

Party Secretaries in Chinese Higher Education Institutions: What Roles Do They Play?

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The Chinese political party in power is the Communist Party. In higher education institutions the Party secretary is a ubiquitous presence. The purpose of this study was to answer the question, “What roles do Party secretaries play?” The Party committee headed by the Party secretary in an institution is supposed to lead the institution. To understand the Chinese higher education system, it is necessary to understand what roles Party secretaries play. A questionnaire was designed and distributed to institution Party secretaries in 15 provinces. KMO analysis and Barlett’s sphericity test results indicated the distribution of response values was adequate for factor analysis, which was conducted to answer the research question. Data analysis results indicate that there are four roles Party secretaries play: decision maker, administrator, coordinator, and political power representative. This study provides empirical evidence on what roles Party secretaries play, filling an obvious gap in the literature on Chinese higher education institution administration.

Key words: Chinese higher education, Communist Party secretaries, institution governance

In China the political party in power is the Chinese Communist Party. In higher education institutions, “as in almost all other social units in the country, the party secretary is a powerful and ubiquitous presence” (Feng, 2013, p. 477). Yuan Guiren, the current Minister of Education, was the Party secretary of Beijing Normal University before he started working in the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2011). The Higher Education Act Chapter IV Article 39 stipulates: In every publicly funded higher education institution there shall be a committee of the Chinese Communist Party that leads the institution, where the president of the institution is responsible for the administration. Following the Constitution of the Communist Party, this committee shall lead the institution and support the president in independently and responsibly executing the powers and performing the duties of the presidency. To ensure that the tasks

focused on cultivating talents are successfully fulfilled, the committee shall lead mainly by following the policies of the Chinese Communist Party ...and have discussions to decide important issues related to the basic administrative system and development of the institution (National People’s Congress, 1998). The Party secretary of a Party committee is the leader of the committee. It follows that the Party secretary is the most important leading figure in an institution. The ubiquitous presence of Party secretaries raises the question, “What roles do they play?”

Context and rationale

The Higher Education Act Chapter IV Article 30 provides that “The president of a higher education institution shall be the legal representative of the institution”. Chapter IV

Article 41 stipulates that the president is responsible for teaching, research, and administration (National People's Congress, 1998). The vast majority of Chinese high education institutions are publicly funded. Every public institution has a Party secretary and a president, and most privately funded institutions also have a Party secretary and a president (Jiang & Li, 2012). Public institution Party secretaries are appointed by the Party committee of the government funding these institutions. All private institutions have a board of trustees. The Non-Public Education Promotion Act stipulates that in private institutions the president shall be responsible for the administration under the leadership of the board of trustees (National People's Congress, 2002).

Still, most private institutions have a Party committee with a Party secretary who is hired by the board of trustees. Almost all presidents in public institutions are Party members. Usually a president is often the second most important member of the Party committee. The Party committee headed by the Party secretary and the president has the power of appointing deans and office directors, and therefore actually have the power of controlling the institution. Sometimes it is difficult to determine specifically who is more responsible for what by simply reading Article 39 and Article 41 of the Higher Education Act.

How does a Party secretary lead through the Party committee? For a long time the common understanding in China is that the Party secretary has more power than the president and that the Party secretary leads; the president is responsible for administration; professors are responsible for academic affairs; and they are all under the democratic monitoring of the faculty, staff, and students. But in reality there is vagueness and it is difficult to differentiate leadership from administration. To understand why there is such vagueness, it is necessary to know what roles Party secretaries play.

In the last three and half decades the Chinese higher education system expanded significantly. The higher education participation rate of the relevant age group increased from approximately 3 percent in 1978 to about 34.5 percent in 2013 (Ministry of Education, 2014). There are more institutions, more students, more

instructors, and there is more cooperation between Chinese institutions and international ones. All these make the administration of institutions more complex. Different groups in an institution have different interests, and they may have different expectations of the Party secretary, which makes the study of what roles a Party secretary plays relevant.

There are altogether 2,788 higher education institutions in China approved by the Ministry of Education (2014). All public institutions and most private institutions have a Party secretary. Party secretaries have a huge influence on how these institutions are administered. Outside China, there is no study to indicate what roles these Party secretaries play. Even within China, few studies have been conducted to explain what roles Party secretaries play. Since the Chinese law stipulates that Party secretaries play a leading role in institutions, which form the largest higher education system in the world with 34.5 million students (Ministry of Education, 2014), understanding what specific roles Party secretaries play is useful.

