CHAPTER 15

On Localization of Chinese Higher Education

Localization (regionalization) of higher education is a hot topic in the world’s structural reform of the higher education system. Since December 1978, when UNESCO held a seminar on the practical contributions made by institutions of higher education to the community, the topic of higher education localization has been attracting attention from the decision-making governmental departments, as well as educational theory circles, in all countries. In 1982, in an international seminar held in Britain on the structure and management of higher education, localization of higher education administration was one of the subjects under discussion. In September 1990, a seminar about modern policies on the reform of higher education will be held at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, localization of higher education has already been listed as an important topic for discussion. All of the above fully demonstrate the importance of this issue to the reform and development of higher education. Although China hasn’t conducted much theoretical research or practical experiences in the field, localization of higher education has become an inevitable trend under the Chinese economic system reform and the planned commodity economy development. Situations in other countries have also provided experiences for our reference. Of course, due to the different historical backgrounds of each country, the localization of Chinese higher education should take its own way. This article will start from the world development of higher education localization, and then discuss the actualities and feasibilities of Chinese higher education localization as we face the twenty-first century challenges for higher education.

1 Localization is a Trend for the World Higher Education Development

Localization of higher education consists of two connotations: first of all, higher education should adapt to and serve local economic, making itself the local cultural and scientific center. Secondly, the administrative right of higher
education should belong to local departments, and the main financial source for running a school should come from local financial allocations. The first connotation is the original meaning of higher education localization, where its principal value lies. The second connotation is the condition required to realize localization. Only if both administrative and financial aspects are localized can we achieve the essential purpose of serving local developments; only aiming at serving local developments can we involve local governments actively in the administration and financial allocations for higher education.

Generally speaking, localization of higher education and finance is relatively easier to realize in the tide of economic reform. But for higher education to actually set the target of serving local developments, and to establish a whole series of practical measures, necessary adjustments should be made in its overall internal system, including adjustments of educational ideas, school running orientations, purposes of talent nurturing, and settings of majors and courses.

Some countries have successful precedents they can follow in their localization process. Especially in the Western countries, where higher education localization was pioneered, huge economic and social benefits have been achieved through this efficient measure. Higher education in the United States has been through a localization process, from the state-owned universities in the nineteenth century to the community colleges in the twentieth century. After the War of Independence, the United States faced the task of exploring their western borders and building up a new country, so talents with practical skills were urgently needed. However, higher education during colonial times was out of step with this national development and construction, higher education was even more in contradiction with the economic demand of each state. Under such historic circumstances, this country inaugurated its trilogy of higher education options. At first, state-owned universities were established by each state to respond to their individual demands of economic construction and development; meanwhile, city-owned universities, built and controlled by municipal authorities, emerged. Secondly, the development of “land-grant colleges” also pushed forward the localization of higher education by huge steps. The key mission of land-grant colleges was to directly serve local economic developments based on local industrial, agricultural, and administrative demands, for example, raising civil engineers for the construction of railways and highways, raising mining engineers to develop mines, and raising agriculture technicians to develop agriculture. Thirdly, community colleges were established, making higher education localization an integral system. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the New University Movement of Britain also demonstrated strong localization colors. The new universities were built