

Some Reflections on and Criticisms of China's Educational Management Studies

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Abstract: In spite of having undergone one century's vicissitude, China's educational management studies are still lagging behind those abroad. Two research lines, one being induction and generalization, another being deduction and transplantation, have been roughly evolved over these studies. Both of them have reached the level of empirical science. Since 1980s, they have developed in an unprecedented way. However, there are still some problems existing in this field. The first one is that a clan of multi-echeloned and multi-typed educational management studies has been multiplied in the way of trying to jump over certain developing phases and to obtain instant success and quick profits. The second one is the concept of what is educational management studies is still unclear, thus leading to ambiguous ideas or even confusions on this issue. The third one is that the study on educational management and the study on educational economy are forced to be tied together and become one by human forces, thus hampering the development of either field. Therefore, it is necessary to make reflections on and criticisms on these confused phenomena so as to preserve standardization and identity of this discipline and promote its healthy development.

Key words: educational management; science; empirical science; principles; educational economy and management

The whole 100 years of the 20th century witnessed the study of educational management in China. So far as its history was concerned, this study occurred at the same time as or a little bit later than those abroad. Its occurrence accompanied such measures as "abolishing the imperial examination system and setting up schools", putting modern civic education into practice with great efforts, establishing a department in the central government which was to be in specific charge of educational management, and declaring national standardization and unified management of all the new types of schools adopted at the turn of the 20th century, and its whole process underwent several times of sinking and rising. So far as its present level of development is concerned, it is still in the stage of initial empirical science. The problems existing in this study are mainly displayed in following phenomena: an impetuous style in doing academic research; a rough and slipshod way of producing research products; a large number of researches the qualities of whom are intermingled, the bad ones being mixed with good ones; research products seemingly large in number but lacking the ones that can be representative of and distinguished in genres or styles.

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1. On the Issues of the Developing Road of Educational Management and Its Orientation

Judging from one century's history, China's educational management study can be divided into two ways: one being transplanting and introducing, the other inducting and generalizing. However, the two developing ways both show something different in their denotations and implications from those of the relevant researches abroad. Although the so-called transplanting and introducing research occasionally includes positivistic research and applied research in which experience of business management or general management has been introduced into domestic educational management, excellent results with good qualities have hardly been produced. The best such researches can be called is introducing into China by means of translation the successful experience abroad of applying what has been obtained in business management into educational management. In 100-year process, China first learned from German and Japanese (mainly Japanese) administrative system in education, then transplanted American and British (mainly American) theories of business management, and then imitated the Soviet Union in adopting the model of combining education and politics, and finally translating into Chinese a large quantity of research products abroad at the end of the last century. Because the research of this kind and its activities lacked standardization and overall plans, a multitude of flaws appeared in the process of doing it. In practice, research of this kind occurred in a random way, while only one aspect or some aspects of it were paid attention to, the rest was left out. Some research even paid attention to minor issues but ignored the major ones. The key ideas, which reflect the major features and orientations of the western society, have not been grasped; on the contrary, some concepts incongruent to the times have been transplanted into China. In spite of all these flaws, this is still the major way of doing research work in educational management study in China.

The so-called inductive or generalizing research is the one in which one's own successful ways of doing work are generalized and raised to a higher level thus becoming a series of experience. Compared with the empirical researches with positivistic methods conducted abroad, China's research work of this kind does not lack successful examples. However, the empirical researches of the reflective or debating kind outnumber the ones using positivistic methods. Relatively speaking, they occupy a larger percentage of the total researches and basically represent the level and developing stage of China's educational management study. Here I venture to quote the statement about the layers of theoretic issues made by Einstein when he was analyzing the relationship between physics and realities as the basis of my analysis so as to make an objective examination of the actual level of China's educational management study. According to Einstein, scientific theories can be divided into a 3-level system. Its first level is composed all the primitive concepts used in sciences, i.e., the concepts directly linked with sensual experiences as well as the system of empirical knowledge about a specific theme related to those concepts. The formation of this kind is made in a random way and belongs to the inferior level because it directly responds to people's daily thinking and generalization of facts and experiences thus lacking a strict logical connection between concepts themselves or subjects themselves. Its second level is composed of a relatively smaller number of concepts and relationships, which are derived from the primitive concepts or relationships of the first level according to specific logical rules. The construct of this level of the system is of a higher logical unity and has no direct link with combination of the sensual experience. The tertiary level is a system of scientific axioms derived from a small number of basic concepts and relationships at the second level with strict logical laws. It reflects all the things including their natures at a deeper layer and in a more simplified and generalized way, thus leaving farther away from phenomena of the world. The raise from the second stage to the third one occurs along^[1] the line of deduction and belongs to the process of formation of mature types of theoretic sciences.