Both the Party secretary and the president in an institution are important administrators and often both are at the same administrative rank without a clear statement about who is senior. Indications are the Party secretary tends to be more important when it comes to making decisions. While in the Higher Education Act there are stipulations on what the Party secretary and what the president shall do, in reality, it is difficult to clearly differentiate their duties simply by reading the relevant articles of the Act. It is very difficult to strictly clarify decision making in administration. Chen (2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d, 2004e) published five reports based on interviews with Party secretaries in five major universities. He reported that there was overlapping between what Party secretaries and what presidents did. Because of the vagueness in specified responsibilities, there were cases where the leading person was not responsible, the responsible person did not lead, the person responsible for the personnel did not have authority over operations, and the person responsible for operations did not have authority over the personnel (Chen, 2004a). To understand why there are such dilemmas, it is necessary to know what roles a Party secretary plays.

Literature review

With “Party secretary” as the key term we conducted a literature search in the data bases of Education Resource Information Center, Sociological Abstracts, Social Sciences Citation Index, and Dissertation Abstracts, but our search produced nothing on higher education institution Party secretaries. We also conducted a literature search in Chinese with the key terms “大学党委书记” (university Party secretary) and “高校党委书记” (higher education institution Party secretary) in the data base of China National Knowledge Infrastructure, the most comprehensive database in the country containing Chinese academic journals, doctoral dissertations, master’s theses, proceedings from conferences, and important newspaper articles. In addition, we read academic articles from other sources. The following paragraphs briefly synthesize the articles we found on Party secretaries.

Public Chinese institutions can be described as belonging to a national government ministry, to a provincial government, or to a municipal government, depending on which level of government funds them. Governments have the power of appointing institution Party secretaries. The Chinese government has made several efforts to let public institutions have the status of legal persons and give them more autonomy. With more autonomy, institutions have more responsibilities in making decisions and decision making involves more risks (Gong, 2009). Theoretically, the whole society is the owner of public institutions and governments are agents of society (Sun, 2004). However, when there is almost no monitoring of the governments, they become actual owners of institutions. Party secretaries become agents of governments, representing the interests of governments at various levels. Institutions promote the interests of stakeholders, particularly the interests of governments that actually fund and therefore control them (Sun, 2004).

Gao (1999) indicated that Chinese higher education institution Party secretaries needed to transform themselves from administrators to scholars, which was required by the unique

functions of these institutions. The people higher education institution Party secretaries worked with were well-educated intellectuals with high personal qualities and advanced attainments from different fields with various orientations (Wang, C., 2000). Institution Party secretaries should have training and personal qualities in leadership abilities, Marxist theories, ideology, morality, science, culture, and advanced administration (Guo, Guo, & Zeng, 2012; Liu, 2004). The Party committee in an institution lead, organized, and taught by precept and example, and it was responsible for directing, selecting, and training of senior administrators in the institution (Li, 2005). The Party secretary should be a leader, not a professional administrator (Han, 2008). As a political leader, a Party secretary should make efforts to establish rapport in: (1) the relationship with the Party committee, (2) the relationship with the president, and (3) the relationship with subordinate administrators (Li, 2008).

The Communist Party’s leadership in public higher education institutions is constitutionally assured. However, most private education institutions, as corporations, also have a Party secretary. Bai (2005) discussed the question, what is “the absolute leadership of the Party in education”? Bai also discussed the issues surrounding the relationship between the Party and the governing body in a private institution. She examined possible legal avenues to provide a new perspective on the role of the Party in the private education sector. She stated that the presence of the Party in the private education sector is problematic and it reflects a political dilemma in Chinese society: capitalist elements have been introduced to reform various aspects of economy and society, but the political system has remained unchanged. She asked the question: Can China implement further reforms without this affecting the political status quo? She claimed that her discussion could be seen as a call for political reform.

Jiang, Guan, and Wang (2008) compared Party secretaries with presidents in higher education institutions and concluded that the roles Party secretaries played were different from those of presidents. Jiang and Li (2012) also conducted a comparison between institution Party secretaries and presidents, which indicates

that Party secretaries are older; there are more female Party secretaries; more presidents are professors with a doctorate degree; more presidents studied overseas and have an overseas degree; more Party secretaries' expertise is in administration or philosophy, whereas more presidents' expertise is in engineering, sciences, or medicine.

