

Academic Culture and Talent Cultivation: The Chinese Experience

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Abstract

This study aims at introducing and discussing the concept of ‘academic culture,’ the Chinese concept of ‘talent cultivation’, and the influence of ‘academic culture’ in the process of ‘talent cultivation’ in the Chinese context. It uses the analysis of some observation notes and relevant literature that examines the issue of ‘academic culture’. The Chinese ‘talent cultivation’ is fascinating and seems useful due to the significant development of the higher education system with the increasing internationalization and the innovation of scholars. However, some challenges such as academic scandals and academic corruption, the falsification and plagiarism of academic achievements, the phenomenon of money-worshipping, the vulgar pragmatism, the utilitarianism, the academic creation of falsehood, the culture of *guanxi*, the lack of talent competition, and the lack of competition with consciousness remain actual. It appears that the cultivation of creative talent and innovative research involves the enhancement of the whole academic organization and environment.

Keywords: academic culture, talent cultivation, Chinese higher education, academic outlooks, academic spirit, academic ethics, academic environments

Introduction

As noted by Burton Clark (1980), all social entities have a symbolic side, cultural and social structure, with various forms and degrees. The university, which is a social institution, also constitutes “an existing form of culture” (Shen & Tian, 2012, p. 62). As an educational and academic organization, universities should not only cultivate talent, conduct scientific research and provide social services but also have a role in inheriting and innovating culture (Sui et al., 2016).

Some authors noted that the transmission of culture constitutes one of the fundamental missions of the university. Thus, the focus of the university must be the apprenticeship to culture by the transformation of an ordinary man into a cultured person (Ortega y Gasset & Nostrand, 2007). From the same perspective, Sui (2017) noticed that the primary roles of university culture are value-

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oriented, emotional healing, psychological construction, behavior restriction, collective cohesion. Therefore, academic institutions can be apprehended as “value-rational organizations grounded in strong cultures described as ideologies and belief systems” (Dill, 1982, p. 303). In reality, the academic system is “ideologically loaded,” and each academic system has a distinctive culture (Clark, 1980).

The academic culture, which refers to the “external manifest of the common values, spirits, behavior norms of people on campus who are pursuing and developing their study and research” (Shen & Tian, 2012, p. 61), has crucial importance and influence in the development of higher education institutions.

The Meaning of the Concept of Academic Culture

The concept of ‘academic culture’ designates the attitudes, beliefs, and values held by academics about all aspects of their activities (Yang, 2015). It comprises academic outlooks (the basic point of view of people about academic activities), academic spirits (the thoughts and spiritual power of academic practices and activities), academic ethics (the norms and regulations of academic activities), and academic environments (the material conditions and the human environment that support academic activities) (Shen & Tian, 2012).

The concept of ‘academic culture’ is closely related to the concept of ‘campus culture.’ Indeed, campus culture is the combination of different cultures on the campus, accumulated with a long practice (Shen & Tian, 2012). The university campus culture constitutes “a comprehensive reflection of people ideology, behavior rules, norms and spiritual pursuance” (Gonondo, 2016, p. 36). Studies reveal that academic culture improves the construction of campus culture, although campus culture shapes and restricts the development of academic culture. Academic culture is an integral part of campus culture (Shen & Tian, 2012).

Burton Clark (1980) enumerated four types of academic cultures, namely, the culture of discipline, the culture of profession, the culture of enterprise, and the culture of system. The culture of discipline refers to academic disciplines, professional specialties and fields, while the culture of profession provides “a general identity” and intends the personal autonomy of professors. The culture of enterprise is related to institutional beliefs and organizational symbols, while the culture of the system refers to features of academic beliefs and related styles of behavior that are relevant to the national context or the traditional organizational system (Clark, 1980). Academic culture has a significant influence on teachers’ and students’ blossoming and development and on the development of society as a whole.

The Significance of Academic Culture

The academic culture has a significant influence on “what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it, concerning decisions, actions, and communication on both instrumental and symbolic levels” (Yang, 2016, p. 15). It has the functions of integrating and mediating, controlling, conducting, and restricting individual behavior in the academic organization (Xu, 2001). Likewise, it enables us to understand the activities of higher education institutions and the whole system of higher education. University organization is, to some extent, similar to enterprise, industry, or government organizations, with a specific culture.

