Governance with respect to higher education in China
--A view on blurring public/private boundaries in policy process

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ABSTRACT. Chinese higher education has undergone dramatic changes since the mid-1980s. Over the past two decades, the traditional public system of higher education has transformed to be more diversified with increasing non-government involvement. This paper tries to examine the recent reforms in the light of governance with a particular emphasis on policy process. In so doing, an analytical framework is developed. As governance theory was derived from a Western context, the paper discusses the possibility of its application in China. It suggests that, regardless of scholarly debate, governance, as part of universal reform ideologies, has practically affected the Chinese society and higher education reforms. However, because the beliefs underlying governance are far different from those in China, the Chinese higher education reforms evidence a distinctive path, suffering lots of paradoxes and challenges in policy process.

INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, higher education reforms took place almost everywhere in the world and reform has become a global topic. Both policy makers and especially researchers of different nations are likely to communicate with each other based on common conceptions and ideas. Since the 1990s, study on governance in the higher education field has become more than a fashion. Governance as a term is mainly used in three interrelated contexts, namely international, national, and organisational. In the higher education literature it often has dual meanings. One refers to institutional governance focusing on how administration and co-ordination processes take place at campus level. In the second meaning, as the focus of this paper, governance is understood as the ways in which higher education is controlled, governed and administered in a national system. In this sense, the concept of governance did not originate in a higher education context, but it was originally developed in the fields of political science and public administration. To better grasp the import of governance in higher education, therefore, we need recourse to broad governance studies. There are generally two approaches to governance. One is often "governance oriented" (Kooiman, 2000) or "state-centric"(Pierre, 2000), regarding state as the government adaptation to its environment in the late 20th century. This is often related to the World Bank definition of "good governance" (World Bank, 1989), focusing on the more technical dimension, such as accountability and transparency (Howell, 2004a: 1). This includes several common trends to change the state: from control to service, from policy-based management to law-based management, and from unilateral government to multilateral governance. In another view, governance is seen as a co-ordination of a social system, which aims at enabling the societies to have control over their development through enhancing opportunities for political participation by all social domains, including "political actors and institutions, corporate interests, civil society, and transactional organisations" (Pierre, 2000: 4). On a deeper level, the modern governance discourse is sometimes understood as a process of institutional change (Tiihonen, 2004). While the informal rules gain more weight in social institutions, the new sources of institutions at work—autonomous networks of public, private and other social actors—have been raised to the centre in discussion of governance. The networks entail merging public/private responsibilities to deal with political, social and economic subjective.

Although most higher education studies on governance depart from the former perspective, their further elaboration largely involves the latter sense, concentrating on contexts on borderline between state, market and society. This point has been effectively picked up by Maassen and Cloete (2002),

who stress a growing prominence of the society/higher education interaction through market dimension. Most higher education systems in the world have moved away in many aspects of their functioning from governmental dominance. The trends are often associated with phenomena such as "privatisation", "marketization" and "decentralisation". These changes blur traditional boundaries between public and private sphere in higher education, forming a major input in policy process. Policy process is often viewed as sequential action chains, including, for example, policy formation, implementation and evaluation. I pay particular attention to the former two, in that a fundamental question on the subject of governance is "whether governments can continue to govern their societies successfully by making and implementing policies" (Pierre & Peters, 2000: 2). This paper, therefore, reflects upon changes in the policy process under the heading of governance study. The central research problems here are twofold. One general issue is about how the concept of governance provides new insights in looking policy process with respect to high education. The major argument is that the traditional public policy process has been challenged by the emergence of a non-governmental dimension, including both market and civil society. It is especially the latter that represents the dynamics of present changes. Market and civil society together with the traditional public dimension (state) constitute a trio in governing higher education. Though there appear to be universal reform ideologies indicating an ideal pattern of governance as an equilibrium between the three forces (Tiihonen, 2004), their involvement in policy process may vary substantially across national contexts. This evokes the second set of inquiries concerning China: How can the governance theory springing from Western society apply to China? Where are the Chinese higher education reforms heading? How are the higher education reforms moving towards the intended end? The final task, thus, is to develop context-bounded answers to the questions.

CONCEPTUALISATION OF GOVERNANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

"Governance" had long been used as interchangeable term with "government" until some researchers gave it new meanings in the 1990s. Since then, the concept of governance has flourished in social science research, though there is a lack of common perceptions. The particular clarification of governance depends on the level we are talking about, the goals to be achieved and the approach being followed. I do not attempt to cover various definitions of governance, but I will concentrate on its use to describe the main ideas of fundamental changes in governing national affairs.

The theorising of governance has its basis in Western social developments. After World War II, "state" and "market", in turn, became the dominating philosophy in Western societies. However, the experiences and lessons of social development in the past evidenced that neither of them could effectively solve social problems. On the one hand, the traditional capacity of " the visible hand" of state has been undermined by the deregulation of financial markets, assertiveness of local administration, and social participation (Pierre, 2000). The state simply cannot optimise social resources through directive commands and central planning. On the other hand, "the invisible hand" of market failed to achieve the Pareto optimum along with the stagnation of national economy since the 1970s. To respond to the rapid changes in its environment, the state is motivated to redefine its role in society and find out new ways of functioning. As a response or solution to "market and/or state failure"

(Jessop, 1998), stepped in the concept of governance. It offers a new body of thought in contrast to the traditional thinking about government. Hirst and Thompson (Hirst & Thompson, 1995: 442) make a clear distinction between government and governance:

> The tendency in common usage (is) to identify the term 'government' with the institutions of the state that control and regulate the life of a territorial community. Governance—that is, the control of an activity by some means such that a range of desired outcomes is attained—is, however, not just provinces of the state. Rather, it is a function that can be performed by a wide variety of public and private, state and non –state, national and international, institutions and practices.