Guan (2009) interviewed Party secretaries from two public universities and one private university to investigate how they viewed their work and what an ideal Party secretary should be. Based on the data, she concluded the three Party secretaries believed that the position of a Party secretary is a unique Chinese senior administrative position. The three Party secretaries believed that a Party secretary should have high political quality, decision-making competence, coordinating competence, a sense of democracy, and personal charisma (Guan, 2009).

Luo and Sun (2011) conducted a study investigating the personal qualities of Party secretaries in 34 "985 Project" universities. Universities in the "985 Project" receive the most funding from the national government. Luo and Sun (2011) analyzed these party secretaries' highest degrees, expertise, academic careers, work experiences, research publications, and how long they had been working as Party secretaries. Luo and Sun (2011) also described the situations of these Party secretaries and their shortcomings. Luo and Sun (2011) stated that these Party secretaries' degree levels tended to be low, they often did not have deep expertise in their specialties, they did not have interdisciplinary knowledge, they did not have an extensive understanding of humanities, their academic careers were simple, they did not understand academic development of universities very well, they lacked visions and courage of statesmen, and they did not pay adequate attention to the research related to higher education. Luo and Sun (2011) made several recommendations on how to improve the personal qualities of Party secretaries.

Based on a careful analysis of 34 "985 Project" universities' official websites, Sun (2012) finds that party secretaries are involved in a lot of administrative work, but are less involved in academic research. Sun (2012) also

finds that overall, party secretaries are of low academic level; they do not have an adequate understanding of universities' academic development; they lack statesmen's bold vision; their academic background is relatively simple; and they do not have broad knowledge of humanities.

Gao and Gu (2013) conducted a study on the personal characteristics of Party secretaries in 34 "985 Project" universities. They found that 85 percent of the Party secretaries in the study were male and 15 percent were female. Most of them were from more developed eastern regions of China and their average age was 53. Eighty percent of them graduated from at least one graduate program. Nine percent of them had a foreign degree. Forty-eight percent had humanities background. Forty percent of them had at least one degree from the institution where they worked. On average they had been on the position of Party secretary for 5.6 years. Most of them had worked in a government department, and their administrative rank was equivalent to that of a deputy minister in the national government (Gao & Gu, 2013).

A review of the relevant literature indicates that past research, including some empirical studies, describes and analyzes characteristics, personal qualities, and expected duties of Party secretaries. However, we are not able to find any empirical study with a large sample to investigate in reality what specific roles Party secretaries play. Since Party secretaries are important leaders, explaining what roles they play with empirical evidence is helpful for an understanding of how institutions operate. This understanding will be beneficial for institutions to develop healthily.

Methods

To understand what roles Party secretaries play, we designed a questionnaire based on the related articles of the Higher Education Act and a careful review of the relevant literature. In addition, we consulted seven Party secretaries working in higher education institutions. In a pilot study we asked 12 Party secretaries to fill out the questionnaire. With careful consideration of their responses, we made revisions to the questionnaire to make it reliable and valid. For

example, one original question was: “The Party committee decides the direction of an institution.” A few Party secretaries thought this statement was inappropriate. It was changed to: “Political power decides the direction of an institution.” The changed statement was more accurate, because a Party committee has to follow policies which are usually communicated top-down.

One way of classifying Chinese higher education institutions is to put them in three categories depending on their main focus: research, research and teaching, and teaching institutions (Wu, 2014). We distributed 300 questionnaires: 50 questionnaires to Party secretaries in research universities, 50 questionnaires in research and teaching universities, 50 questionnaires in teaching universities, and 150 questionnaires in vocational colleges which were all teaching institutions. These questionnaires were distributed in eight provinces and municipalities directly under the national government with education development above the national average and seven provinces and ethnic autonomous regions with education development below the national average, out of the 31 provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions in the country. In more developed provinces, we distributed more questionnaires but in less developed provinces we distributed fewer questionnaires. This occurred because in more developed provinces there are more institutions but in less developed provinces there are fewer institutions. For example, we distributed two or three questionnaires to Party secretaries in research universities in a more developed province, but

one questionnaire in a research university in a less developed province, so on and so forth. Out of the 300 questionnaires distributed, 235 were returned, and all were usable, with a response rate of 78 percent. Based on the responses from Party secretaries in the study, we believe the questionnaire is valid.