Additionally, academic culture is fundamental to the success of higher education institutions and systems (Yang, 2015). It has a significant influence on training and education. Therefore, it is essential to “integrate culture into the process of talent cultivation” (Shen & Tian, 2012, p. 61). First of all, for Sui et al. (2016), the university culture is the indispensable rationality for the university. Second, university culture is the most indispensable educational element for the university. Third, university culture is an essential foundation for the university to establish a suitable governance structure.

Literature Review

The current study focuses on the analysis of some documents and the observation of one Chinese university functioning. The documents are ‘stable’ materials, “objective’ sources of data, ‘unobtrusive”, easily accessible for the researcher, and constitute the ‘best source of data’ for some subjects (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 182). For this purpose, some relevant literature about “academic culture” in general and “Chinese academic culture” such as (Bush & Haiyan, 2000; Chen & Uttal, 1988; Chen & Macfarlane, 2015; Ingleby & Chung, 2009; Li, 2010; Mattisson Ekstam, 2015; Price et al., 2011; Shen & Tian, 2012; Sit, 2013; Sui, 2013; Sui et al., 2016; Sui, 2017; Tian et al., 2016; Q. Wang & Han, 2005; Wu & Jia, 2007; Xu, 2001; Yang, 2015, 2016; Yi, 2011; C. Yu & Jia, 2009; Zhao, 2010) have been used.

Additionally, observation was a significant tool in the data collection process. It enabled us to see with our own eyes and to perceive with our senses without filters and intermediaries the research scope (Yin, 2011). The observation involved the watching of “physical setting, participants, activities, interactions, conversations” (Creswell, 2013). As former scholars in a Chinese university, authors took the necessary time (respectively four years and five years) to observe the organization of a Chinese university, including the campus culture and the structure of the higher education system.

The Meaning and Challenges of “Academic Culture” and “Talent Cultivation” in Chinese Higher Education Institutions

Since the adoption of the “open door” policy in 1978, Chinese higher education has witnessed impressive development. It is the world’s largest higher education system with regard to the number of teachers and students (Yang, 2015). This progress is the result of different higher learning traditions, economic growth, and the possession of numerous talents (Yang, 2015). Presently, the authorities who are working on developing world-class universities and first-class disciplines are faced with some challenges.

The Meaning of “Academic Culture” and “Talent Cultivation” in Chinese Higher Education Institutions

The Chinese higher education system is shaped by the influence of the Confucius philosophy of “gaining wisdom and complying with morality” (Jiang, 2011, p. 96). Additionally, the traditional culture of “respect for authority, collectivism, and harmony in schools” is perpetuated (Bush & Haiyan, 2000, p. 58). The trend is for the cultivation of innovative talent through the spirit of innovation, creativity, and innovative personality. Indeed, the value of higher education is perceptible through the cultivation of innovative talents (Yu & Jia, 2009). However, the examination-oriented system made students “lost the opportunity to develop their creative personality,” and to a “relatively low quality of innovation” (Yu & Jia, 2009, p. 165).

In China, more and more scholars are paying attention to the educational concept of “talent cultivation.” According to Yu and Jia (2009), most of the existing publications focused on the analysis of talent cultivation in the professional area or from the teachers’ side or students’ side; nonetheless, the talent cultivation remains a “complex system”, which involves all aspects of education. The cultivation of innovative talent plays a supporting role for the economic and social development, the development of human-being and the development of colleges and universities (Yu & Jia, 2009).

The Chinese higher education law (1998) highlighted that the institutions of higher learning should focus on cultivating talents. For Xie, Cheng, and Fan (2014), the university should “cultivate the innovation consciousness and pioneering spirit of students who are practical talents equipped with an international vision and an international competition capacity” (p.39). The talent-training is closely related to the cultural construction; and for this purpose, the cultural construction is integrated into the whole process of talent cultivation (Shen & Tian, 2012).

In the recent decade, Chinese higher education has undergone significant development and succeeded in creating and establishing several world-class universities through two key programs, namely, the “211” and “985” projects, which had the goal of “subsidizing a certain number of selected universities or

disciplines to make them globally competitive” (Yi, 2011, p. 501). During this process of development of world-class universities, it appears that the focus was on the hard index, while little attention was given to the cultivation of the university spirit (Wang & Han, 2005).