The statements emphasise the redefinition of the roles of participants in political arena as well as the interactions between various social actors. The modern governance process also represents the transformation of political approach to social affairs from top-down hierarchy towards bottom-up or networks performance. Milward and Provan's definition, quoted by Hill and Hupe (2002: 6-7), best reflects such a stand:

> Governance…is concerned with creating the conditions for ordered rules and collective action, often including agents in the private and nonprofit sectors, as well as within the public sector. The essence of governance is its focus on governing mechanism—grants, contracts, agreements—that do not rest solely on the authority and sanctions of government.

As the concept of governance is basically associated with a changing relationship between state and public sector, higher education, as a public sector, has been much involved. However, in the higher education literature, the term governance has vague boundaries with other concepts, such as steering, control and co-ordination. It has also been discussed in the form of steering models which, as argued by Gornitzka and Maassen (2000: 268), "refer to the approaches governments use to control and influence specific public sectors, such as higher education". They also consider as steering models the patterns of relationship between state and higher education, such as state control model and state supervision model distinguished by Neave and Van Vught (1994). In order to analyse complex relationships between government and higher education in a more sophisticated way, they translate Olsen's (1988) four state models in a higher education context, namely the sovereign, rationality-bounded steering model, the institutional steering model, the corporate-pluralist steering model and the supermarket steering model. Though Clark never employs the particular term governance, his famous "triangle" (Clark, 1983) has inspired younger generations to probe the ideas of governance in higher education in creative ways. In the triangle, he distinguishes three types of system located at three corners, namely state authority, market and academic oligarchy.

While the scholars classify different steering models, they also indicate a general move away from strong state intervention towards more market elements. The transition sees a new form of power relationships. While the state is no longer the solo stakeholder with an interest in higher education, there appears to be an increasing participation by society (Maassen & Cloete, 2002). In a broad sense, social participation embraces both market and civil society. The latter is often used interchangeably with the third sector, which makes a contribution to society outside the parameters of both government and business. The organisations belonging to this sector are characterised by "voluntary", "non-governmental", and "non-profit". The third sector organisations not only produce collective goods or deliver social services, but they also defend collective values and interests (Bifarello, 2002). The latter function has a clear impact on the policy process "through direct intervention or the strengthening of social capital and the encouragement of social dialogue"(Casey, 2004: 242).

The higher education sphere is no exception to this. Clark's Triangle implicitly embraces what is called the third sector today in the market corner, as he signifies, "in this broad meaning of market, it is synonymous with nongovernmental, nonregulated" (Clark, 1983: 138). Nevertheless, it is somewhat confusing to accommodate new ideas concerning governance and, especially, civil society to his framework. His nominal construction is likely to lead followers to capture the reform changes in a continuum between state and market. Goedegebuure and his colleagues, for example, make the following observation:

> In "market-driven" higher education systems (e.g, the United States), governments are becoming more and more involved in shaping the goals and functions of higher education. Second, in those systems in which the state authority traditionally dominated higher education regulation (such as in Continental Western Europe), a fundamental reappraisal of government's position can be witnessed. (Goedegebuure, Kaiser, Maassen, & de Weert, 1993: 7)

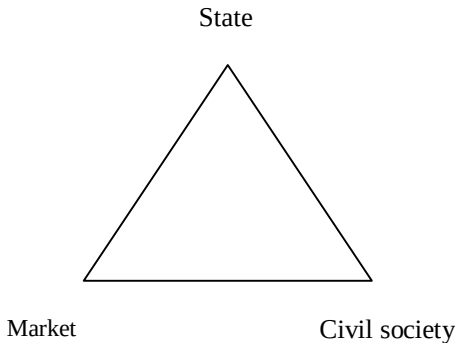
Similarly, Neave and Van Vught claim mixes of state and market in higher education co-ordination as common reform practices; "the delicate relationships that can exist between government regulation and market co-ordination and of the consequences these relationships can have for the dynamics of a higher education system"(Neave & Van Vught, 1994: 6-7). It is true that governance, in the first instance, suggests a combination of state and market. Markets provide the relevant environment for state action, while states are important environment for market behaviour. However such ideas do not go beyond traditional debates about governing society. What is new in modern governance is concerned with the rise of civil society, which is effective complement for state and market.

As recent governance studies suggest drawing a clear line between the third and business sectors, Clark's framework can be easily improved by adding a new corner—civil society, turning from a triangle to a pyramid. In this case, the market corner refers strictly to profit business sectors, in Colebatch and Larmour' words, "to describe a model of the world driven entirely by calculations of self-interest" (Colebatch & Larmour, 1993: 19). However, there may be an overlap between academic oligarchy and civil society. In the systems where academic oligarchy had a strong influence on higher education, the local authorities of professors were transmuted into national power through professional guilds or intermediate bodies (Clark, 1983; Goedegebuure et al., 1993). With reference to the German higher education system, for example, as Clark puts it, "German professors have had powerful collective voices at national as well as provincial and local levels, in such bodies as the Science Council (*Wissenschaftsrat*), the West German Rectors Conference, the University Association, and the disciplinary committees of the German Research Association" (Clark, 1983: 140). Such professional organisations bear clear characteristics of the third sector. To make the framework more simple and direct, therefore, the corner of academic oligarchy can be left out, for it can be seen as an inclusive part of civil society. China is quite possibly a best case for this simplification, as academic oligarchy never patronises the country. The dominance of academia in higher education is often associated with traditional norms of university autonomy and academic freedom. "In China, university autonomy and academic freedom on European lines were neither easily acceptable in terms of their epistemological connotations, nor practically possible, given the series of political and economic crises the nation was passing through" (Hayhoe, 1999: 59). As such, a new framework of co-ordination in higher education, though based heavily on the contribution of predecessors (Clark, 1983; Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000), will be constructed for the particular use of this study.

