

# The Research on the System of Examination and Assessment of Academic Teachers Based on the Cultural Reflections

Chunyan Zhou\* Jiangsu University of Science and Technology

**Abstract:** With some reflections on the management culture of higher educational institutions in China, this paper presents that it is not adequate to make analyses of rules and regulations from the mere perspective of institutional economics to get rid of short-term, which can be accounted for on a deeper level by the absence of management culture in the prevailing assessment system of teachers' achievements; while the key to reform the system of assessing teachers' work is to rebuild cultural conceptions in the management of higher educational institutions.

**Key words:** assessment of teachers' achievement; cultural reflection; academic freedom

## 1. Present Situation of Assessing Teachers' Work in Higher Educational Institutions

As a key joint of the employment system, assessing teachers' work plays an important role in the management of academic teachers. Quantity assessment has been the main method by which to assess teachers' work in colleges and universities for long, and the degree a teacher gets in the assessment has been based on his/her achievements in teaching and scientific research work. The treatment a teacher receives has mainly been given according to the quantity assessment result.

Accompanying the deepening reform of employment system in higher educational institutions, the research of assessment system goes further and further. But there are still a lot to be improved in the assessment system, which deserves more efforts to study carefully. One of the main problems with the assessment system is how to establish a more scientific and reasonable assessment system to assess teachers' work and how to prevent teachers' short-term activities from rising.

Short-term activities refer to actions a person takes to maximize the short term profit. In the course of teacher employment, it mainly refers that both the staff and the academic faculty are eager for quick success and instant benefit, putting priority on the partial and immediate profit while neglecting the long-term profit and target for development<sup>1</sup>, which could be found expressions in the following:

### (1) Orientation towards Scientific Research Superior to Teaching Work

To upgrade the reputation of school, the school authorities usually make certain policies to orientate teachers' priority towards scientific research work. One important measure they take is to implement quantity assessment system, requiring teachers to publish a certain number of academic papers within a specified time, and to

\* Chunyan Zhou, associate professor, deputy director general of personal department of Jiangsu University of Science and Technology; research field: human resources management of higher educational institutions and moral education; address: personal department, Jiangsu University of Science and Technology, Mengxi Road 2, Zhenjiang City, Jiangsu Province, P.R.China; postcode: 212001.  
<sup>1</sup> Biao Ying & Chao Yang. (2005). To Solve the Problem of Short-termization and to Implement Elastic Terms of Employment. *Study of Higher Engineering Education*. (3): 41-43

undertake research projects with a certain amount of funds.

(2) Over Emphasis on Quantitative Assessment of Scientific Research

Over emphasis on quantitative assessment of scientific research invariably leads to teachers' pursuit of quantity rather than quality of research achievements in some schools. There rise in some higher educational institutions the phenomena of "regarding scientific research superior to teaching" and "teachers do not teach", and there forms an academic situation in which teachers do scientific research for the mere purpose of promoting their own professional titles, which exert negative influence on teaching and contribute to teachers' being overanxious for quick results and instant benefits. And it also explains the existence of academic corruptions, such as plagiarism and submitting a piece of paper for publication several times.

(3) Lack of Originality

Teachers orientated producing achievements as many as possible and as quickly as possible neglect the quality of their academic products. In contrast with a steady rise in the funds for scientific researches and a sharp increase in the number of research papers published in the past decade, there has been an decrease in achievements with originality, which is shown in the statistics of scientific research work in 30 colleges of science and engineering directly under the Ministry of Education according to *Statistics of Higher School Scientific Research Work* (1997).<sup>2</sup>

In addition, there is no symmetry between teaching and scientific research work. So, it becomes crucial to prevent short-term activities with a scientific and reasonable assessment system that can give full play to reciprocity between teaching and scientific research.

The scandal of Yuxi Huang in Korea and some other academic faking events in China make us feel that system construction is particularly important while we are strengthening moral education.

## 2. Reasons for the Existence of Short-term Activities

In recent years, some scholars have begun to make study of teachers' academic assessment system from the perspective of institutional economics. Institutional economics holds that system is a kind of public article, and is the rule people gain in the process of pursuing benefits while escaping harms<sup>3</sup>. A system with proficiency and stimulation should be the one that makes clear people's rights and obligations, which keeps a balance between one's work and income and makes one's efforts equivalent to his payment. Only such a system can, to the greatest extent, stimulate people to work hard for a long time. On the contrary, an institution without proficiency blurs the board line between rights and obligations, under which the individual's payment derivates from his effort; therefore, the impelling function of the system doesn't come into effect. A system that is static for a long time and under powerful protection helps people a lot to form long-term expectation and develop into long-term and regulated behavior. Versus, the opposite can be true and cause people to take short-term activities.

The assessment of university teachers' work can be seen as a process of game between the teachers and the school, and between teachers, which is subjected to institution and environment. Under certain restrictive conditions, the teacher and the school try to maximize their respective profits. The profit of the school is the total of the teachers' profits, but the maximization of the individual's profit doesn't equal that of the collective's.