The country witnessed a remarkable achievement in the area of scientific publication and the high number of graduate students (Yang, 2015). Financial and other resources and innovation strategies have permitted the rapid development of Chinese higher education institutions (Yang, 2015). Presently, universities are pursuing talent cultivation to improve economic growth, social development, and personal development (Yu & Jia, 2009). The culture of world-class universities has placed increasing pressure on the university community.

In the area of institutional management, the influence of communism ideology is perceptible in Chinese higher education institutions because each of them has a Committee of the Communist Party that is responsible for the respect of the party's direction and provides political education to faculty, staff and students (National People's Congress, 1998, Chapter IV, Article 39). In addition, school leadership is ensured by the university president under the authority of the secretary of the Communist Party (National People's Congress, 1998, Chapter IV, Article 39).

The culture of enterprise is visible in the Chinese higher education system through the marketing of universities, with the decreasing role of the State in allocating resources to higher education institutions and profound changes in the funding structure (Qiping & White, 1994). Indeed, the central government has established a policy of decentralization to enable local governments to multiply the sources of funding for their educational services (Zhao, 2010). This marketing has introduced fee-paying for students, partnership with industries, market influence on the curriculum, and market influence on the management system (Qiping & White, 1994). In fact, before the 1980s, higher education was free of charge and the state covered almost all the expenditures of higher education institutions. However, from 1997, the payment of tuition fees has been obligatory for all students (Zhao, 2010). Additionally, the state has adopted a circular pattern in 1980, which aimed to expand the capacity of higher education institutions and create new sources of funding (Zhao, 2010). For this purpose, the State promotes collaboration in various ways with enterprises, institutions, public organizations or groups, and higher education institutions are entitled to use “the property provided by sponsors, the fiscal fund allocated by the State and the contributions and donations” (National People's Congress, 1998, Chapter IV, articles 35 & 38). For this purpose, many institutions start with a business activity (Bush & Haiyan, 2000). Furthermore, the marketing of the Chinese higher education system introduces “competition” between higher education institutions to improve the efficiency and

effectiveness of these institutions (Zhao, 2010, p. 68). It appears that China has succeeded in establishing its system of “market socialism” through the mixture of communism and enterprise (Bush & Haiyan, 2000, p. 63).

Additionally, we should note that all Chinese universities use the communist ideology. Most of the university staff and the students are members of the Communist Party and are profoundly engaged in the achievement of the party purpose. Moreover, the party representatives are present at all levels of university management. The university also has a representative of the communist party, who gathers the students who want to adhere.

The Challenges of “Academic Culture” in Chinese Higher Education Institutions

It is usual to see some tendencies of non-standard, immoral, unhealthy and lack of self-discipline within some higher education institutions. Currently, universities are weakened by snobbery, the phenomenon of money worshipping, “afford trade”, vulgar pragmatism, utilitarianism, the growth of corruption, the academic creation of falsehood, plagiarism, shoddy academic evaluation, academic inbreeding, and so on (Sui, 2017).

Academic culture sometimes constitutes a barrier to Chinese higher education to reach a leading status in the world (Yang, 2016). Indeed, the Chinese higher education system is faced with a “corrupt academic culture”, *guanxi*, which limits the freedom of movement of staff and students and confines the resources and the career advancement of faculties (Yang, 2015, p. 532). Personal relationships and preferential treatment sometimes influence the decision-making process. The challenges of Chinese academic culture also include the falsification and plagiarism of academic achievements, obtaining of scientific research and reward through illegal means, academic scandals and academic corruption (Yang, 2015). Even Chinese world class universities such as Peking and Tsinghua universities are affected by this “toxic culture” (Yang, 2015, 2016).

The current problems in Chinese universities also comprise a few number of world-class universities, the lack of talent competition, and the lack of competition with consciousness (Sui, 2013). Academic misconduct is severe and is perceptible within regional as well as national flagship universities. This problem, which concerns students, professors, scholars, and institutional leaders, has affected every feature of university activities. An increased number of Chinese scholars choose to “becoming trapped in the pursuit of administrative standing, rather than devoting their time to legitimate academic research” (Yang, 2016, p. 15). This prevalence of regretful behaviors in university culture spoils the Chinese academic international image and status (Sui, 2017).