THREE DOMAINS OF GOVERNANCE WITH RESPECT TO HIGHER EDUCATION

This framework (Figure 1) mainly suggests three possible or potential forces (state, market and civil society), with their interaction, affecting higher education. Each corner of the triangle represents the extreme of one force at work and a minimum of the other two. Locations within the triangle represent combinations of the three elements in different degrees. The framework suggests modern governance in higher education systems must encompass all the three forces, but with different emphasis.

Figure 1 Framework of co-ordination in higher education



State, market and society, sometimes with different labels, are three fundamental components in society and in social sciences studies. They have been explicitly expressed by Tiihonen (Tiihonen, 2004) as three pillars or domains of governance in a more political sense. Based on such a framework, Tiihonen regards the present governance discourse as "a conscious step towards a balanced equilibrium of state, market and society and growing self-governance of economic and social organisations" (Tiihonen, 2004: 32). Colebatch and Lamour (1993) have used bureaucracy, market and community models to categorise organisations, which are respectively based on rules, self-interest, and affiliation. By nature, these models are akin to my framework though the authors use different terms and make their investigation on a different area of social science (organisational study). Hill and Hupe (2002) implicitly echo the three domains in his presentation of three governance modes, namely authority mode, transaction mode and persuasion mode. Their presentations of the three modes have particular implication for policy studies. They argue that the appropriateness of governance modes depends on the particular contexts and settings. In the authority mode, the government performs its role like the CEO. After the government makes directive decisions, it expects that the decisions are managed and implemented accordingly. In this sense, the administration functionaries carry high responsibilities and commitment. The mode is appropriate if the level of steering ambition of the government is high and the dependency on other actors is low. In transaction mode, more actors from the public and the private sectors are largely involved in decision-making and administration. The central subject of governance action is to check the results of other actors' performance and ensure the framework is functioning well. The government here has a role like a regulator in a market place, in which different interests groups interact and negotiate. The persuasion mode is likely to be adopted when the government is heavily dependent on other actors, even though the steering ambition is higher. In such a context, the government can be compared to a chairperson. Before making final decisions, the essential task of the government is to develop co-ordinating networks. The authority, transaction and persuasion modes

correspondingly reflect the basic concepts concerning governance of state, market and civil society. Now we return to a detailed explanation of the three domains of governance with respect to higher education.

The state corner is characterised by a strong state intervention. Higher education is considered as an important tool for reaching governmental goals in political, economic and social aspects. The higher education institutions are treated as part of the formal structure of the state and are operated like governmental agencies. The decisions are made in a clearly top-down manner and implemented under a hierarchical structure. For the government, the accountability of higher education institutions is the most important concern. Within such a system, the hope for changes depends heavily on effective planning and administration. However, such a co-ordination model does not necessarily determine an absence of institutional autonomy. “Autonomy of universities and colleges is based on the idea that government is overloaded” and “therefore `technical' decisions can be left to the universities and colleges themselves” (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000: 270).

The market domain is quite different, if not completely opposite, to the state authority. In a market co-ordination system, changes are facilitated by means of competition. In its pure form, there are no inclusive goals, and decisions are closely linked to the results of negotiation and competition among private organisations. “The role of the state is minimal” and “all state action and all activities by public bodies will be less efficient, effective or just, than the activities of private individuals relating through the market”(Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000: 272). When the third sector plays an extremely important role, the development of higher education reflects the constellation of interests from independent and autonomous organisations and groups. Therefore, organisations such as professional associations, student unions and other non-profit organisations may outshine governments and industries. The expansion of market or civil society or, most likely, the combination of the two, represents the direction of social development with respect to higher education. In such a direction, it is essential to create conditions for “sustaining co-ordination and coherence of a wide variety of actors with different purposes and objectives” (Pierre, 2000: 3-4). “In its ideal model, external authoritative government steering would be abandoned, regulation of the markets and society would be collaborative in nature and state intervention in the management of the nation’s affairs would be based on joint action of the markets and society” (Tiihonen, 2004: 32).

However, reforms in practice may never reach the ideal destination. While the present changes clearly evidence an increase non-governmental involvement in higher education sphere and particularly with respect to policy process, it is not sure that the state as a primary representative of public dimension is retreating as rhetorically expected. The states still see higher education as an important place to preserve national identity and culture, and, therefore, they are reluctant to step back. Another motivation for state intervention is due to the incomplete market with respect to higher education. Even though a tendency has been argued as moving away from higher education as a social institution to higher education as an industry (Gumport, 1997), higher education is still, to a large degree, independent of market activities (Goedegebuure et al., 1993). There also exist many uncertainties concerning market adjustment in higher education. As there are few regulations concerning “market place” with respect to higher education, it is necessary to formulate policies and develop instruments in

order to create a healthy institutional environment for the market. How to protect the weaker social groups' interest and ensure equality, for example, should mainly be the states' responsibility. The importance role played by the state is expressed by Peter Scott (Scott, 1996: 120):

> Key determinants are the overall balance between public and private sectors, with the fate of higher education inevitably aligned with the 'success' of the former, and, flowing from this balance, the availability of public expenditure. Detailed arrangements made by the state, and any intermediary agencies, for steering the system are seen as second-order tactical issues in the sense that they merely reflect these broader strategic considerations.

