

## Chinese Research University Presidents' Roles: Ideal Expectations and Actual Status—Based on the Content Analysis of *China Education Daily*

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### Abstract

The ideal and actual roles of Chinese research university presidents are analyzed in this paper. A content analysis of the news reports in *China Education Daily* from 2000 to 2012 is conducted. Comments genre reports have been analyzed in order to find the expecting roles and actual roles. Compared with the actual roles reflected by content analysis of interview genre and information genre reports, the role of educator is mismatched. Then the reasons have been analyzed. Reflecting from the findings, some suggestions for the Chinese research university presidents to promote their educator roles are provided in this paper.

**Key words:** Research university presidents; Role; Content analysis; Educator

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.css.1923669720130905.2811>.

### INTRODUCTION

As the top leader of a university, the president is the center of the whole university. University president plays an important role on the development of the university. Since 21<sup>st</sup> Century, with the rising of global university ranking, the increasing fierce competition among universities, university

presidents sustain great responsibilities and play multiple roles. This study concluded the leading roles of research university presidents through related literature, including the teachers responsible for the development of students, the academic spokespersons responsible for academic research and translation of science and technology, the managers responsible for the functioning of organization, the social activists and communicators responsible for dealing with the various relationships. Meanwhile, the university president is also an educator, thinker and moral model who is shaping and keeping the spirit and idea of a university (Feng, 2011, p.87).

This study focuses on the actual public roles and the expecting roles of Chinese research university presidents through the perspective of major mass media. Are there any dislocation between the two types of roles and the real roles reflected from the university presidents' works? What's the reason?

### 1. STUDY DESIGN

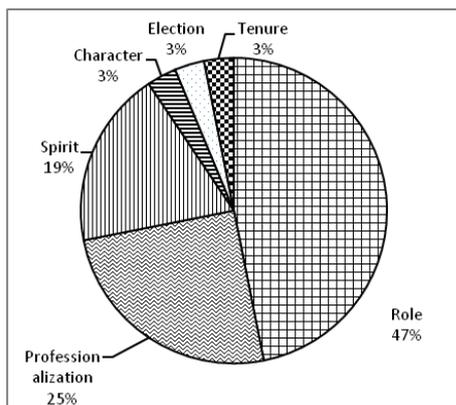
Content analysis is a research method to calculating the obvious content of communication objectively and systematically and describe the result (Krippendorff, 1980). This study choose the texts related to Chinese research university president from Chinese major press *China Education Daily*, analyze the texts using content analysis (Inch, Moore, & Murphy, 1997).

*China Education Daily* is a national daily newspaper about educational news sponsored by the Ministry of Education. It can reliably, precisely and timely broadcast the policy of the party and government, as well as information about educational revolution or development. It also has huge stable readership from colleges, middle schools, primary schools and educational institutions, affecting the administrators of universities and the public.

Researchers retrieved the database of important Chinese newspapers for university presidentS, with the time limit

from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2000 to December 31<sup>st</sup> 2012, and got 354 texts. The useless texts (the texts not related to research university presidents, simple messages, and the texts not related to university presidents' main duties (Jauch, Osborn, & Martin, 1980).) were deleted. By reading the texts one by one, we got 214 texts. This study firstly analyzed the objective information of the effective texts. They included 51 reviews, which took up 24%, 75 interviews, which took up 35%, and 88 pieces of information, which took up 41%. This study analyzed the reviews part by theme.

The figure below reflects the theme distribution of reviews, it includes the role of university president, professionalization of university president, the spirit of president, took up 91% of the whole text. Meanwhile, other texts qualitatively discuss the themes about the character of university president, election of university president and the tenure of president.



**Figure 1**  
Theme Distribution of China Educational Daily

The texts about role usually discuss the real role of the university president and then expect the ideal role on their views. University president is the administrator of grass-root organization. It has much varied works, which lead to the location of university president, the planer, the principle, resources allocator, communicator, negotiator, dealer, information collector etc. Under the social background of economic marketplace, government change the manage model for university to the combine of centralization and decentralization, university presidents' role changes from manager to operator (Gao, 2000).