For this purpose, it is necessary, as proposed by Yang (2016), to establish an academic culture based on meritocratic values, free inquiry and competition. If cultural means are not used to positively affect student training, a negative culture will inhibit the university's expected training and education (Sui, 2017). Accordingly, academic leaders should pay attention to the combination of the university spirit culture, system culture and environmental culture to strengthen mutual transformation. They should also pay attention to the combination of shared culture and individual culture, which can reflect the generality of university culture (Sui, 2017).

The Purpose of the Study

This study aims to introduce and discuss the concept of “academic culture” and to analyze the specificity of Chinese academic culture and its influence on the process of talent cultivation. To this end, it tends to answer the following questions:

1. How well does the Chinese academic culture operate into the process of talent cultivation?
2. Moreover, which best practices can result from the Chinese academic culture?

Method

This study employed a qualitative research method with the use of observation and document review techniques. The qualitative research enabled the production of descriptive data from people's writing or speech and observable behavior (Taylor et al., 2016). It aimed to “describe, understand, and interpret” the research (Lichtman, 2013, p. 174). Additionally, it emphasized meaning, understanding, and processing (Merriam, 2009)

In this research, we used document analysis as a qualitative research method. It involved the systematic review and evaluation of the relevant documents (Bowen, 2009). As noted by Bowen (2009), the main documents for this study provided some data about the research context and supplementary data and contributed to the validation of the observation notes. In fact, the data that result from the document analysis enabled us to confirm the features observed in Chinese university functioning (the profound respect toward the teachers, the close relationship between the students and the teachers, the students' rote learning method, the culture of “face and face-saving”, the culture of intensive promotion of scientific publication...).

Thematic analysis was used as categorizing. The data obtained from document analysis and observation notes were categorized and reorganized around the focus of the research questions (the role of academic culture in the process of talent cultivation and the best practices resulting from the Chinese academic culture) and the most salient identified themes. We proceeded through a descriptive and critical

analysis of documents and observation notes using themes such as “academic outlooks and talent cultivation”, “academic environments and talent cultivation”, “academic ethic and talent cultivation”, and “academic spirit and talent cultivation.”

Findings

The Influence of “Academic Culture” into the Process of Talent Cultivation

Talent cultivation can be considered the highest goal of higher education institutions (Yu & Jia, 2009). For that reason, it is essential to analyze the influence of each component of academic culture on the process of talent cultivation.

Academic Outlooks and Talent Cultivation

Academic outlook refers to the primary point of view of people about academic activities. It is subdivided into “outlook on academic ontology, the academic attitude, the academic purpose, the academic development and the academic evaluation” (Shen & Tian, 2012, p. 61).

Regarding academic attitudes, we may note that Chinese academic beliefs have some particularities. For example, Chinese students are considered to some extent passive learners because the interaction between teachers and students is restricted in the classroom, even if these relationships are casual beyond the classroom (Sit, 2013). This situation seems curious because relationships between teachers and students are similar to the parent-child relationship. Moreover, the “family-like interaction pattern” between teachers and students is not restricted to the academic context. Also, students are encouraged to approach their teachers outside the classroom to ask for help (Sit, 2013). Likewise, the relationship between the supervisor and the student is particularly intimate. Students meet their supervisors often and even during the night and the weekends (Mattisson Ekstam, 2015). Supervisors are closely implicated in the training and initiation of their students, even in non-academic areas.

Chinese students need guidance in “planning their time, making the best use of the library, identifying and annotating useful sources, and constructing new and interesting arguments and studies”, while Western supervisors just have to “ensure that students fulfill the relevant criteria as stipulated in the syllabus” (Mattisson Ekstam, 2015, p. 243). Supervisors usually associate students with the realization of their research projects. Additionally, Chinese students have a deep respect for their supervisors and do not disagree with them, even if they have different opinions (Ingleby & Chung, 2009).

In the area of academic development, the Chinese higher education system has a particularity: promotion of publishing scientific papers by students, even undergraduate students. Publications are used as a means to measure university performance (Tian et al., 2016). Indeed, many universities have instituted the publishing of one or several articles or scientific research by the students as a condition for

graduation. This practice presents some advantages, such as the early initiation of students to research attitudes, but it has also creates the multiplication of the publishing of mediocre papers and the growth of approximate publishing houses. In reality, students were rushed to publish, and for this purpose, they cared less on producing papers of better quality or research with novel and original discoveries (Tian et al., 2016).