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<sup>2</sup> Jing Tu. (2002). An Analysis of the Game of Human Resources Management in Higher Educational Institutions. *Researches on Quantitative Economic Technology*. (9)

<sup>3</sup> Xianglin Meng. (2004). On Institutional Loss in Organizational Competition from the Assessment of Teachers' Work in Higher Educational Institutions. *Journal of China Geology University* (edition of humanity and social sciences), (4): 50

Ying Biao analyzes and explains short-term in teacher assessment with *the prisoner's straits* of the game theory: because there is lack of reasonable restriction and orientation in the assessment system, the result of the school and the teacher's pursuit of immediate interests cannot ensure the optimum which causes loss to the long-term profit of the teacher and the school<sup>4</sup>.

It can be seen from the above that because there are shortcomings with the impelling system and the supervision system, the teachers who work hard and teach well cannot get their deserving payment, and short-term activities result from the game of profit between teachers. It is teachers' rational choice to put more stress on the quantity than the quality of their research achievements under the present institution. And the main reason for the phenomena is the existence of defects of the assessment system.

### 3. Reflections on the Absence of Management Culture in the Current Assessment System

The author of the paper holds that analysis of the defects of the system is not adequate to get rid of short-term activities, because the profound reason has not been revealed, which should be absence of management culture in the assessment system of teachers' achievements and proficiency in higher educational institutions.

College management culture exerts invisible, latent and, at the same time, profound and long-lasting influence on the whole institutions. Absence of management culture will inevitably affect the assessment system in a negative way and it will even hold back the healthy development of the school.

#### 3.1 Rationalism and Scientism Plays the Leading Part in Higher Educational Institutions Management Culture

The forming and development of any style of management is closely related with its cultural background. The management style of quantitative assessment reflects that the higher educational institutions management culture has been greatly influenced by rationalism, whose presumption of human nature is that the teacher should be economic being in the field of economics, and that the teacher in a university, the same as a member in other organizations, is to take the maximum economic profit for his goal, thus neglecting the teacher's lofty social responsibility to "teach, educate people and to serve the society". The absolute dependence on quantitative and technical means causes people to overlook the "soul" of management --- culture value, and to overlook the dynamic role of man's spirits and social cultural factors.<sup>5</sup>

#### 3.2 The Theoretical Development of Higher Educational Institutions Management Lags behind and the Concept of "Quality" in Thoughts of Higher Educational Institutions Management Need to be Updated

At present, there is an outstanding management style in higher educational institutions which applies modes of thought in business management to the personnel and scientific management in universities. With this style of management the school takes quantitative criteria in the assessment of teacher's work, the substance of which is to copy mechanically the concept of "quality" in science and industry which is built on the basis of measurement and operation system. Is it sensible to borrow the industrial measurement methods in our assessment of teachers? Is the concept of "quality" in business management that was formed in the background of the machinery mass production suitable for higher educational institutions management? The existing problems in the assessment of teachers' work and the challenging of the assessment measures from all sides indicate that we need to renew the

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<sup>4</sup> Biao Ying. (2003). An Analysis of the Game of Distributing Human Resources in Higher Educational Institutions: 64-67

<sup>5</sup> Dong Qiao. On Cultural Integration and Shift in Management Theories, 2005-01-20, <http://www.7158.com.cn>

concept of “quality” in higher educational institutions management culture.

**3.3 The Control Theory of Education has Held Sway on the Thoughts of Higher Educational Institutions Management, and the Government is in Improper Relationship with Higher Educational Institutions**

The control theory of education has held sway on the thoughts of higher educational institutions management, and the government is in improper relationship with higher educational institutions, which contribute much to absence of college management culture. When the first university was set up, academic freedom had been gradually established in the process of resisting the church and the secular power that interfered into the creation and dissemination of knowledge. It means that higher school teachers are endowed with freedom and autonomy in their teaching and scientific research. It also means higher schools enjoy freedom in their management and organization.<sup>6</sup>

While the modern university is beyond the ivory tower and become the center of the society, the traditional conception of universities is being challenged. The control theory of education holds sway on the thoughts of higher education and the government is unwilling to give up its control and supervision of higher education. Higher educational institutions are, to the government, just like independent workshops deserving no right of autonomy at all.<sup>7</sup> The outside initiative force of quantitative assessment comes from various assessments of higher educational institutions by the state, the result of which determines their school resources and their social reputation. Higher educational institutions are likely to be reduced into bureaucratic apparatus-like organizations by the operation system subordinating to administrative control power. And the rough style of higher educational institutions management represents the government’s will in quantitative assessment.

**3.4 The Deviation of Teacher Assessment Criteria Reflects the Deep-level Contradiction of Universities with the Market**

Since the Humboldt University was set up in Germany, and the modern university institution was established in the Bolin University, universities have been endeavoring to protect teacher’s freedom of pursuing knowledge. While the modern university, drawn by the external force from the market, gives derivative to multiple goals apart from the goal of academic creation. Because the logic of the market operation is proficiency and profit, if the university subordinates itself to proficiency alone, assessing academic achievements in the utilitarian way, it will, undoubtedly, orientate teachers’ efforts to the academic activities that need little work but produce quick achievements. If the assessment of academic productive forces becomes that of academic production, no wonder there arise serious subsequent problems such as academic impetuosity and academic plagiarism.