If we take a close look at the studies on educational management carried out in China, we can see that the research line used there is mainly deduction with methods of reflections and debates and that no matter whether research products are articles or books they are all isolated and full of empty talks, belonging to the collections of experience at the first level. In a word, decent research using positivistic methods is few and far between. Recently we can occasionally find some fragmentary but fashionable-looking researches on quality (for example, narrative research, research on the spot and field research). Although it is necessary and useful to do such researches and some of them reflect the new trend and move, they have touched only the surface of matters, the researchers have not grasped the essentials; therefore, such researches cannot affect the general academic atmosphere a great deal. Various editions of the books on educational management published in recently years also show that most of the researches conducted by their authors belong to the initial empirical stage. Not only have they such problems as having vague logical starting point or ambiguous logical relationships, and making the order of chapters changed, the contents added or deleted according to their authors' own need or attention focus; but also terms used to express different concepts belong to those for daily use, such as "teaching and learning management", "management of students", "management of personnel", "educational administrative management" or "school educational management". Added with introductions to management abroad, these books look like traditional assorted cold dishes by combining three into one, or changed types of assorted cold dishes by combining 2, 4 or 5 into one, and form a system of different editions. So far as contents are concerned, they are much the same except for minor differences. Although they try to explain facts and phenomena of educational management, expound its nature and laws, and raise its scientific level, actually, none of them has escaped from the binding force of empirical induction system.

Strictly speaking, although China's study of educational management has its unique features, it is still on the level of what Auguste Comte has described as empirical science because of being limited by such factors as national cultural background, the tradition of doing research by reflecting and debating and developing level of educational management itself. Therefore, it lags the studies of the same kind abroad and has not reached the level of positivistic science. Since the latter part of the 19th century, humanistic and social sciences abroad have been under the control of positivistic epistemology and methodology although its research object is human society itself but not the natural world therefore it seeks its own research method, line and logic. Under such a research atmosphere, the study of educational management, as a branch science of a science subordinate to or a branch discipline of the social sciences, naturally could not be exempted from such an influence. Following the steps of modern humanistic and social sciences, it embarked on the road of positivistic research. It was because of this special experience that it entered the door to positivistic science saying good-bye to empty talks and turned to sciences after positivism, i.e., post-positivism at the latter part of the 20th century; at the same time, positivism and post-positivism began to make a new combination thus causing the appearance of prosperous development of sciences in which plural elements are juxtaposed to or mixed with each other. From this, we can see there is a very sharp contrast between China's humanistic and social sciences as well as their branch science—the study of educational management and those abroad.

However, since 1980s, there have appeared endlessly in China books on the "study" of educational management; for example "Study on Adult Education Management", "Study on School Time Management", "Study on Examination Management", "Study on Intermediate Normal School Management" and "Philosophy of Educational Management". These various books make a very grand scene and are of special Chinese features. We can find that the main attention of these researches or approaches is always paid to the theories of general

educational organization management. This, on the one hand, explains that classified researches on disciplines subsidiary to educational management are still weak in western countries although researches on educational management as a whole are mature, more developed, advanced than those in China. On the other hand, this reflects China's present way of doing research work, which is eager for instant success and quick profit. Just as mentioned above, in the aspects of epistemology and methodology, China's research on educational management is still on the level of empirical induction; in the aspects of research ability and achievement, it is on the initial stage of the empirical system. However, there are some people trying to produce so-called studies with different fancy names. They act just as those people who are eager to get married at an immature age so as to produce a male heir to continue the family line. Their acts are totally against scientific laws and moral principles. Here we are going to point out that this way of doing research work like trying to help the shoots grow by pulling them upward is not only of no help to the healthy development of educational management, but also can lead it astray.