Civil society is undoubtedly an important element of governance, but it cannot live without the state. "It relates to political expressions outside the realm of direct state control; but, paradoxically, it does not make sense to speak of civil society without reference to state control" (Seppälä, 1992: 2). Neither can it exist without reference to market dominated by private actors. Rather, it servers as a buffer zone between the public and the private; "the growth of the civil society can been seen as an attempt to enlarge the grey zone between what is definitely state controlled or definitely private" (Ibid. p.2).

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY PROCESS

Recent years have seen fundamental changes: a relaxation of state intervention and an increases concern among the organisations and individuals outside the public sphere. For higher education, there is a blending of public and private interests and resources, indicating blurry public/private boundaries in the policy process. The participation of private forces in public policy is by no means a new phenomenon. Three decades ago, Nadel enumerated several types of non-governmental group involvement in public policy: "from the participation of private organisations in governmental policy-making to the co-optation or delegation of policy-making functions to private organisation and finally to a monopoly of policy-making function by private organisations in the face of governmental non-involvement (via non-decision) in a policy area" (Nadel, 1975: 11). The real dynamics of the current transformation is, however, the return of power to civil society.

Even though the state retains a strong position, the growth of both market and especially civil society input more non-governmental elements in the policy process. The emerging non-governmental dimension reflects a restructuring of power, interests and alliances in the policy process. Historically, one obvious role of the state was to set the policy agenda for higher education. Higher education policies reflected how nation states interpreted and delivered their higher education priorities. The state was deemed to be responsible for keeping higher education in line with the dynamics of society and to mould society into specific forms by formulating and implementing appropriate policies through public dimension. However, since the early 1970s, society has increased its demands with respect to higher education. Higher education has therefore to take into account more interests of a variety of social stakeholders in addition to a Ministry of Education (Maassen & Cloete, 2002). This has been observed by Maassen (2000: 377): "the traditional bilateral regulatory, policy-making, and funding relationship between government and public sectors such as higher education is gradually replace by a complex interactive policy process in which many different actors participate at different moments, in different ways ". To respond to this situation, an important issue is about how to properly reflect various demands by different interest groups in setting policy agenda. Hill and Hupe (2002) have nicely expounded the different processes of policy making and implementation in varying contexts of

governance modes. Their conceptual contribution hopefully sheds light on the higher education sphere in two aspects: policy-making and policy implementation. The two modes of governance—transaction mode and persuasion mode imply two types of policy-making processes. In the persuasion mode, the policy-formation is open-ended and supposed to continue through the participation of different actors during implementation. With respect to higher education, the role performed by the government becomes more strategic, mainly creating a framework for social participation and collaboration. In the transaction mode, the policy process mainly supplies a framework in which different actors are supposed to deliver specified shares on a basis of market rules. A best case in point with respect to higher education is that market mechanism has been reinforced in most higher education systems, because the state is not only unable to afford the increasing expansion of public institutions, but also unable to reconcile all kinds of social demands on higher education. Market as a private dimension has become a fundamental basis for the interplay and interaction between higher education and society at both system level (Maassen & Cloete, 2002) and institutional level (Clark, 1998).

The above changes in policy making have an impact on implementation processes. Traditionally, often in state authority mode, policy-making and implementation are in two different worlds. The former world often sees a group of politicians who make policy statements and set policy goals. They are inclined to treat implementation as the responsibilities of those in the other world. Following this, the implementation is likely to take place in a top-down manner. A successful implementation relies heavily on the compliance of policy implementers to policy makers. Unfortunately, the actors in the two worlds often work on different logic; "when the results of a policy are seen as disappointing, actors involved in that specific policy process may commonly blame the 'other world'" (Hill & Hupe, 2002: 164). The policy formers see implementation problems as a bad execution by those directly accountable for delivery of policy, while implementers often find that the causes of the problems are a bad policy and/or scarcity of resources. To bridge the "implementation gap" (Hill & Hupe, 2002), an important step is to enhance the interaction and negotiation between those in the two separate worlds. The new ways of governing society usher in changes in this direction. As more social actors make demands on higher education development, policies become less concrete than before. Not only has government intervention become less efficient in delivering policies, but it is also beyond the capacities of both the government and its administrative functionaries to control the attainment of policy goals through traditional top-down hierarchies. In the meantime, implementers are required to interpret policies in a creative way; "being implementers, they may, in fact, sometimes practice 'formulation and decision making' additional to the policy formally at hand" (Hill & Hupe, 2002: 162). As a consequence, in the higher education sphere, more administrative power has been transferred to local authorities and delegated to higher education institutions. The decentralisation of administrative power has an obvious manifestation in the changes of policy instruments. Both traditional "instruments of treasure" and "instruments of authority", emphasizing a discourse of implementation, become less restrictive (Maassen & Van Vught, 1994). Governments, therefore, seek new approaches, such as "a system of quality control, evaluation of performance, application of positive and negative incentives, setting national priorities in teaching and research, budget cuts, conditional contracting, involvement in the internal affairs of institutions, and so on" (Goedegebuure et al., 1993: 7). Hill and Hupe imply two

parallel changes with respect to policy implementation. One move away from top-down implementation is associated with the context of governance by transition. In this case, policy formers mainly provide a general framework, while there is much room for implementers to work at operational level. Performance rather than conformance becomes central to implementation. Management by result with a particular emphasis on contract compliance, for example, has been gradually adopted by a number of countries. Such an approach is based on result negotiations between the Ministry of Education and the universities in which objectives are set and the required funds agreed upon. The other possible change on managing implementation is suggested by the persuasion mode of governance. This perspective focuses on managing outcomes as shared results. Policy formers are mainly responsible for initiating a policy agenda and the process of policy formation is rather open-ended. Implementation, with more vague boundaries with policy formulation, relies on the co-ordination among a wide variety of actors in separate roles. The characteristics of the policy process in the three domains of governance with respect to higher education can be presented as follows (Table 1).