Results

After the data were entered into an SPSS dataset, we conducted reliability analysis of the questionnaire. The analysis results indicate a Chronbach's α of .73, which is acceptable (George & Mallery, 2011). We also conducted KMO analysis to measure whether the distribution of response values was adequate for conducting factor analysis. We conducted Barlett's test of sphericity to measure the multivariate normality of the set of distribution. The analysis results displayed a KMO measure of sampling adequacy test statistic of .7 and Barlett's test of sphericity test statistic of $< .05$, indicating that the distribution of values was adequate, approximately multivariate normal, and acceptable for factor analysis (George & Mallery, 2011). Factor analysis is most frequently used to identify a small number of factors that may be used to represent relationships among sets of interrelated variables (George Mallery, 2011). Based on the results from the survey, we obtained 12 variables related to the roles Party secretaries play. With these 12 variables, we conducted factor analysis to answer the research question: What roles do Party secretaries play? Table 1 displays the outcomes of the factor analysis.

Table 1. Factor analysis results

Variable	Rotated Component Matrix	Components			
		1	2	3	4
5	Highest institution decision maker	.70			
1	Most important Party committee decision maker	.59			
2	Has roles different from roles in other sectors		.89		
4	Highest institution administrator		.66		
3	Responsible for Party affairs and administration		.52		
7	Leads Party committee to assist president in administration			.75	
12	Party secretary & president communicate well is important			.73	
11	Coordination between secretary & president has a huge influence			.69	
6	Assists president in leading			.58	
8	There is political power in institutions				.76
9	Is a political power representative				.65
10	Political power decides the direction of an institution				.55

The results of factor analysis indicate that there are four roles Party secretaries play: (1) decision maker, (2) administrator, (3) coordinator, and (4) political power representative. Variables 1 and 5 are related to the role of decision maker. These two variables indicate that the Party secretary is the most important decision maker in an institution. Variables 2, 3, and 4 are related to the role of administrator. These three variables show that the Party secretary is involved in the administration of an institution, although the Higher Education Act Chapter IV Article 39 stipulates that in every publicly-funded higher education institution the president of the institution is responsible for the administration. Variables 6, 7, 11, and 12 are related to the role of coordinator. These four variables demonstrate that the Party secretary assists the president in administration and that the coordination between the secretary and president has a huge influence on the operation of the institution. Variables 8, 9, and 10 are related to the role of political power representative. These three variables display that the Party secretary is the political

representative of the Party's power and that political power decides the direction of an institution.

Conclusion and discussions

Based on the results of factor analysis, we conclude that Party secretaries in this study play four roles: decision maker, administrator, coordinator, and political power representative. The following paragraphs explain and discuss these four roles. We make a suggestion as to which of these four roles are more important. In addition, we make several related recommendations.

The first role of a decision maker is reflected in the fact that a Party secretary leads a Party committee responsible for important issues. Important issues such as appointments and dismissals of officials and the general direction of the development in an institution are decided by the Party committee. The Party secretary is the leader of the Party committee, exerting a significant influence on any decision the committee makes. The Party secretary is the

most important decision maker in an institution. The decision maker role is the role a Party secretary plays the most often.

Since the decision maker role is the role a Party secretary plays the most often, we would like to make two recommendations related to this role. At the moment the Chinese government is promoting the environment protection industry, however, there are few such programs in higher education institutions. Developing these programs has a great potential. We recommend that perceptive Party secretaries collect the relevant information, act proactively, and make the right decisions in facilitating the development of environment protection programs to meet the needs of the country. Second, as the most important decision maker, the Party secretary needs to attentively listen to all parties involved in dealing with any issue to avoid becoming a dictator. When a Party secretary consults all parties involved, the information collected is more likely to be comprehensive and accurate (Chen, 2004b). It is stipulated in the Constitution of the Party Chapter II Article 10 section 5 that “Party committees at all levels function on the principle of combining collective leadership with individual responsibility based on division of work. All major issues shall be decided upon by Party committees after discussion in accordance with the principle of collective leadership, democratic centralism, individual consultations, and decision by meetings” (The Chinese Communist Party, 2012).

The second role of an administrator is reflected in the fact that a Party secretary is involved in administration. There is a need for a clear distribution of powers so that everybody knows their specific responsibilities. A clear distribution of powers is also beneficial when problems arise, which makes it easier to track whose responsibilities they are. A Party secretary only needs to pay attention to the general direction of an institution’s development.

