

# The Relationship of Two-Way Construction of Tradition and Innovation of Higher Education

CHEN Zhizhong<sup>[a],\*</sup>; HU Haiqing<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>Lecturer, School of Education, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, China.

<sup>[b]</sup>Associate professor, School of Education, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, China.

\*Corresponding author.

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## Abstract

The relationship between tradition and innovation of higher education is two-way construction. It should be pointed out that the three principles to be followed in the two-way construction of tradition and innovation of higher education: Adhere to the principle of subjectivity; Adhere to the principle of the unity of history and logic; Adhere to the principles of democracy and the rule of law and promote consensus. Only in this way, can we build harmonious relationship of tradition and innovation of higher education and construct a modern higher education with world-class and Chinese characteristics.

**Key words:** Tradition of higher education; Innovation of Higher education; The relationship of two-way construction of both

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In any higher education system, under the given conditions, through interaction with the surrounding

environment, it not only maintains its own characteristics, but also realizes its own transcendence. It is always in the contradictory movement of inheriting tradition and pioneering innovation (tradition and innovation for short). The history of the development of higher education in the world is the history of the unity of opposites of tradition and innovation. The relationship between tradition and innovation is not a contradictory dichotomy, but a two-way construction relationship that is both opposite and harmonious. Discussing the relationship between the two is an important issue that must be faced in promoting the reform and development of higher education and building a higher education ideology with Chinese characteristics.

## 1. PERFORMANCE OF THE TWO-WAY CONSTRUCTION OF TRADITION AND INNOVATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

From the perspective of higher education philosophy, higher education tradition represents the unique personality of a higher education system in a society; Innovation is a force within the system that opposes those behaviors that try to keep traditions unchanged. The opposites between the two are unified in the development of the higher education system. The contradiction and harmony between tradition and innovation can be analyzed and clarified at least from the following aspects.

Firstly, in terms of value orientation of development, tradition and innovation embody the tension between seeking goodness and seeking truth. Tradition is called a tradition, which is inherited by a certain system and which is also the most authentic way of existence. It has a kind of sacred “Charisma trait” of Hills which is respected and attached by people, therefore, it must be “good”; Innovation is innovative and adapts to the environment, so it is “true”. Both have existing value. This tension of seeking truth and goodness can be clearly confirmed

from the psychological tangles felt by the generation of scholars who experienced the transition between new and old education in the early 20th century--one aspect is the traditional "cute and unbelievable", On the other hand, the new learning is "believable but not cute".

Secondly, in terms of the source of power for development, tradition and innovation reflect the tension between follow-up and reform. Following is not an old-fashioned tradition, but a traditional way to solve the problems faced, or to find a solution to the problem from the educational tradition. Innovation is to adapt to the current situation. It may discard the outdated practices in traditional education, but it does not necessarily point to novelty or modernity. Sometimes it does not focus on the redefinition of the goal, but the redefinition of the operation of the old goal (Yang, 1987, p.243); sometimes it is precisely the resurrection of a more ancient tradition, as Jaspers said, humans often gains spiritual impetus by reviewing history during the axial period, at which time is consistent with traditional inheritance.

Thirdly, in terms of the target outcomes of development, tradition and innovation reflect the tension between heterogeneity and homogeneity. Tradition is a summary of the education modes of a certain period, a certain space, and a certain group. Of course, it contains regularity, but it is not "constant" and not difficult to change, which may be a random product or may contain some vulgarity of disobeying the law. On the contrary, although innovation may also be an expedient measure or a one-off move, in the wave of knowledge economy and globalization, the educational change from the perspective of innovation is increasingly accompanied by different types of education traditions at different stages of development, which learn from each other and merge with each other to form the phenomenon of "de-characterization" and "academic drift".

Regarding the harmonious confrontation between tradition and innovation, Yang Xiong of the Western Han Dynasty once had a classic expression: "In the process of the development of Tao, there must be reason and order to make the process continuous, and there must be reforms and changes to make things suitable for the time". The so-called reason and order is the inheritance of tradition; the so-called reform and change is pioneering and innovative. The relationship between tradition and innovation embodies the process of two-way construction. We can neither replace innovation with tradition or replace tradition with innovation, nor artificially deny each other. Therefore, the innovation of higher education must be an innovation that embraces tradition and continues tradition which is so-called comprehensive innovation; the inheritance of higher education tradition must be an inheritance of choice and abandonment which is so called critical inheritance. The development of the higher education system must strike a balance between seeking truth and goodness, reform and follow-up, homogenization