Table 1 Characteristics of the policy process in the three domains of governance with respect to higher education

	State	Market	Civil society
Key actors in policy making process	Governments	Private organisations	NGOs
Principles	Coercion Participation	Competition Profit-making	Consensus Collaboration
Policy formation (PF)	Distinct PF	Framework PF	Ongoing PF
Co-ordination models	System of command	Marketplace	Network
Policy implementation	Conformance	Performance	Co-production

Adapted from Hill & Hupe (2002) and Tiihonen (2004)

RELEVANCE OF GOVERNANCE IN A CHINESE CONTEXT

Now we are almost ready, with such an analytical framework, to examine the case of Chinese higher education, but can governance theory be applied to a study on higher education? Before we move on to the discussion of higher education in China, it may be necessary to reflect on the issue in a broad social context. On the one hand, it is because that higher education is an important social sector. To understand the changes in higher education, one has to understand its broad social context. On the other hand, the recent Chinese higher education reforms are designed as responses to social and economic restructuring.

For me, the aforementioned models or framework are more in the imagination or in theory. It certainly cannot reflect the diversity that exists in reality. Models are "abstract and simplified representations of reality which highlight some aspects rather than others", and, therefore, some elements of one model often appear in another (Colebatch & Larmour, 1993: 18). Nevertheless, the framework reflects, to some extent, a well-established practice of thought. For analytical purposes, it forms a basis for

observation and interpretation of complex realities in an understandable way. However, the problem encountering this study is how the social science concept of governance developed in the West can also be relevant to non-western settings, for example China. Tiihonen (2004: 13) claims that the modern governance can hardly apply to developing countries:

> It was clear that the problems in developing countries did not have much in common with the discourses of new governance we had accustomed in developed Nordic and European countries. The practical problems were as if from a different planet. Many of these countries can be regarded as failed states. They do not have even basic administrative machinery, legal framework for public administration, solid budgetary systems or civil service legislations. …Developing countries cannot step directly from patrimonial rule to New Public Management and network-based governance. Before that they have to build classical institutions of public administration.

I partly agree with his argument, in that, at least with my experience in China, the Western experiences of administrative modernisation cannot be translated exactly into a Chinese context. Since the 1990s, some Western reformist politicians have pursued ideas of governance by sometimes using a new name "the third way". The concept marks distinct characteristics from traditional political ideologies, both democratic socialism "on the left" and new liberalism "on the right". Nevertheless, it draws heavily on some traditional beliefs, such as rule of law, democracy and liberal market. In contrast, China had a long tradition of rule by rulers with little experience of democracy as well as market. It is not only important but also necessary for China to change towards democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights. Actually, China is making efforts in such a direction notwithstanding difficulties. However, given the particular situation in China, I do not think that "these principles should be realised before any steps towards the new system can be taken" (Tiihonen, 2004: 35) and that China has to establish classic western-style institutions of public administration. Despite its unique authoritative system and political culture, China cannot be exempt from governance either practically or ideologically, under intensified globalisation. On the one hand, the cross-country flow of physical and social capital is not only a token of developed countries, but also occurs in the developing world. While western politicians pursue new approaches to social affairs in response to the "ungovernable global market" (Hirst, 2000: 23), developing countries are no exception. On the other hand, the western reform experiences as well as the underlying rationales have become universal reform ideologies for the developing countries. Though the ideologies may not directly accommodate to the local contexts of developing countries, they do affect the countries' institutional environment and drive, in one way or another, their own reforms. It may be safe to say that the combination of global reform rationales and local contexts has resulted in diversified reform practices, though, in some cases, the variations may be too far away from what originally informed by governance theory. The important problem, especially for developing countries, is to develop a context-bound application of governance.

In China, some researchers in the field of political science and public administration have recently turned their attention to governance (Mao, 1998; Yu, 2000). The concept has also been introduced in higher education by a limited number of Chinese articles (Long, 2004; Sheng, 2003; Xu, 2003). Although most of their studies are no more than introductions of Western works, their conceptual contribution should be appreciated. They not only provide governance with a Chinese name, but also make a distinction between the term governance and the term government in the Chinese language. The English term government can refer to either "a governing body" or "the act or process of governing", while Chinese people express the two meanings in separate terms. The governing body is called

zhengfu (government) and the second meaning of government is almost as same as governance according to the Chinese translation. For analytical purposes, some scholars translate governance into Chinese as *zhili* (or *zhidao*), while government in the sense of the act or process of governing as *tongzhi*. While both *zhili* and *tongzhi* are concerned with using authorities to keep social order as well as to meet public needs, the subjects of authorities are different. *zhili* requires authority, but the authorities are not necessarily government institutions. In contrast, from the perspective of *tongzhi*, government institutions are regarded as the resources of authorities.

