

Discovery of “Double First-Class” Institution in Local Universities

Lasheng Li

Jiangnan University Hubei, Wuhan, 430056

Abstract: These years, many universities have been working on the “Double First-Class” institution. Under this circumstance, local universities should combine it with serving local economy and social development, overcome kinds of difficulties and choose the suitable direction based on their own features and strength.

Keywords: local university; “Double First-Class” Institution; serving the local

The close tie between the modern universities and economic society is unprecedented since the developing of universities. On one hand, university development relies on powerful social economic base; On the other hand, society requires universities to provide knowledge and talents to promote technological improvement and sustainable economic growth, which form university’s orientation, function and development direction. Dived by managing system, there are subordinate universities and local universities in China[1-4]. Local universities mainly are universities funded and managed by local government. By June 15, 2019, China has 2,956 universities and 980 of them are undergraduate institutions(excluding independent colleges). Among the ordinary undergraduate institutions, there are 866 local universities, accounting for 88.3% of the total. Among the local universities, there is a group of 15 sub-provincial city universities, which is quite representative. Normally, only undergraduate institutions with large potential would be actively developed into first-class educational institutions.

In November 2015, the State Council released the 《Overall Plan for Promoting the Collaborative Construction of World-class Universities and Disciplines in China》. The reform and developing of the higher education in China has come to the new era of “double first-class”. On September 21, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance and the National Development and Reform Commission jointly released a list of universities and colleges, which will participate in the country’s construction plan of world-class universities and first-class disciplines. In the list, there are 137 “double first-class” initiatives, among which, there are 42 world first-ones(36 for A and 6 for B) and 95 world first-class disciplines universities. Almost all of them are directly under the Ministry of Education and “Project 211” and “Project 985”. Only one sub-provincial city universities, Ningbo University, among local ones, is on the “double first-class” list[5-7].

The aim of “double-class institution” is the strategy to improve education quality and develop first-class institutions and disciplines. Clearly, only excellent universities get in the list and it’s also the case. However, many universities which are not on the list also seize the opportunity and make plans to be one of them. The

local government, wanting the local universities to promote or lead the local social and economic development, strongly support it. So these years, many universities have been working on the “Double First-Class” Institution.

I The Great Importance of “Double First-Class” in Local Universities

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the CPC Central Committee general secretary Xi Jinping has attached great importance to the “double first-class” institution. “Our need for higher education is more urgent than ever, and our desire for scientific knowledge and outstanding talents is stronger than ever,” he said in a speech at the national conference on ideological and political work in universities on December 7, 2016. The Central Committee made the strategic decision to accelerate the construction of world-class universities and disciplines, which is to improve the development level of China's higher education and enhance the country's core competitiveness. The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China stressed the need to “accelerate the construction of first-class universities and disciplines and realize the connotative development of higher education.” At the national education conference in 2018, Xi Jinping, the general secretary, stressed again: “we need to promote economic and social development of education service ability, to adjust and optimize the regional layout, subject structure, professional settings, establish and improve the dynamic adjustment mechanism of academic disciplines and accelerate the construction of first-class universities and first-class disciplines, promote production-study-research cooperative innovation, be active in innovation development strategy, focus on cultivating innovative, compound and applied talents.” These conclusions point out the direction of the development of higher education from strategic height of the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics[8-10].

Local colleges and universities are the main part of China's higher education system and the important participants of the “double first-class” institution. Needless to say, local colleges and universities cannot be compared with those affiliated colleges and universities in terms of facilities, faculty, scientific research level and discipline construction. However, in promoting regional economic and social development and supporting the deepening of urban reform, local colleges and universities play an irreplaceable role and have unique advantages that cannot be matched. The construction of “double first-class” in local colleges and universities should start with development orientation, school-running characteristics and deepening reform, strengthened discipline characteristics, improving talents trainings, consolidating the platform foundation, cultivating major innovative achievements, and giving full play to the role as an innovation engine in regional economic and social development. Local colleges should seize the important opportunity of “double first-class” institution, adhere to the “indomitable spirit” of the university policy and in accordance with the “creating talent highland, build open