The other initiative that contributes to the development of students is the organization of recruitment within universities. It is perceptible that Chinese universities work for the professional insertion of their students through cooperation with public and private enterprises. For this purpose, universities organize several recruitment sessions for graduating students during which they could have job interviews with many enterprises.

Concerning academic evaluation, it is important to note that Chinese traditional education was examination-oriented, and memorization constituted an essential strategy of learning, particularly in the Confucian tradition (Sit, 2013). The examination oriented system constitutes a significant measure for the quality of education in the Chinese system (Yu & Jia, 2009). Currently, the Chinese educational system still emphasizes rote learning, memorization, and the production of the correct and complete answer, contrary to the Western system, which focuses on critical thinking through discussion and interpretation of the problem (Mattisson Ekstam, 2015). In this system, class attendance plays a non-negligible role in student evaluation. The Chinese learning styles are not as cynical as noted by some Western scholars, but it is essential to “explore student’s learning perceptions and experience from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds” (Sit, 2013, p. 38).

Academic Spirit and Talent Cultivation

Shen & Tian (2012) defined the concept of “academic spirit” as “the thoughts and spiritual power developed and condensed from the long term practice and activities” (p. 61). Academic spirit is shaped by time and constitutes the shared values and group consciousness possessed by faculties and students (Wang & Han, 2005). Academic spirit comprises “the down-to-earth spirit, the explorative spirits, the innovative spirits, the critical spirits, the co-operative spirits, the tolerant spirits, the free-and-open spirits, and the spirits of integrating science and humanities” (Shen & Tian, 2012, p. 61). The universities are encouraged to develop the spiritual culture with university characteristic (Shen & Tian, 2012).

The Chinese educational system is profoundly rooted in Confucian philosophy and educational ideology. Indeed, the Chinese way of learning is grounded in the philosophy of Confucius, which is characterized but not limited by the following: filial piety, the acceptance of distinct social ranking, the emphasis on personal discipline, patience and the respect of authority, the notion of “knowledge being

masculine”, and the intrinsic value of knowledge. Confucian philosophy also emphasizes the concept of a “complete person” raised through education, the conservative approach of solving problems, the doctrine of the mean, and the significant literary tradition (as cited in Price et al., 2011, p. 160). Additionally, the high value given to education and the profound respect towards elders characterise Chinese society. Because of these, deep respect is accorded to teachers *laoshi* who is considered the “fountain of all knowledge” (Mattisson Ekstam, 2015, p. 248). Indeed, Confucianism considers that teachers must have deep knowledge, be able to answer questions, and be good models of morality (Sit, 2013). In China, all university staff are called *laoshi*, even administrative staff.

To improve talent cultivation, Chinese university leaders are working to encourage and enhance student entrepreneurship through the organization of entrepreneurship training and project funding. Entrepreneurship is growing within each level of higher education institutions (Li, 2010). Moreover, some activities are organized during the academic year to promote useful entertainment, the spirit of innovation, and cooperation between students. Some of these activities gather professors and students to strengthen their relationship.

Additionally, Chinese cultural values help teachers and students persevere in working hard. These values include human malleability, the potential for change, self-improvement, collectivism and group identification (Chen & Uttal, 1988).

Academic Ethics and Talent Cultivation

Academic ethics principally involve “the norms of academic research, the norm of academic evaluation, and the norm of academic criticism” (Shen & Tian, 2012, p. 62). In China, the traditional culture emphasizes “person’s self-cultivation for ethical and moral perfection” (Bush & Haiyan, 2000, p. 62). As for academic ethics, since the 2000s, the Chinese government has built academic norms and research integrity by means of establishing standards and regulations, the establishment of particular agencies, the issue of policy papers, the organization of national forums, seminars, and the enhancement of international cooperation (Yang, 2016).

The Chinese government has also established the “Draft Regulation of Higher Education Institution Evaluation” to evaluate higher education institutions through four steps, namely, “qualified examination, excellence evaluation, randomized evaluation, and general evaluation” (Li, 2010, p. 63). This regulation has reformed over time, and the government adopted in 2003 a “Project for Quality Assurance and Further Reform in Higher Education Institutions.” This project introduced some interesting criteria, such as the selection of excellent teachers, the establishment of high-quality

courses, the further promotion of the reform of teaching English to students of non-English majors, the regulation and the improvement of the higher education evaluation system (Li, 2010).