2. On the Issue of Distinguishing “Sciences” from “Disciplines” in Researches on Educational Management

Another problem, which has existed in China's research on educational management for a long time, is that the concept of “study” is used in an ambiguous way. Because of lack of discriminations of concepts, when educational management became a “study” has still remained to be a bewildering issue. When did educational management become a study? It seems that experts abroad have not made special studies on this issue. Looking up historical records, we can find that western countries once experienced a “Theory Movement”, which promoted the level of educational management in a scientific way. However it was soon found that this movement has many flaws, thus being called impolitely “a pseudo research”. People, in turn, began to regard it in a critical and reflective way and raised some new research theories and methods in an effort to raise the research on educational management to a more “scientific” level. However, in China, there are different sayings about this issue. Some people believe that educational management became a “study” around 1950s. Their beliefs about the founding of the “study” can be further divided into those of the end of 1940s, 1950s, post-1950s, the mid-20th century, 1951 and 1957 respectively. Other people believe that it was founded in the transitional period from 19th century to the 20th century. Their beliefs can be further divided into those of the latter part of the 19th century, the end of the 19th century, and the beginning of the 20th century. In general, one common thing the two groups of people have done is that both of them first presuppose that educational management is a science and then with colored spectacles on they try to look for or copy relevant materials and finally declare this “study” was founded at a certain period with some so-called evidence which has been used in the way of grafting one twig on another. Neither of the two groups has made a strict discrimination of different implications carried by the “study” of educational management. This kind of research is apt not only to lead to an arbitrary explanation of the things going on abroad, but also to cause a confusion about the two concepts of “science” and “discipline”, thus making ambiguous the demarcations of researches on educational management at different stages such as that of initial science, mature science, developed science, or teaching and learning discipline, empirical discipline and theoretical discipline.

It sounds reasonable to say in a broad way that the “study” of educational management was founded at the beginning or in the middle of the 20th century. Because there can be different explanations to the term “study” and also because people have different views about educational management itself, it is inevitable for people to have

different ideas about the time when the “study” of educational management was founded. When educational management came to be studied as an independent scientific research activity; when it, relative to empirical management which is a kind of potential science and a science at an early stage, came to be an obvious scientific management; when the logic for modern educational management came into being: when it, as an independent system of knowledge and experience in the form of the initial stage, became a discipline in teaching and learning; and so on. When people say that the “study” of educational management was founded in the period from 1940s to 1950s or after 1950s, they refer to the facts that after a continual evolution of a half century, it, as a developing empirical science or discipline, has become a research activity in which people in organizational systems make conscious efforts in large scales, starting from scattered individual spontaneous activities; that its research purpose has become clearer and clearer; that its research scope has become wider and wider; that its research objectives became more and more distinct; that its research contents became more and more specialized; that its research processes became more and more standardized; that its research methods became more and more diversified; that its research achievements became richer and richer; and so on. In a word, they mean to say that in doing the “study” of educational management during this period people tried to escape from the bondage of the empirical research and that of the research which transplanted research achievements from abroad into China and to make a combination and reasonable union of the two researches; and that it developed to a new stage according to its research activities, achievements or scopes. However, in talking about the time when the “study” of educational management was founded, nearly all Chinese scholars do not make strict distinction of what makes it become a science from what makes it become a discipline; nor do they make distinctions between its different features and implications related to different times. All of them call it the “study” of educational management in a general way. This, on the one hand, reflects the startling consistency of narrowness in the traditional way of understanding “study”, i.e., regarding it habitually and generally as the study of educational management in its theoretic system; on the other hand, it expresses ambiguity and shallowness with which people understand the evolution of the concept of “study” and its complicated implications. Obviously, guided by such isolated, static and two-dimensional way of thinking, the discussion about when the “study” of educational management was founded can only lead to confusion and ambiguity, just as the blind men, after touching different parts of an elephant, tried to explain what an elephant is in a way of taking a part for the whole.