A lot of scholars consider, China is lack of excellent university president, lack of good educators, the presidents of Chinese universities are the same (Zhu, 2005). As the university president of new time, they should become organizer of politic direction, pioneer of revolution and innovation, preside of academic governance, pusher of sustainable development and constructor of harmonious system (Li, 2007; Si, 2011).

The review texts conclude the real roles of university presidents, including planer, the principle, resources allocator, communicator, negotiator, dealer, information collector. The public expect university president to become educator, manager,

politician, thinker, social activist. Professionalization is the deep discuss about the theme for role, it was put forward from 2007 and the government educational policy in 2010 raises "Strengthen the development of university leadership, enhance the capacity of university administration". It established the policy of educator as the university president. The figure below represents the real roles and expecting roles in the review text.

**Table 1**  
The Comparison Between the Roles in Reviews and the Roles in This Study

Roles	Roles in review text	Roles in this study
Real role	Planner, Resources allocator	Manager
	Communicator	Communicator
Expecting role	Educator, Thinker	Educator, Moral model
	Operator, presider for academic	Teacher, Spokesperson for academic
	Politician	Politician
	Social activist	Social activist

However, what do the university presidents focus on in the actual works? What are the actual roles from the actual works? Is there any difference between the actual role and the roles in the review texts? This study analyzed the interview and information texts by content analysis.

The sample is 163 totally. The information and interview texts present what are the Chinese research universities' presidents do and present their ideas, thinking. This study analyzed these texts by content analysis; quantify the qualitative content, in order to find the actual roles of Chinese research university presidents. The analysis unit of this study is piece, each piece of text, but the recording unit is paragraph (Stemler, 2001). This study codes the paragraph in each text into the coding schedule, which was formulated before the coding procedure (Vourvachis, 2007).

The research chose 21 texts as pilot study, the consistency is 0.78, the reliability is 0.88, which was met the request of content analysis. After refine the coding procedure (Figure 2), the formal coding procedure was begun.

**Table 2**  
The Coding Schedule

Roles	Secondary category	Third category
Teacher	Students cultivation	A. Class teaching
		B. Educational service
Spokesperson for academic	Academic research and transfer of scientific and technological	A. Scientific research program
		B. Scientific innovation and outcomes transfer
		C. Attract research talents
Manager/CEO	Organizational function	A. Team building
		B. Resources integration
		C. Strategic planning

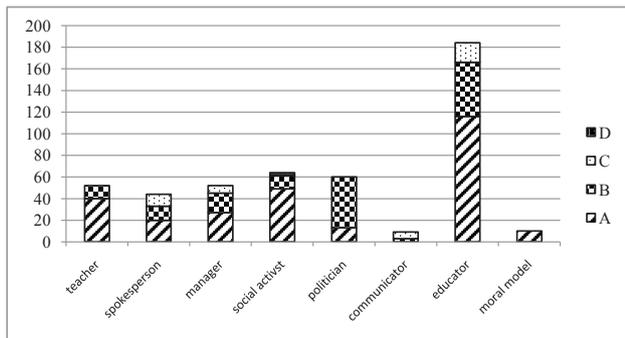
To be continued

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Roles	Secondary category	Third category
Social activist politician/officer	Coordination of relationships outside university	A. With other university: international cooperation
		B. With other university: national cooperation
		C. With donors (alumni)
		D. With mass media
		E. With local government
		F. With central government
Communicator	Coordination of relationships outside university	A. With board
		B. With faculty
		C. With students
Educator	Educational ideas	Understanding about higher education and management
	University mission	A. Goals, orientation, development strategy
Moral model	Moral authority	B. Spread spirits, traditional culture
		Construct moral standards

## 2. FINDINGS

After the coding procedure and statistical analysis, interview and information present the roles of Chinese research university presidents as the figure below, the height represents the frequency and different pattern represents different third category.