pattern, deepen system reform" to fit the national and regional development strategy, dock power integration advantage, concise main go-to direction and realizes the university construction and the economic and social development. We should meet the needs of social development, grasp the rules of higher education development, and plan discipline construction with a broader vision in a longer term to clearer thinking. We should also strengthen process management, performance appraisal of construction funds, the leading role of disciplines, the cultivation of advantageous and characteristic disciplines. Of course, the "double first-class" institution of local colleges and universities also face problems such as insufficient funding investment, low level of staff, unreasonable discipline structure and imperfect service mechanism. Because of it, it is possible to integrate all aspects of school-running resources through the "double first-class" institution, stimulate their own potential great vitality and form a "double first-class" college pattern with Chinese characteristics. Local colleges and universities generally face the dilemma of "shortlisted" and "breakthrough". The key lies in how to base on the regional economic and social development, orientate the subject development with service orientation, take the applied subject and characteristic specialty as the breakthrough, and truly realize the connotation development[11, 12].

As is known to all, the "Project 211" and "Project 985" have been in the priority position in terms of policies, funds and other aspects, making the gap between them and local universities widening. The proposal of "double first-class" institution has broken the original and inherent identity of universities to some extent, rekindled the power of the development of local universities, and provided competitive opportunities of equal treatment in disciplines construction. Local colleges take advantage of this opportunity, based on their own characteristics and advantages, to broaden the space of school-running, adhere to serving local economic and social development as the guidance, vigorously implement the development strategy of differentiation through the construction of key support and the formation of regional comparative advantages, and seek to lead, on the basis of the formation of comprehensive advantage, a sharp rise in the school core competitiveness.

II The Difficulties of "Double First-Class" Institution in Local Universities

At present, from the list of universities with "double first-class" institution published by various provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government), quite a number of sub-provincial city universities have been selected into the list of first-class universities and universities with first-class disciplines construction in China. City universities and other local colleges, during their development, closely relate to the city's economic construction and social development, continuously meet the needs of the urban development in the personnel training, scientific research and social services and play an important role in

serving the regional economic and social development, and make important contributions for China's socialist modernization. However, there are still many problems in the reform, construction and development of local universities and colleges.

First, limited access to resources. In terms of school-running resources, there is a big gap between local universities and universities affiliated to the ministry. When applying the "Project 211" and "Project 985", a large amount of obvious school-running resources flowed to these affiliated universities, such as the plans made for the matriculation quotas, financial allocation, evaluation standard, etc., which are converted into advantageous school-running resources. In addition, a large number of hidden school-running resources also flow to these universities, such as subject evaluation, credit evaluation, scientific research project evaluation, scientific research base evaluation, practical base construction, etc. The school-running resources obtained by them also make local universities hard to catch up with them.

Second, the weak disciplines foundation. In the context of the expansion of China's higher education reform in the 1980s and 1990s, almost all the local colleges and universities rushed onto the historical stage of higher education through new construction, merger and upgrading. Take the 15 sub-provincial city universities as an example, apart from Shenzhen University which was newly built in 1983, all of them were reformed through merger and upgrading, leaving many problems. In terms of discipline construction, there is a general lack of rich accumulation and innate advantages.

Third, difficulty in attracting elites. Talents are the key resources of higher education. In terms of it, the biggest difference between local universities and the directly-affiliated ones is the difficulty in attracting elites. This will inevitably lead to the lack of leaders in disciplines intuition and scientific research, etc. and in local universities, which makes it hard to build high-level teams.

Fourth, the lack of ability for scientific and technological innovation. In terms of scientific research, the biggest gap between local universities and those affiliated to the ministry lies in innovation ability. Although in the local economic and social development, the local universities can offer a certain guidance and intellectual support of scientific and technology innovation, but in the national scientific and technology innovation system, the local universities hardly get key projects in national strategic level and hardly find the place in the national innovation system of science and technology because of the lack of funding, talents, high level scientific research platform, the preponderant and characteristic disciplines.

Fifth, the low quality of personnel training. In terms of the quality of personnel training, there is also a big gap between the local universities and universities affiliated to the ministry. The quality of talent training is

restricted and affected by many factors including the school's orientations and goals, faculty members, teaching resources, training process, students quality, teaching guarantee and so on. Local colleges and universities lag behind the affiliated ones in terms of teaching staff, teaching conditions, students quality and social resources, which leads to the fact that the quality of personnel training in local higher education cannot be comparable to the affiliated ones.