The third role is the role of a coordinator. A Party secretary needs to coordinate the relationship with the president. A Party secretary also needs to coordinate the relationship between the Party committee and other committees that influence the institution’s

administration. When a Party secretary assigns tasks via the Party committee, the secretary needs to coordinate the works of different departments. As a leader, the Party secretary should make efforts to establish rapport with three groups: (1) the Party committee, (2) the president, and (3) administrators the Party committee leads (Li, 2008). Timely and successful coordination helps to avoid misunderstandings and prevent frictions among administrators. A Party secretary also needs to coordinate the relationship between the institution and other organizations, particularly the government department that provides the funding. In addition, a Party secretary sometimes must coordinate the relationship between subordinates and superiors. A Party secretary must understand subordinates’ thoughts as well as superiors’ thoughts to comprehend the situation of current affairs, facilitating the process of overall decision making (Chen, 2004c). The Party secretary has to report to superiors tasks performed, progress made, and difficulties encountered. At the same time the Party secretary has to communicate to subordinates the goals superiors set and the tasks they assigned.

The fourth role a Party secretary plays is the role of a political power representative. The Party secretary in an institution is appointed by the Party committee of the government that provides funding to the institution. The Party secretary has to follow the Party’s policies. The Party secretary leads the Party committee to actively participate in making decisions in dealing with important issues, serving as a kind of political nucleus. The Party secretary needs to uphold the principle of democratic centralism, lead the Party committee to play a central function in an institution, and support the president to perform the president’s responsibilities independently. “Democratic centralism is a combination of centralism on the basis of democracy and democracy under centralized guidance. It is the fundamental organizational principle of the Party ... The Party must fully expand intra-Party democracy, respect the principal position of its members, safeguard their democratic rights, and give play to the initiative and creativity of Party organizations at all levels as well as its

members. Correct centralism must be practiced ... to ensure the solidarity, unity and concerted action in the whole Party and prompt and effective implementation of its decisions” (The Chinese Communist Party Constitution, 2012, General Program, para. 28). The Party secretary is the nucleus of political power, having a decisive influence on the operation of an institution (Wang, Y., 2000).

Based on the data analysis results, we conclude that Party secretaries play four roles of decision maker, administrator, coordinator, and political power representative. Party secretaries need to consider carefully of these four roles which ones are more important. With the consideration of the relevant literature (Chen, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d, 2004e; Han, 2008; National People’s Congress, 1998; Wang, Y., 2000), we argue that the roles of decision maker and political power representative are the more important ones that Party secretaries should pay more attention to.

The most important decision maker in an institution is the Party committee with the Party secretary as its leader. It follows that the Party secretary is the most important decision maker. The Party secretary has to decide what needs to be reported to superiors but what can be decided by the Party committee. The Party secretary also has to determine the appropriate procedures of the Party committee in making decisions. As the most important decision maker, the Party secretary has to consider long term goals and the necessary priorities. The Party secretary has to consider how to obtain resources for the institution, how to improve teaching and research, how to serve the community, and how to inherit the traditional culture. These are the important issues the Party secretary has to think about. As the most important decision maker, the personal qualities of the Party secretary directly affect the rise, or decline, of an institution (Wang, Y., 2000).

In the process of letting institutions have more autonomy, the Chinese government sometimes gives institutions more power, but other times takes back the power given earlier. One fear is that when there is little autonomy, there is no initiative, but when there is too much autonomy, there is anarchy. With Party secretaries as political power representatives,

governments may be able to moderate its progress of letting institutions have more autonomy.

To have efficient administration in a contemporary organization, the organization’s decision-making unit and its executive unit should be independent of each other; and its executive unit and its disciplinary unit should be independent of each other. In a Chinese institution, the Party committee is the decision-making unit, the administration system headed by the president is the executive unit, and the disciplinary sub-committee in the Party committee is the disciplinary unit. The Party secretary is the leader of the decision-making unit, the leader of the disciplinary unit, as well as the representative of the government. The data in this study suggest that the administrative system headed by the president should be responsible for the daily administration of an institution. The president and vice-presidents should also be responsible for the coordination of different functional departments and schools in the university. Only when this happens, the administrative system of an institution can operate effectively and efficiently.