and heterogeneity. For example, in the two-way construction process of homogenization and heterogeneity, various higher education systems interact with each other, not only retaining traditional characteristics but also possessing characteristics of the times, thereby forming a "homogenization" that includes heterogeneity, which is what Hegel calls "concrete commonality". In this way, the two-way construction of tradition and innovation is reflected in the dialectical unity between tradition and innovation of higher education: Tradition is called tradition because it is not "new"; Innovation is regarded as innovation because it is not unified. Unification must be "new". Once it is "new", tradition will change from old form to new form and become "new unification". Once the "new unification" becomes "unified", it is faced with a new "newness".....The two-way construction of tradition and innovation connects traditional new and old forms to form a traditional "chain", thereby promoting the development and improvement of the higher education system (in some way, it is tradition).

From the perspective of higher education, it is particularly important to handle the relationship between tradition and innovation. In modern society, the pressure from inside and outside the higher education system keeps higher education under constant adjustment and change in various countries. Tradition is placed under the influence of ubiquitous innovation power and cannot be completely "self-contained". However, as Parsons argued, although higher education needs to be adjusted as the society and culture change, subordinating the tradition of "cognitive interests" formed by higher education completely to other interests will destroy the entire higher education system (Parsons, 1973, p.387 ).This requires us to respect the universal characteristics of the conservative tradition of higher education while focusing on innovation.

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## 2. THE PRINCIPLE OF THE TWO-WAY CONSTRUCTION OF TRADITION AND INNOVATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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It needs to be pointed out that the discussion of the relationship between the two-way construction of Chinese higher education tradition and innovation must be based on the theme of today's era--"Handle the relationship between inheritance and innovative development, and focus on creative Transformation and innovative development" (Xi, 2014, p.164). In this way, we can get rid of the radical measures of Westernization, "breaking the word and standing in it" as well as the conservative thought of returning to the tradition. At the same time, we can supplement and improve the idea of critical inheritance through comprehensive innovation. The following discusses and clarifies the principles of inheriting tradition and pioneering innovation from the aspects of subject, logic, and mechanism.

## 2.1 Adhere to the Principle of Subjectivity

Innovation is the innovation of the tradition (that is, the specific higher education system), which is the inherent innovation that originates from the tradition itself. Although it will learn from other traditional advanced school-running experiences in the world, it is based on me and used by me instead of “input” or copy of other traditions. For Chinese higher education, the unique cultural tradition, unique historical destiny, and unique basic national conditions especially require us to deal with unity of opposites of homogeneity and heterogeneity, adhere to the subjective consciousness, and treat the national tradition of higher education comprehensively and deeply. Carry out creative transformation to construct a higher education theory with Chinese characteristics, Chinese style and Chinese air.

As early as the early 1980s, the older generation of educator Chen You song pointedly said: “We have a culture of thousands of years, and there are some valuable traditions in all dynasties. Confucian educational ideas have many precious things which are inherited from generation to generation. Why did you study American pedagogy for forty years after the Revolution of 1911 led by Dr Sun Yat-sen which overthrew the Qing Dynasty, and Soviet pedagogy for thirty years after the founding of New China, and there is no very important Chinese pedagogy until now without China’s Dewey, without China’s Kailov, few outstanding Chinese pedagogy experts?” He called for the establishment of Chinese pedagogy (Chen, 1982, p.16). But two or three decades later, although domestically original educational theories have begun to emerge, However, the mentality and learning style of academic circles in education as a whole is crazy about foreign things and obsequious to foreigners and copying is still prevailing. This urgently requires us to enhance cultural self-confidence and cultural consciousness, on the basis of “clarify the historical origin, development context and basic trend of China’s excellent traditional culture, and explain the unique creation, value idea and distinctive characteristics of Chinese culture” (Xi, 2014, p.164), based on current educational practice, we actively introduce new concepts and knowledge from the theoretical achievements of higher education in the West, continue the national tradition of Chinese higher education, and adapt it to contemporary society and harmony with modern civilization.