III The Choice for "Double First-Class" Institution in Local Universities

The mission of local higher education is mainly to serve local economic and social development. Under the background of "double first-class" institution, local colleges and universities should base on their own characteristics and advantages, highly unify the construction of "double first-class" and better serve the local economic and social development, thereby further strengthen "double first-class" institution and realize the benign interaction. To achieve such an effect, it is very important to choose the right construction path.

First, discipline construction always adheres to the needs of local economic and social development as the guidance. In the construction of "double first-class", local colleges and universities should first make a comprehensive and profound analysis of their own disciplinary pros and cons, avoid the compete with affiliated universities in traditional fields, focus on finding new growth points in emerging and interdisciplinary fields, take a differentiated development path, and realize dislocation selection and characteristic development. On one hand, do not compete with the affiliated universities for resources or "size", and try to avoid "I have what others also have", but strive to "have what others don't have"; On the other hand, we should avoid the tendency of homogenization with similar local universities and try to make full use of their own discipline characteristics and advantages, strengthen characteristics and hit the first-class discipline with precision.

Second, the teaching staff building focuses on attracting talents. Talent is the foundation of "double first-class" institution and the key. Without first-class talents, first-class universities and disciplines are out of the question. Talent team construction project is the first project of discipline construction and the most important of "double first-class" construction. The goal of the talent team construction project is to build a team of high-quality teachers with ambitions and faith, moral sentiment, wild knowledge, reasonable educational background, professional title, age and academic structure----a team which is in line with the "double first-class" institution. We will formulate a feasible system and policy for talents, carry out a program for cultivating talents, and do everything possible to improve the level of the teaching staff.

Third, raise the level of scientific research. The level of scientific research is an important reflection of the strength. Local colleges and universities should push forward the project of improving the level of it, constantly

improve the scientific research management service system, scientific research innovation system and scientific research results transformation system, enhance the scientific research innovation ability and highlight the scientific research characteristics.

Fourth, talent cultivation highlights the characteristics and advantages. Talent training is the most important obligation of every university. The fundamental task of building a first-class university is to cultivate first-class talents. In order to improve the school personnel training, the core competitiveness, local colleges should speed up the formation of its own characteristics and advantages of high level talent training system, strengthen the personnel training center, accurately grasp the basic rules of higher education and talents, aim student growth as the starting point and the foothold, inspire students to study hard, lead teachers to great concentration. Local universities, especially city universities, should take advantage of the "double first-class" institution, make real efforts to improve the quality of undergraduate education in an orderly way.

Fifth, open wide access to school resources. The "double first-class" institution requires a large amount of financial input and resources allocation. Government resources are important for the development of local universities. As a systematic project, "double first-class" institution not only needs the university to mobilize all positive factors internally, but also needs it to strive for all social resources externally. It is a very important work for city university to win the support from the local government for the "double first-class" institution. Government is the largest and most powerful school-running resource, which is fully conducive to geographical advantages. Local universities must seek support from the government and society through multiple ways, and obtain more. In April 2015, Guangdong provincial committee and Guangdong provincial government held a high-level university institution conference. 17 universities in Guangdong, including Shenzhen university and Guangzhou university, were selected as high-level universities with key disciplines. In January 2017, the municipal committee and government of Guangzhou proposed to invest 2.1 billion yuan in the first phase of construction within two years to promote Guangzhou university and Guangzhou Medical University as a whole. This practice is worth learning to other local universities and local governments.

Sixth, establish and improve the system and mechanism for building "double first-class". It is the basic premise of the construction of "double first-class" in local colleges and universities to improve the understanding and to do a good job in the publicity work. We will do a good job in investigation and research, and carry out special investigations and studies on colleges and universities of the same type inside and outside the province, so as to provide a practical basis for the formulation of the "double first-class" institution. Make the background clear, do the top-level design well, elaborate the overall plan and detailed implementation rules for the "double

first-class" institution, plan the construction goals and tasks, and specify the phased goals and completion time nodes. To fully mobilize the enthusiasm of the college, formulate a feasible college "double first-class" institution and solid progress.

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