While governance becomes an increasingly popular topic in Chinese social science communities, few seriously consider its adaptability in a Chinese background. Those who, based on Western experiences, foresee a similar governance transition in China might be disappointed by the realities in China. Since the late 1970s, China has launched continuous reforms together with the introduction of an "open door" policy, especially in the economic sphere. Over that period, China has been largely transformed from being a centrally planned economy to being a market-oriented one, more integrated into the wider world. The reforms have "led to a relaxation of party control over the economy, society and ultimately over public discourse in part by design and in part by default" (Saich, 2001: 203). The market reforms result in the growth of private sectors, which have evidenced as one of the fastest-growing economic engines, have gained increasing legitimate status. The State's present attitude to private sectors contrasts sharply with the "party line" of the 1970s, when private businesses were viewed as "capitalist tails that must be cut off" and entrepreneurs were condemned. The private markets originating in the economic sphere have gradually expanded to many social realms previously confined to the public field, such as higher education. With the aim of bring society in line with the economic transformation and/or solving the unexpected problems caused by economic transformation, social reforms have taken place in a variety of sectors. While the changes in both economic and social sectors have created new opportunities for social and citizen participation, it has been argued that there is little prospect that China will evolve into a liberal democratic version of governance as found in economically advanced countries in the West (Howell, 2004c; Saich, 2001). Although social and economic reforms have brought Chinese State expansion into new areas, old functions have not necessarily been terminated. This may be determined by the country's unique political climate, for example, the authoritative structure, and traditional norms.

For the Chinese State, the government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have never been clearly separated, and institutional overlap is a major complicating factor (Saich, 2001). In China, the real source of authority is the Chinese Communist Party and the role of the government is to implement the Party's guidelines and policies. China's political tradition, though labelled as socialism, was derived from its traditional philosophies, e.g. Confucianism, and was forged by the long period of imperial bureaucratic system. When the People's Republic of China was established, "Mao Tse-Tung tried to wipe out Confucianism but in the meantime his own rule contained Confucian elements" (Hofstede, 1991, p.40). It has been agreed that the nature of Chinese traditional political culture was to serve the ruling class, characterised by socialised human beings, ruled by man, moralisation of politics, and centralisation (Zheng & Liu, 2002). The core of these lay in the value of loyalty to those in power (Chu, 2001).

The recent Chinese practice of borrowing the Western version of governance may remind us of the historical lessons of planting Western "trees" in a Chinese "garden". In the development of a modern higher education system, for example, the country often saw what appeared to be useful in the West, while it tried to separate, if it did not neglect, the associated values and beliefs (Cai, 2003). However, "western ideologies cannot be wholly extracted from an advanced Western education system and educational concepts" (Cai, 2004:168). As there are quite different, if not contradictory, ideologies between China and the West, the Chinese higher education reforms, if somehow affected by the universal reform ideologies with reference to governance, may inevitably confront paradoxes and challenges. However, the wheel of reform will not stop because of these troubles. Rather, more reforms may take place to solve the problems. For this, governance theory may provide a new perspective to reflect upon the challenges in higher education reforms. Sheng Bing (2003: 48) put it,

> We often believe that the problems in higher education will readily be solved when the government renders more power. However, the reality shows that the reforms have not achieved the outcome as desired. There is no doubt that the relaxation of the government is necessary, but the present questions are: to what extent the power should go from the government, and to how the power transferred from the government should be shared by higher education institutions, society and market, and how to redefine the responsibilities of the government and institutions. Governance theory provides us with a new viewpoint to solve these problems.

PRACTICE IN CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education was operated only in the public domain in the People's Republic of China before the 1980s reforms. In the past decade, China entered a new phase of its reform of higher education. The traditional relationship between the state and higher education has changed significantly (Mohrman, 2003). On the one hand, the central government is abandoning the central planning model of the past to allow regional governments and individual universities to make more of their own decisions. On the other hand, higher education is growing beyond the public domain in several aspects. One is the shift in the funding of higher education from a state-funded system to one that requires higher education institutions to rely more and more on private funds. Moreover, the state is no longer the sole sponsor of higher education institutions. The last decade saw a boom of private schools and universities—*minban* institutions, as well as an expanding role for foreign educational institutions to participate in the growing market for education in China. A study carried out ten years ago noted that the Chinese State became less dominant in the higher education sphere and there was a clear shift toward "state supervision" (Min, 1994). I certainly have little doubt about this general tendency, which is best reflected by reform statements. However, the original design of reform in higher education has, in practice, taken a different orientation. Let us take a closer look at the policy making and implementation processes.

From the perspective of policy making, the higher education reforms in China are state-oriented. In a society like China, the state as the dominating force to initiate reform is not only necessary but also inevitable. State endorsement certainly became the dynamics of Chinese higher education reforms at the outset. However, the dominant role of the State, on the other hand, turns out to be an impediment to deepening reform in a long run. Recently, the relation between state and higher education has become a major reform issue, but, in the policy process, less evidence shows effective participation by both social actors and higher education institutions themselves. The State has not yet developed a complete