So far as its nature of being related to science was concerned, the study of educational management at the beginning of the 20th century was just starting to introduce scientific management into the field of education and made this field appear different from the traditional way of empirical management. Relative to the traditional way of empirical educational management, it entered a stage of classical educational management and tried to raise itself from the empirical management over education to a scientific management, which paid more attention to norms, standardization and efficiency. Of course, the “scientific management” mentioned here has its specific reference related to the specific time. It represents a stage in the research process of educational management and is a historical and logical starting point, which indicates educational management entered a stage of being called “managerial pedagogy”. So far as its nature related to a discipline was concerned, it was listed in the general teaching programs in such countries as Germany, Japan, America and China. If we can say educational management was a discipline at that time, we mean that it was more like a teaching item in the sense of curriculums, an embodiment and extension of the subject of educational management in the traditional sense and laid foundation for the development of the discipline of modern educational management. Compared with the study of educational management at the beginning of the 20th century, the study in this field in the middle and

latter part of the 20th century, was different not only in developing level but also in implications, no matter it was considered as a science or as a discipline. As a science, the former mainly refers to the dynamic process of scientific research; while the latter involves not only the dynamic process of scientific research and its system of methods, but also the system of knowledge as the result of its activities. As a discipline, the former mainly refers to a subject taught in schools; while the latter refers to the system of research activities within the field of science and their theoretic system, which certainly includes the concept of a subject taught in schools. Although it is different from the purely theoretic study of educational management and there is a gap in the matter of the scientific sense between them, the fact that the two became “systematic studies” in step with each other can not be affected a bit.

3. On Rationality of the Organizational System of Educational Economy and Management as a Discipline

Since the 1980s, China's humanistic and social sciences have undergone a rapid development. A series of newly-born disciplines, especially amphibious disciplines, disciplines occupying many fields and disciplines coming into being by combination of two or more disciplines, have sprung up endlessly like mushrooms and have the momentum of becoming forests. Educational economics and educational management, originally two disciplines, have undergone a process of being molded and reshaped. Before 1997, they were two parallel disciplines; but after that, they were adjusted and combined into one. According to the document entitled “Disciplines and Specialties to Confer Doctorate or Master's Degrees and to Cultivate Post-graduate Students” issued by The Office of Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council and Post-graduate Affairs Office of the Education Ministry of People's Republic of China, its full name is “the study of educational economics and management”. One thing needed to be pointed out is that it is undoubtedly useful to conforming to the historical trend of the times, expanding the foundations of academic disciplines and speeding up cultivation of high-level and complex-talented personnel to combine the two disciplines of educational economics and educational management into such a complex discipline. However, such a way of setting up a discipline has a lot of problems of its own.

Firstly, educational economics and management is a tied-up discipline. To a certain degree, it is a by-product of the state administrative organ and has come into being through the administrative forces. In another word, it is a discipline which pays much attention to the conference of degrees and cultivation of post-graduate students but neglects its own academic construction. It is a discipline into which the two disciplines of educational economics and educational management are combined by strong administrative force, but not one which comes into being after free union and natural growth of disciplines. The main purpose of setting up this discipline is to meet the social needs of high-level and complex-talented personnel without consideration of the disciplines' own development. Specifically speaking, there was not sufficient demonstration to test the rationality of establishing the discipline beforehand and the attention was focused on the cultivation of post-graduates. The two concepts “discipline” and “specialty” were mixed and the distinction between them blurred. In a relatively broad but not strict sense, the unity of the implications carried by the two terms was accepted; therefore, although it was named a discipline in reality, it was a specialty or a discipline with a narrower sense somewhat like that of a specialty. Initially, it was regarded as a specialty for the purpose of cultivating talents, but not as a discipline; therefore there was not a whole plan, which gave a unified and integrated consideration to the construction of the discipline and