After gaining power in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party claimed that only socialism could save China—a poor country with the vast majority of its people illiterate—and that socialism was superior to capitalism. By 1953 all Chinese universities and colleges were changed into public institutions within a central planning system. The major mechanisms included governments allocating resources and appointing institution leaders (Cai, 2004). The Chinese Higher Education Act makes it clear that institutions shall be administered under the leadership of the Communist Party, stating a clear socialist orientation (National People’s Congress, 1998). But the claim that socialism was superior to capitalism was quietly dropped not long after China opened up to the world in 1979.

Most countries and international organizations acknowledge that the Chinese economy is a market economy, but the Communist Party’s intention of staying in power is clearly reflected in article 39 of the Higher Education Act. After China opened up in 1979, democratization reforms have taken place (as

evidenced in laws passed after 1979 as well as in modifications to laws passed before 1979), but these reforms have been very slow and gradual. There are people with power who want to stay in power, and there is also a fear that too much freedom too fast may lead to anarchy. The long history of China is full of civil wars. Incremental democratization is balanced against the magnitude of social complexity and chaotic interchange demonstrated in the proportionately higher traffic accident rate and higher rate of food safety issues in China than those in developed countries. The government claims that the Chinese economy is a socialist market economy. However, for ordinary citizens it is not clear how much influence socialism still has, as reflected in the laws, and how much influence a market economy has, as most economic decisions and many political decisions are made from an economic perspective. Progress to modify laws to make them suitable for a changing society is extremely slow. University autonomy is restricted and the state still retains effective control over key aspects of higher education governance (Li, 2014). The Chinese model for social-political development denotes a central role of the state and places emphasis on efficiency for the sake of accelerating economic growth, which finds its expression in universities (Zha, Shi, & Wang, 2015). State control is stipulated in laws. Government departments of education in China have more power in regulating, supervising, and evaluating institutions.

Higher education systems have always been in interaction with their societal contexts, and the combinations of these interactions have produced different social dynamics for higher education systems. Higher education is—and has always been—a part of their societies (Valimaa & Nokkala, 2014). Although Chinese are learning from developed countries in almost every aspect, the progress of the Chinese higher education system will be different from those in developed countries. China has a different geography, history, and social, political, and cultural contexts with their attendant traditions and beliefs.

Higher education institutions operate within national contexts that are highly different

(Bleiklie, 2014). The differences in policy content can be traced to differences in national political organization (Bleiklie & Michelsen, 2013). With Jungblut's (2015) analytical dimension focusing on the control over the higher education sector, the Chinese system can be described as having centralized control, where the state and its bureaucracy are the main actors steering the system. Students from the largest Chinese cities outperform counterparts in mathematics and science in a 60 country Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development assessment. However, the Chinese higher education system as a whole still does poorly on quality indicators (Postiglione, 2015), and there is a long way for China to become an internationally influential part of the higher education landscape (Huang, 2015).

With data collected from Party secretaries, this study has produced useful information on the administration of Chinese higher education institutions, but it has its limitations. One limitation is the sampling method. The authors made efforts in selecting institutions from both more developed and less developed provinces so that they were as representative as possible of higher education institutions, but they were not randomly selected. Another limitation is the sample size. With 235 Party secretaries, the sample size is not large. One more limitation is that this study only examines what roles Party secretaries play in public institutions. It does not investigate what roles Party secretaries in private institutions and Sino-foreign collaborative institutions play. In addition, using a questionnaire as the only data collecting method is a limitation.

Although there are limitations to this study, it provides interesting empirical information on what roles Party secretaries play, filling an obvious gap in the literature on Chinese higher education administration. As far as we know no previous one study analyzes and discusses the four roles revealed in this study, together with empirical data. The study also helps readers understand the organizational structures of the Chinese higher education system with regard to how it is operated. If we hope to understand the system, we need to have more knowledge about Party secretaries working there. It is useful to understand what roles Party secretaries play.

While this study provides preliminary information on what roles Party secretaries play, there is more to be learned about these people who have a huge impact on their organizations. With a quantitative approach the results of this study tell us what four roles Party secretaries in the study play. For deeper understanding, future research can examine what Party secretaries particularly do when they play these four roles. A mixed research design (combination of qualitative and quantitative methods) will enrich

the data to be collected. Future research can investigate how Party secretaries are appointed in public institutions or hired in private and Sino-foreign institutions. In addition, future research may examine the question of how a system of governance that gives Party Secretaries the highest decision-making power can ensure competitiveness in global academic circles for Chinese higher education institutions.

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