policy-making mechanism with respect to education. Some policies are based on policy makers' occasional discoveries or their subjective decisions; some policies are determined by some irrational factors, such as policy makers' interests or even personalities (Yuan, 1996: 34). Yuan Zhenguo, a Chinese professor in educational policy and senior official at the Minister of Education, categorizes three types of policy-making processes according to the roles played by the Party, the government or the Ministry of Education (Yuan, 2000). Although there is no single policy-making process to go by, normally the formulation of education policy in the reform era followed such a line: based on the problems in higher education sector, the Ministry of Education collecting information and submitting policy proposals to the State Council for examination and approval (Du, 2000). In an extreme case of policy-making— the policy launched in June 1999 with a clear aim for an enrolment leap in higher education, the Ministry of Education was somewhat bypassed by central authorities. The goal concerning expansion in higher education together with an objective to achieve mass higher education was not new at that time. It was already in the plans of the Ministry of Education half a year earlier. According to the "Action Plan for Vitalizing Education for the 21st Century", which was proposed by the Ministry of Education, endorsed by the State Council, and finally published on February 25,1999, the enrolment ratio would increased from 9.1% in 1997 to 11% in 2000, and finally would approach 15% by 2010. On June 13, 1999, the Central Council of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council promulgated the "Decision on the Deepening of Education Reform and Advancement of Qualification-Oriented Education". It reconfirmed the objective set by the "action plan" that by 2010 the enrolment ratio would increase from 9% to around 15%. At the third national education conference from June 15 to June 18, it was already agreed that in 1999 higher education institutions would recruit 1.3 million new students, with a growth ratio of 17.3% over the enrolment number in 1998 (1.08 million). On June 25, however, the Central Council of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council made an astonishing decision first publicised by the news media: the 1999 enrolment increased to 1.537 million with a growth ratio of 41.7% over 1998 (In fact, 1.59 million new students were enrolled that year). By 2003, the gross higher education enrolment ratio already had reached 15%, entering a stage of mass higher education, 7 years ahead of its original schedule. It is not my purpose to assess the fundamental effects of such a policy on Chinese higher education development, as it has already stirred up continuing discussions among Chinese higher education researchers and administrators. What I comment here is concerned with the policy process per se. The central authorities firmly controlled the policy-making process and disabled the role of society as well as the mass of the population. The process of policy formulation showed lack of transparency, rationale, and long-term consideration.

While putting much attention to the negative sides, I also acknowledge that the policy-making process is not the same as it used to be, though the central authorities still remain dominant. Firstly, some social groups have in one way or another affected the policy makers' concerns. The policy-making bodies tend to gather opinions from more representatives of society. The private actors as major social participants have gained legal status in the provision of higher education by law and become more or less involved in higher education development. Even in the case of enrolment expansion, the ideas underlying the policy did not come from nowhere. It has been commonly accepted among Chinese

higher education researchers that it was the economists' suggestions that drove the State to deliver the policy. A Chinese professor argues that various circles of society, such as news media, teachers, experts and scholars, enterprises and students' parents, have paid more attention to educational development than they did at any time in the past (Wang, 2003). The real problem confronting China is, however, the lack of effective channels and mechanisms for broad social participation. Secondly, there is a clear downward transferring of power. However, delegating power to lower levels mainly occurs in the public domain: power is transferred from one government agency to another. Some Chinese scholars suggest that while some power has been conveyed to local authorities, some needs to be made over to social intermediate organisations (Xu, 2003). The slow moving in this respect is largely determined by the lagging political reform and especially the underdevelopment of the third sector. In spite of the rapid proliferation of business, trade, professional and academic organisations in the 1980s and the 1990s, the legal status of these organisations is neither well defined nor secured. Due to the lack of social and economic resources, most organisations have to seek protection from governments, and in so doing, they have to give up many responsibilities that the third sector should undertake (Howell, 2004b). In the present system, most of the third sector organisations concentrate on delivering social services, while few can defend collective values and interests. For this, they exert limited influence on the policy process. In higher education, for example, even though teachers working in the front line of educational practices are best qualified to speak on educational issues, it is difficult for them to defend their interests in collective ways. While some researchers discuss varying ways that teachers' unions in Western countries contribute to education reform and development (Bascia, 2001), in China there are few voices calling for more independent teacher organisations.

The theoretical framework earlier presented implies that policy-making and implementation are interrelated, and both are determined by the context of governance. Due to the present policy-making setting in China, the implementation process has moved slightly away from a traditional top-down manner. As such, conformance is still considered as the most important concern. I will not try to convince readers of such argument by more text here, as it is not uncommon in studies on Chinese higher education. Rather, the following discussion will focus on the implementation of major principles associated with the desired reforms. It has been argued that there are two major reform strategies: "to introduce market forces to liberate education, create impetus for change, and encourage competition for improvement", and "to use legislation to regulate new social relationships, practices and behaviour arising from the first strategy" (Law, 2002: 579). For the marketization of higher education, it has been claimed that the participation of society in higher education relies on market mechanisms (Maassen & Cloete, 2002). One celebrated achievement of the Chinese reform is that society has become more market centred, and likewise higher education. A best example in point is the transformation from unified job assignment to a "free" labour market. In the centrally planned system, all university graduates were allocated into a variety of workplaces according to the state plans. Since the late 1980's, in order to adapt to a market-oriented economy, more and more graduates have been encouraged to seek employment opportunities through "two-way selection" between graduates and employers. Along with the abolition of job assignment in the mid-1990s, "graduates now enter the labour market—and there is a labour market that allows private decisions about employment" (Mohrman, 2003: 10). The

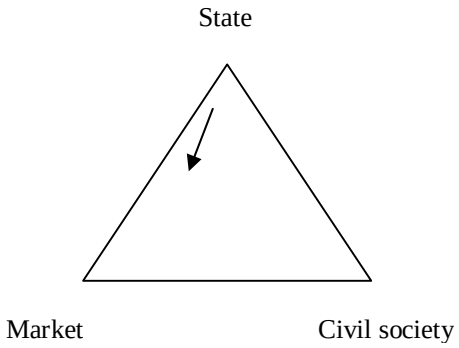
private voices also appear to become both the state's and universities' concerns. In the meantime, however, we can also read criticisms. The change of the graduate employment system is not modelled according to market mechanism. Instead, graduates looking for jobs rely heavily on personal connections (Agelasto, 1998). Reforms in this field are confusing and problematic and the process of marketization with respect to the labour market has not broken entirely out of the framework of centrally planned procedure (Williams, Liu, & Shi, 1997). As an assessment of overall Chinese higher education reform, Mohrman(2003) claims an absence of a real market in higher education.