## 2.2 Adhere to the Principle of the Unity of History and Logic

Burton Clark, starting from the pragmatic philosophy of higher education, criticized the claims of Newman, Humboldt, etc. on the ideal of the university “only represents a kind of memory of the idealized past which cannot prevent reality from developing in another direction of Nostalgia”(Clark, 1994, p.21). This philosophy pays more attention to the development of

history and reality between logic and history. However, the deduction of logic is consistent with the development of history, and it cannot separate the investigation of the historical process of things from the analysis of the internal logic of things. Especially when dealing with the two-way construction relationship between tradition and innovation, we cannot see the theoretical logic of the development of higher education itself. Not only can we not grasp the direction and easily fall into specific details, but more importantly, we lose our reflection and critical vision, therefore, it is difficult to inherit and innovate better; cannot see the historical process of higher education constrained by social, political, economic, and cultural factors, it is susceptible to simple, irritable, and even some of the most basic problems such as “who are the main contradiction between tradition and innovation” cannot be solved.

From the perspective of implementing higher education in China, adhering to the unification of history and logic means adhering to the development path of socialist higher education with Chinese characteristics. It takes the unique mass higher education tradition (or revolutionary tradition) created by the Communist Party of China’s own higher education practice as its main body, drawing on and experimenting with the tradition of Western higher education (may be called the “scientific tradition” of Chinese higher education), At the same time, it blended Chinese national traditions and initially formed the logic of the development of Chinese higher education itself. In this way, in terms of the relationship between tradition and innovation, we have not only drawn the line between blindly imitating Western liberal traditions, but also made a distinction between the Chinese Communist Party and contemporary neo-Confucianism who also advocate creative transformation of Chinese traditions. Because the creative transformation in the sense of Marxism is to critically inherit and develop the national tradition of Chinese higher education under the guidance of Marxism, so as to take the development logic of Chinese higher education as an intrinsic part of the Sinicization of Marxism. Contemporary neo-Confucianism insists on Confucian orthodoxy, hoping to dig out modern elements such as scientific democracy from the tradition of Confucianism, and some even advocate raising Confucian doctrines to “official school”. Obviously, no matter how history or logic, this kind of the approaches is infeasible.

## 2.3 Adhere to the Principles of Democracy and the Rule of Law and Promote Consensus

Traditional inheritance and innovation involve the ideological and habit issues of the masses who are affected by them; therefore, they are not only theoretical issues, but also practical issues. It is necessary to find a balance between “believable” and “cute”. China has been used to theoretically discussing various standards for distinguishing the essence and dross in tradition,

but no matter whether it is democratic, revolutionary or scientific, it has not scratched the itch completely. This is as long as the characteristics presented by the historical evolution of the British higher education system--as the first industrialized country, it "always coordinates conflicts and seeks improvement, but does not harm the interests of representatives from all quarters, nor does it abandon modes of characteristics of the traditional system (Gao, 2003, p.105), which shows the benign interactive relationship between the early-onset endogenous education modernization and traditions--it can be seen that innovation in the education tradition must be a process of condensing the wisdom of all parties. That is, the deliberative democracy and scientific decision-making mechanism demonstrated in the formulation of the "National Outline of Medium and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development Planning (2010-2020)", "Each type of planning and some major issues can be discussed by the whole society, and seek consensus in disputes and get recognition", making the planning process "a process of promoting democracy and brainstorming, a process of unifying thoughts and building consensus". In this sense, we need to establish a "forum" that has common interests, full consultation, which can blossom, and contend with hundreds of citizens, bring various opinions and suggestions into public debate, and seek mutual understanding by interacting and communicating with others, not bargain and exchange interests as in pure market competition. At the same time, negotiation requires a series of fair procedures to regulate, as what Habermas proclaimed, it is necessary to gradually improve the "institutional procedure for the formation of rational collective will" (Habermas, 2006, p.48), on the one hand, it promotes the agreement of multiple stakeholders on reform and innovation. On the other hand, to ensure that the outcome of the consultation really affects the decision.

Of course, consultation is only a necessary part of scientific decision-making. The complete decision-making process is a systematic project that includes public participation, expert argumentation, risk assessment, legality review, collective discussion decision, etc. This reminds us that when we are dealing with the relationship

between tradition and innovation, we must be prudent to improve mechanism of democracy and rule of law, and exert enthusiasm of all aspects.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the three principles to be followed in the two-way construction of tradition and innovation indicate that we need to construct Chinese higher education theory, improve the development path of socialist higher education with Chinese characteristics, and improve the system and mechanism of democratic consultation and scientific decision-making. Obviously, these three tasks have made different progress. As a theoretical summary of the "Tao" in the development of Chinese higher education, the task of building a higher education ideology with Chinese characteristics has a long way to go. However, in any case, "the scholar must not be unyielding", we should have theoretical confidence, road confidence and institutional confidence, and strive to connect the national blood of higher education and build a modern higher education with world-class and Chinese characteristics.

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