CHAPTER 16

Improving Local Undergraduate College Education and Building a Stronger Country in Higher Education

To upgrade local undergraduate colleges into application colleges is not only helpful in solving the problem of a lack of application-oriented talents but also provides references for undergraduate colleges and newly built colleges facing the local service. It will also bring practical experience and theoretical guidance to undergraduate colleges that cultivate application-oriented talents for all walks of life. Therefore, I undertook the National Important Project of National Fund of Social Science during the Eleventh Five-Year Plan in 2008. It is also the subtopic named “Strengthening Local Undergraduate Colleges,” the key research project of CAHE, namely “following the scientific development for building a stronger country in higher education.”

1 Improving Local Undergraduate College Education and Building a Stronger Country in Higher Education

The national general higher education and full-time school is composed of three components: the academic and characteristic type, directed under the Ministry of Education; the application college, which is usually the local undergraduate college; and occupational education, referring to the vocational college, in general.

Among the 1,092 undergraduate colleges on a national scale, the local undergraduate colleges can account for 90%, which is the main part of undergraduate colleges and the core needed to build a stronger country in higher education. One of the main tasks involved in using higher education to build a stronger country is to improve the education quality of these colleges.

The elite education and research of top university study can provide references for building academic colleges. The successful experiences accumulated

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recently also provide references for improving occupational colleges' education. Its requirements on position, purpose, size, teaching, and faculties are specific. It is necessary to attach importance to innovative ideas and experience to improve the local undergraduate college education. However, study on the basic, in-depth and systematic study is needed. This study first discusses positioning and then moves on to reform and innovation.

2 Positioning Problems for Local Undergraduate Colleges

This research project first focuses on the position problems for local undergraduate colleges because this is a prerequisite for local undergraduate colleges' reform and development. It is the positioning on reform targets, size, service orientation, curriculum, education, and quality assurance that can make the reform targeted, feasible, and effective.

The research carried out a series of positioning investigations for local undergraduate colleges, namely, target positioning, service orientation positioning, personnel training positioning, discipline positioning, teaching positioning, and scientific positioning. Among the most important is the personnel training positioning, which talks about how to cultivate talents to enhance comprehensive national strength and improve the national core competence. Our preliminary conclusion is that the personnel training positioning of local undergraduate colleges should center on training applied talents with certain exceptions. However, a large number of local undergraduate colleges currently attach more importance to cultivating academic talents instead of applied talents. Although the introduction of some local undergraduate colleges has modified the goal “to build a research-oriented comprehensive university” into “to build an applied university with multiple disciplines,” the education value emphasizes the academic and theoretical level instead of application and experience. One important reason for this is that the school administrators, teachers, and students don't have proper awareness. We hold the view that local undergraduate colleges should get out of the traditional pattern of “elite education” and “academic talents training.” The combination of theoretical knowledge and practices should be valued instead of pursuing theory only. Based on the needs of economic and social development, it should be a priority to train tens of millions more applied and innovative talents with theoretical foundation and professional knowledge, which help to solve practical problems that they face in real life when dealing with the diversified demands of society.