**4. New Designs for Higher Educational Institutions Assessment System**

The author holds that the basic countermeasure against short-term in the present assessment system in higher educational institutions is to renew the concept of management culture, which will promote quality of knowledge production, make it suitable for the healthy development of higher education in China, and reset the value orientation in the assessment system of higher educational institutions.

**4.1 Set up the Outlook of Management Culture that is Suitable for the Development of Higher**

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<sup>6</sup> Xinfu Zhou, Qinzhen Zong. (2005). On Shortcomings in the Present Assessment of Teachers in Universities and Their Countermeasures. Journal of Anhui Agriculture University (edition of humanity and social sciences). (2): 97

<sup>7</sup> Zhouping Deng, Zhifa Qian. (2001). On Value Orientation of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Higher Education System and an Operational Design of it. Tsinghua University Education Research. (2): 88

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Academic freedom, democratic management, humanity thoughts should emerge into the management culture of higher educational institutions, and “people-centeredness” should be the guiding line of it.

In the long run, what we need to do is to construct the new higher education system on the principle of university autonomy and indirect supervision of the government. It’s not reasonable or possible for universities to keep totally aloof from the reality and the society, but it’s necessary for them to keep proper distance away from the society.

The government is expected to release its control over universities, and universities are supposed to maintain autonomy in a proper way. Only when higher educational institutions keep initiative in their own hands can we change the operation system in which administrative control plays a leading part; can we prevent universities from being attached to administrative apparatus and from being reduced to bureaucratic apparatus like organizations.

Teachers’ original work should not be assessed in the way used in industrial products. The assessment index should fit the idea that teachers are human beings but not things, the criteria of which should not be quality target but mental and academic levels. The system should go well with the responsibility higher educational institutions take for the society and for the nation.

**4.2 New Designs for Higher Educational Institutions Assessment System after Some Cultural Reflections**

4.2.1 Establish the system of selecting qualified persons for a post and appraising an on-post person through discussion; to define the duties incumbent on each person or post. The teacher employment system is actually a system of selecting qualified persons for the teaching post. And the design of this system should involve the following three points: (1) Employment is classified into three grades: primary, medial and advanced; (2) There should be definite regulations about the setting posts of the three grades. For example, it is laid down in Jiangsu province that in universities of teaching and scientific research style teachers in advanced degree posts should be in the ratio of 35~45%, among which professors are in ratio of 15-20%<sup>8</sup>; (3) There should be appropriate regulations on qualifications for posts. It is advisable to implement assessment of posts by experts and to define the duties incumbent on each person or post in the light of specific situation of each school and international standards for setting posts in higher educational institutions, so as to benefit assessment after employment.

4.2.2 Implement the system of elastic term of employment, making the employment system a lasting and sustainable one. According to analysis of the game theory, it is advisable to apply “elastic term of employment” to post employment; namely, different terms are for different posts, short terms for posts of lower grades and the higher the grades of posts the longer the employment terms. It is suggested that professors and associate professors be employed for long terms, and scholars be given a free and easy environment, in which they may concentrate on their researches. And longer terms of employment may settle the problem of short-termization caused by the “*the prisoner straits*” resulted from the game of profits between teachers, because under the condition of longer employment terms, teachers may cooperate with each other for long-term benefits, which forms a kind of balance of profits between the school, the discipline and the individual teacher, thus reducing waste of resources within the school.

4.2.3 Assess teachers in different ways according to their categories and levels.

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<sup>8</sup> Documents of the Education Department of Jiangsu province, Jiangsu Education Personnel (2005). No:30 *A Notice form the Provincial Education Department about the Ratios and Post-settings of Profession IPosts in Pprovincial Higher Schools*

The system of assessment teachers' work is a kind of reinforcement of the system of employment, which should be based on clear and definite duties and goals of posts, and should be implemented in accordance strictly with regulations. The assessment of teachers should be carried out according to professional features, categories and levels of teachers.

In assessment of teachers' work, the school should take full consideration of the differences between art and humanity disciplines and science disciplines, between basic disciplines and applied disciplines, and should appraise teachers' academic achievements in an overall view. The school should lay down appropriate standards for assessment so as to highlight disciplinary features of achievement of humanity and social sciences.

4.2.4 Set up institutions for special purposes to complete academic assessment and supervision system, and to standardize academic construction in higher educational institutions .

It is suggested to complete academic assessment and supervision system and to standardize academic construction of higher educational institutions by setting up institutions for special purposes. Aiming at fighting against academic plagiaries appearing in universities of the present, the Education Ministry is now planning a committee of promoting style of study, hoping to help standardize the building of style of study in higher educational institutions.

**References (omitted)**

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