its specialties. There were no necessary beforehand or predictive researches on issues such as: can the two disciplines keep a unified concept, method and standard after being combined into one, and to what degree can the establishment of this discipline change the traditional narrow way of talent-cultivation and promote a healthy and orderly development of the discipline construction. In addition, there was no necessary sensitivity over the constructing practice after the establishment of a new discipline, nor was there necessary track-following investigation; therefore the problems occurring in the process of operation have not been discovered or solved. Actually, by adjusting the curriculum and research directions of a discipline and making it focus on one aspect and pay attention to other aspects, the purpose of cultivation of talented personnel with a broader base in academic degree education might also have been realized; therefore, there was no need to impose a forceful combination on the two independent disciplines. What is worse; if educational economics and educational management can be combined into one, why not combinations of educational economy and politics, educational economy and society, educational politics and management, educational society and management, so on and so forth acting in the like way? It is hard to say that educational economics and management are more important than other disciplines therefore only the two must be combined into one. Of course, unexpectedly, we can make a deduction from this and discover that this discipline is a product of thinking according to economical fundamentalism (in China it is fashionably called as “centered around economic construction”).

Secondly, educational economics and management are two disciplines whose belonging is difficult to decide. In the list issued by China's State Council in 1997, this discipline was called “study of educational economics and management”.¹ However, it is interesting to find from the seen materials that generally there is only the term “educational economics and management”. Undoubtedly, no matter whether it is called “educational economics and management” or “study of educational economic and management”, the two disciplines directly above it are the study of educational economics and the study of management; and the disciplines which is indirectly subordinate to are economics, the study of management and pedagogy. In another word, these three disciplines constitute the biggest disciplines to which it belongs. However, there is a discrepancy in the understanding of this issue between the political circle and the academic circle in China. In documents, charts or lists issued by governments, educational economics and management is a discipline belonging to management study. The discipline directly above it but below the management study is the discipline “public management” which is first degree discipline of the management study. However, in the academic circle, mainly in normal universities and colleges, it is made to belong to educational science and built into such organizational systems as education department, educational science college and educational management college. Hardly is it seen to belong to Economics Department or Economics College. This discrepancy has not only caused the upgrading of it by bypassing its immediate super ordinate discipline, insisting on one's biased opinion or even confusions; but also reflected the trend that the combination of educational economics and management is inoperable or that it will only have its name kept without any real significance.

There have always been disputes over the issue of belongings and ratings of the disciplines produced after the combination of educational discipline and its related discipline. As early as in 18th century, John Friedrich

¹ This issue has something complicated in it. The term “study of educational economics and management” sounds improper. What is “study of educational economics and management”? Can there be such a discipline as “educational economics and management”? Can it be called “study of educational economics and management” or simply called “educational economics and management”? In the following of the article, the author is to call it “educational economics and management” just as it is popularly called. However, can this go against the terms adopted in official documents of the Chinese government? Owing to the limited space, the author is not going to deal with these uncertain issues.

Herbart, in the position of defending educational disciplines, warned against the danger of educational field being encroached upon or replaced by other disciplines. Up till now, many people in the educational field still advocate that these interdisciplinary subjects should be called educational disciplines but not with a name used in other fields. However, there are some other people advocating different opinions. These groups of people are arguing with each other, unable to convince each other. Take educational economy as an example. There are four opinions about it. The first group people believe that educational economy is a newly born discipline in the field of economics, a branch of economics; therefore it should be called a branch economics. Their reason is that this discipline mainly uses knowledge of economics to study economical issues, phenomena and laws in the educational field. The second group people hold a completely different opinion, they believe that this is a newly-born educational discipline and that besides using theories and methods of economics, it also uses theories and research methods of pedagogy; moreover, its research field is mainly in the educational field, but not in the field of economics. The third group people hold an independent opinion. They believe that this discipline is neither a branch of economics nor a branch of pedagogy, but a newly born independent discipline and that it has its own special laws overlapping those of education and economics. The fourth group people, skillfully using its interdisciplinary nature to bypass the subtle issue of deciding its belonging either from economics or pedagogy, advocate that it is better to put aside this issue. What they have done is actually to soften or avoid the dispute over the subtle issue of this discipline's belonging^[2]. The same is true with the issue of the belonging of educational management. Some believe that it is a branch of educational science; some believe that it is a branch of management science; some believe that it is a marginal or interdisciplinary discipline and that it is both a component of educational science and a branch of management science; while some believe that it is a marginal discipline between educational economics and educational management, and it is also the branch discipline of both sciences^[3]. It is worth noting that even when there were disputes over the issue of belongings of their two direct super ordinate disciplines—educational economics and educational management, the decision of the combination of the two disciplines was made; what was more, the combination was made in the way of bypassing their these two direct super ordinate disciplines and trying to link them to higher disciplines such as management study. The combination not only transcends the basic concepts of the above-mentioned disciplines, but also is against the common laws of the development of scientific disciplines and against common knowledge of formation of scientific discipline systems as well as apt to lead to new confusions.