China has also established an external quality assurance system. The system explores government policies, the evaluation organized by government agencies, the evaluation and ranking activities organized by non-governmental agencies and media, and an internal quality assurance system that includes the establishment of institutional teaching evaluation centres, the formation of teaching supervision or steering groups, peer review, student feedback, annual reports, and teacher training (Li, 2010).

In addition, the norms of academic research are not strictly respected in the Chinese higher education system due to the cultural context, which emphasizes the “building of relationship and courtesy towards and respect for authority” (Chen & Macfarlane, 2015). Much academic misconduct is apparent in Chinese higher education institutions. These are mainly the “adding of a well-known professor to the list of authors” to increase the chance of the publishing of a paper, authorship order generally based on the hierarchical structure, the use of incentive pay system to reward publicly in high-impact journals and the academic promotion overemphasizes the quantity of publishing rather than the quality (Chen & Macfarlane, 2015).

Referring to the mechanisms of academic research evaluation, it consists of the administrative department and their specific mode of operations, which include the evaluation standards (Wu & Jia, 2007). The transfer of academic evaluation to administrative departments raises some questions because administrative departments are external actors who handle matters with regulations and balance the distribution between various interests and without specialised knowledge (Wu & Jia, 2007). Therefore, these conditions led to the growth of “academic opportunism and corruption” (Wu & Jia, 2007, p. 70). This system, which is “too formalistic, places excessive emphasis on the number of research items conducted and relies too much on partial evaluations for quality control” (Wu & Jia, 2007, p. 68). The administrative departments’ criteria for academic research evaluation and confirmation focus on the form of research activities and their results. Some include the quantity and number of academic activities and their results, the ranking of the publications, the submission for approval, the assessment, instead of focusing on the intrinsic quality and the achievement of academic research (Wu & Jia, 2007).

Regarding academic criticism, the “Chinese academic criticism” is different from Western culture. The Confucian tradition promotes respect for hierarchical relationships in society, and for this purpose, scholars and teachers are considerably respected, and students must listen thoughtfully (Sit,

2013). Thus, some Western scholars consider Chinese students as “passive-obedient-learners who never question the knowledge transmitted during lectures,” although they are hard workers and assiduous (Sit, 2013, p. 37). Chinese students do not have the habit of asking questions because asking questions means that the teachers have not explained well in Chinese academic culture (Mattisson Ekstam, 2015). Nevertheless, it is important to note that the misconceptions of “obedient, passive Chinese students and non-participative rote-learners” do not mean that they are not “actively engaged in thinking or class activities” (Sit, 2013, p. 38).

Academic Environments and Talent Cultivation

The academic environments consist of “hardware environments and software environments.” The hardware environments refer to the material conditions that support academic activities, while the software environments refer to the human environments, respectively, the ‘academic aura and academic atmosphere” (Shen & Tian, 2012, p. 62). Various authors demonstrate the role of the environment in the education process. John Dewey (1922), for instance, noticed that education is a continuous process of adaptation to the environment. It is through the mechanism of formation and the improvement of the educational environment that university culture is influential and affects the education system (Sui, 2017).

As noted by Shen and Tian (2012), the construction of a high-quality academic culture involves the possession of some material conditions. Indeed, the construction of an academic culture needs sufficient funds for research, some instruments and equipment, plentiful data resources and research sites (Shen & Tian, 2012). The environment of the Chinese university is built to facilitate the training of the students. The central and provincial governments and university leaders take much effort to develop innovative infrastructures and work to provide a suitable environment endowed with the necessary materials and equipment. For this purpose, libraries are well equipped, and up to date, laboratories and equipment are renewed permanently, and gymnasium and sports infrastructures are multiplied to promote physical health and the blossoming of students. Additionally, the university leadership put in efforts to create a beautiful campus to stimulate student creativity, innovation, and performance.