Concerning the second strategy, China has made remarkable progress in building a legal framework to steering higher education. Since the 1980s, China has constituted numbers of laws and administrative statutes with respect to higher education. Symbolically, the promulgation of these laws shows a clear move towards a law-based administration. Rhetorically, the laws provide more autonomy to universities and offer more opportunities for social participation in higher education. Practically, however, many law statements can hardly be fulfilled. The Higher Education Law, for example, grants autonomy to Chinese higher education institutions no less than that enjoyed by their counterparts in most European countries. However, according to a survey, university leaders complained that much control was still vested in the Ministry of Education and other government authorities, such as admission policies, setting up educational programmes, granting diplomas, financial affairs and international academic exchanges (Li, 2000). When I interviewed an official at the Ministry of Education in 2002, I was told that sometimes the heads of, for example, vocational colleges preferred to follow governmental directives instead of making institutional strategies in their own right. A similar point has also been observed by a noted Chinese educationalist, Gu Mingyu (2000: 16), that colleges do not think these can act autonomously. Since for a long time Chinese higher education institutions lived in an environment where they were too dependent on the government, it may take some time for universities to learn how to exercise autonomous power (Xu, 2003). This example implies that defaulting of law implementation is, in part, because of people's weak legal consciousness as a historical heritage. What makes the situation worse is, as one argues, that "state and schools are supposed to equip law-abiding citizens, but are themselves lawbreakers" (Law, 2002). When lawmakers break laws, it will seriously undermine the authority and credibility of the laws. Another interesting case is that some most fundamental reforms in Chinese higher education are neither driven nor regulated by laws, but directly linked to the central authorities' commands. China launched nation-wide mergers in higher education since the beginning of the 1990s. From 1992 to 2002, the number of cases of mergers reached 313 involving more than 700 institutions. However, behind such a larger operation it is hard to identify what the underlying policies are. When I inquired about this matter during an interview with an official at the Ministry of Education this summer, he said, "the mergers of higher education institutions were driven by leaders' speeches rather than policies". Of course it is up to how we define policy, but at least this reflects a lack of normative and regulative aspects in reform operation.

The policy-making process with respect to the Chinese higher education transformation can be summarised as follows: (1) There is a relaxation of the state, though the central authorities still

dominate the policy-making process; (2) The desire to make higher education more market oriented boosts the involvement of private sectors in higher education, but there is a lack of a proper institutional environment to ensure such a move; (3) While the market dimension has been stressed in the on-going reforms, little attention has been given to the rise of civil society. The changes in policy process can be illustrated by Figure 2. Before the reform period, the state controlled most affairs in the higher education sphere. The recent reforms are designed to move towards the market corner while no signal shows clear magnetism from the civil society corner. In this sense, the reforms are not consistent with the ideal tendency—moving towards a balanced equilibrium between state, market and civil society—suggested by some governance theories (Tiihonen, 2004). In practice, the move along the state/market is not as fast as is theoretically supposed.

Figure 2 Changes of policy process in Chinese higher education



CONCLUSIONS

The modern governance discourse is, to a large extent, characterised by a relaxation of state and an increase of non-governmental involvement. The changes break the traditional public/private line in the policy process in general and with respect to higher education in particular. The non-governmental elements include both market and civil society. The growth of the latter largely makes up the dynamics of modern governance. However, the concept of governance is rather context bounded. It is a product of political culture and the result of institutional change in the West. The creation of new institutions is always based on old templates. The Western efforts to develop governance are largely based on traditional beliefs, such as rule of law, democracy and liberal market. The discussion on the specific Chinese context suggests that a Western version of governance may not be immediately applied to China since the institutional bases of governance have not been effectively developed in the country. However, it does not necessarily imply the irrelevance of governance in China. In fact, the introduction of governance has significant meanings for Chinese society. It evokes the awareness of the mass population about their human rights and social responsibilities, and, consequently, impels the central authorities to change, more or less, their ways of governing social affairs. As a researcher, the understanding of governance theory does provide me with a fresh perspective to reflect upon the challenges confronting Chinese society as well as higher education in particular.

The recent higher education reforms point, at least intentionally, to the direction more associated with market element. From the view of the policy process, however, the market-oriented reforms leave

much room for improvement in practice, and the involvement of social groups in the policy process is rather symbolic. The sluggish movement is largely determined by the country's political structure, traditional ideology and the people's mindset forged in a centrally planning system. All of these are, in one way or another, linked to the inertia of the traditional role of the state. It partly explains why the introduction of market mechanisms in higher education is so problematic. Another impediment to the development of a market system in higher education is the lack of civil society. As China has little experience of market, it may be too risky to deliver the higher education sector directly to the invisible hand of markets. To reduce the risk, China needs a rise of civil society. It will provide a bridge between state and market, avoiding both the deficiencies of the former and potential anarchy of the latter. Given the particular circumstance in China, though the access of social groups to the policy process is a necessary condition for modern governance with respect to higher education, the problem of the first importance may be how to standardise the relationship between the party and the government.

The study of governance in a Chinese context with respect to higher education is a new research area and it concerns much broader issues than what I can cover in such a limited text. The paper has, to some extents, touched upon some important questions: Does China have proper institutional environments for governance? Is it possible to base a Western version of governance on the Chinese institutions? If China has already embarked on an institutional change, is it consistent with the reform action concerning governance transformation? The consideration of the issues guides me in thinking of the reform practice in Chinese higher education. Nevertheless, I have not gone into these questions deep enough and leave much room for further endeavour.

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