It should be said that the paternal or maternal disciplines which have one generation gap from the disciplines educational economics and management are economics, management and pedagogy. According to the original purpose of those people who established this discipline, they meant to put economy and management in positions of equal importance or positions of similar importance with one position slightly emphasized; therefore in its initial name, there was a hyphen between the two terms “economy” and “management” so as to indicate they are parallel to each other or of equal importance, or, at least not to indicate which is more important. However, in the operational process afterwards, most people have added their emphasis to one side, trying to subscribe this discipline to “management study” or to its first degree discipline “public management”, or, even further, put it in a position of a second degree parallel to “administrative management”, “labor and social security” and “management of land resources”, three other second degree disciplines of “public enterprises management”. This, on the one hand, reflects the operator's way of sticking to traditions. They always wishfully think that there can be only one super ordinate discipline for each of subordinate discipline, but not act according to the developing trend of modern disciplines and let the newly-born disciplines, marginal disciplines or interdisciplinary disciplines

which belong to several super ordinate disciplines show their true nature. On the other hand, this shows the contradiction between designer's original purpose of setting up this discipline and its actual development. Although on the surface there is the term "educational economics and management"; in reality, the emphasis of the discipline's construction is still on management.

In a word, the organizational system of the discipline "educational economy and management" is, in theory, against the principles and laws of discipline development and has transcended the level of its development. If we can say the establishment of educational economics and management as a specialty has its rationality and necessity, as a discipline combined with administrative force, the establishment of it has much arbitrariness and parasitism. In practice, this establishment has paid more attention to the education of post-graduates but neglected the construction of the discipline itself; has paid more attention to disciplines of management but neglected the disciplines of economics. Judging from the things related to its operation, the combination of educational economics and management not only has not fully reflected the initial purposes of the combination, i.e., widening the channel of cultivation of personnel, and promoting in a substantial way the good circulation and healthy development of the construction of disciplines and academic degree conferring units; but also is accompanied with such phenomena as replacing disciplines with specialties and replacing construction of disciplines with cultivation of post-graduates and conferment of academic degrees.

According to what has mentioned above, we can see that although the research on China's educational management has undergone a century's journey in a shaky way and shaped roughly two basic lines, one being inductive and generalizing, the other being transplanting and deductive, it is still lagging behind those abroad and remains, as a whole, at the initial stage, i.e., the empirical stage of forming a "study", no matter whether its research content, means and methods, or its research achievement and level are concerned. Since the end of 1980s, various editions of China's "studies" on educational management have been appearing like mushrooms after spring rain. However, there has not been a discriminating study or examination over the educational management "study" as a science and that as a discipline as well as over multi-level implications carried by each of them and those carried by them at different developing stages. There is only a vague and muddle-headed study. What is more, a discipline of educational economics and management has been produced in a wishful way regardless of the actual condition of development of disciplines, thus holding back China's educational management study from developing along a healthy way. We have pointed out these problems and made some criticisms of and reflections on them, hoping that they may be helpful to the normalization and prosperity of the research activities of China's educational management study.

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