Some features of Chinese culture that characterize the human environment of the university include power distance, harmony and collectivism, face and face savings, and educational backgrounds (Ingleby & Chung, 2009). Indeed, concerning the “power distance”, this feature established a “standard of behavior” for the students given their position in the university. The “harmony and collectivism” involves modesty and friendly cooperation and gives priority to people’s relationship because, according to Confucian scholars, the purpose of education is the shaping of every individual into a harmonious

member of society (Bush & Haiyan, 2000, p. 62). It also includes an interaction between students and their supervisors in a context of broader settings and the primacy of harmony in their relationship (Ingleby & Chung, 2009). Concerning the 'face and face-saving,' it involves the maintaining of their 'self-respect' by the students and the maintaining of the 'appropriate respect for their supervisor.' Indeed, the concept of 'face,' in Chinese '*diulian*' (丢脸) and '*diumianzi*' (丢面子) have a particular meaning. The first refers to "a situation where someone causes embarrassment by his or her behavior," and the second refers to "a situation where a person is embarrassed by the behavior of another" (Ingleby & Chung, 2009, p. 44). For the 'educational backgrounds,' it refers to the authority of the teachers, who are considered the 'master of knowledge' in the Chinese educational system. These cultural features regulate the interpersonal relationship within Chinese higher education institutions.

Discussion

Despite the vital role of the academic culture in the construction of educational values and talent cultivation, we should notice that the cultural attributes of the university also produce perverse effects that deviate from the essential attribute of university organization. For example, with the traditional culture of the respect for the authority and collectivism proper to the Chinese higher education system (Bush & Haiyan, 2000), the institutions still face some challenges related to bureaucratic delays and the lack of communication and involvement among the university's stakeholders.

Additionally, in China, the university is considered a '*danwei*', which means a work unit. The *danwei* is the "institutional arrangements under planned economy in urban China, concerning resources allocation, employment and social welfare and with unique spatial and social representations" (Chai, 2014, p. 184). For this purpose, the university simultaneously constitutes a place of residence, family and community life, leisure and commercial activity, and workplace. This system based on the Confucian traditional culture of 'harmony', 'obligations', and 'hierarchy' in the structure of social and professional life, displays some limits (Yu, 2018).

Moreover, for Cai and Yan (2019), the Chinese higher education system faces some challenges somewhat related to the academic and campus culture. The challenges of Chinese higher education include lack of sufficient resources and effective measures to ensure quality, lack of capability to cultivate outstanding and innovative talent due to the formulaic educational model, lack of diversity among higher education institutions, increasing unemployment among university graduates, disparate distributions of higher education resources among regions and unequal access to higher education between different social groups, and issues related to higher education reforms, namely, the contrast

between Chinese and Western ideologies. In this perspective, Cai (2013) also stressed the necessity of strengthening a university culture based on academic freedom and individual development.

The government has launched a series of policies as responses to higher education demands (Cai & Yan, 2019). China is developing its higher education system in size, quality, and impact (Mohrman et al., 2011). The country has the largest higher education system in the world, with a total of 38.33 million students in 2018 (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019). As noted by Cai (2011), the higher education reforms introduced the establishment of a legal environment, the reduction of state control, the fulfillment of mass higher education, the implementation of quality assurance systems and market mechanisms, the building of competitive universities, and the expansion of internationalization. For Wang (2014), the Chinese government is engaged in the promotion and development of assessment mechanisms and the improvement of university performance. However, Li (2010) considered that the implementation of evaluation and quality assurance mechanisms do not automatically create quality.

The main policy trends of Chinese higher education include the increasing quality of talent cultivation, the enhancement of the university innovation system, and the development of the world-class discipline (Cai, 2013). According to Rungfamai (2014), the Chinese government had played a 'critical role' over the university function in society.

Conclusion

Chinese higher educational institutions are endowed with a rich and specific academic culture rooted in Confucius philosophy. Several Confucius precepts such as the "respect for authority, patriarchy, worshiping traditions and collectivist rather than individual values" still affect the structure of Chinese schools and the broader society (Bush & Haiyan, 2000, p. 66). The higher education system has witnessed significant development with the increasing number of world-class universities, the expansion of higher education through internationalization, the growing number of international students, and the innovation of scholars.

Nonetheless, the Chinese higher education system still faces some challenges, such as corruption and the issue of university autonomy. It is perceptible that the Chinese government is working to solve these problems considering their action in the construction of better academic culture. In this context of globalization and the growth of world-class universities, it is necessary to improve the 'academic organization,' 'academic democracy,' 'academic freedom,' and 'innovative essence,' to build a competitive culture of universities (Sui, 2013, p. 213). Universities should consider the cultivation of

innovative talent as the highest goal, promote educational innovation, contribute to the promotion of scientific and technological progress, and develop a knowledge-based approach (Yu & Jia, 2009).

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