**Figure 2**  
**The Actual Roles of Research University President**  
 (Unit: Frequency)

From Figure 2, we can find that educator is the most obvious role. Teacher, spokesperson for academic, manager, social activist and politician represent average level.

With the comparison of the real role in review texts, planner and resources allocator are the similar with manager, and these were reflected from the content analysis, which was consistent with the roles in reviews. In the reviews, the real role of university president includes communicator with inside

stakeholders; however, this role has not been reflected from the content analysis. The possible reasons includes, first, Chinese research university president actually pay fewer attention on inside communicator. Second, Chinese research university president pay attention on communicating with inside stakeholders, but it rarely appears on mass media. Third, when the major press reports the news about university president, they chose the remarkable news and sometimes ignore the problems students and public care about, this also leads the role of communicator was not represent obviously (Wang, 2012).

In the review texts, public expect university president to become educator, operator, politician, social activist. The essence of operator is similar with teacher and spokesperson for academics. From the consequence of content analysis, these expecting roles are the consistent with the actual roles. Politician role and social activist role in the review are also consistent with the roles in content analysis.

In the review texts, public expect university president to become educator. But in content analysis, we can find that Chinese university president did excellent on this role, even surpass any other roles. University presidents pay much attention on spreading the educational ideas, how to manage the university, no matter come from interviews or information texts. This is not consistent with the expecting roles in the reviews text, and what leads to this result? This study analyzed it through qualitative ways.

## 3. CAUSE ANALYSIS

First, what is an educator? There is no final conclusion. English scholar Delhi Krona Terry regards educator as the well-known researcher or theorist in the field of education, whose reputation is higher than teachers (Lantery & Zhao, 1992, p.123).

In Chinese literature review, most scholars agree that educator is a person who understands educational principles and can develop education. This study analysis the texts theme and discourse expression.

In 75 interview texts, involved 43 project “211” university and 50 presidents. 26 texts refer to innovation and revolution, 19 texts refer to student cultivation, 13 texts refer to goals, 6 texts refer to the construction of world-class university. In 88 information texts, 31 texts refer to innovation and revolution, 20 texts refer to students cultivation, 11 texts refer to the construction of world-class university, 6 texts refer to goals. And some other texts refer to international and national cooperation, macroscopic problems. The figure presents the proportion and typical discourse expression.

**Table 3**  
**Theme and Typical Discourse Expression**

Text theme	Typical discourse expression
Innovation, revolution interview 35% information 35%	Constructing innovation-oriented country, university would play an important role. University should be instructed by the conference spirit, in order to improve the university's capacity for independent innovation as the core, in order to promote science and technology closely integrated with economic and social development as the key point, give full play to the university of science and technology in the transformation of the pattern of economic development and the important function of the adjustment of economic structure (Chen, 2006).
Student cultivation interview 25% information 23%	Establishing and improving the internal teaching quality monitoring system in colleges and universities, strengthening the comprehensive management of teaching quality, is the place the guarantee the quality of talent cultivation in colleges and universities, in order to realize the coordinated development of the scale, quality, benefit (Wang, 2012). To cultivate all-round development of talents, we must establish the advanced education conception; dare to break through the traditional concept of bondage (Tang, 2005).
Target, Orientation interview 17% information 7%	Integrated disciplines layout has been basically completed, significant progress was made in discipline construction; Research university personnel training system is built, improving continuously the quality of teaching and scientific research; we are trying to practice the open educational philosophy, to meet new challenges in the 21st century (Yang, 2010). Stick to the construction of the goal of "multilingual, multidisciplinary, high-level, the characteristic is bright, the domestic first-class, has the important influence of foreign studies university international", we are around the "scientific development for the future, the characteristic quality be" the practice of the carrier, to advance learning practice (Tang, 2001).
World-class university interview 8% information 13%	We are making efforts to combine the universal law of development of world-class university and historical tradition of the university of XX. We put forward the comprehensive, research-oriented, and open running mode (Tang, 2009). Building world-class university, is a strong response to the challenge of new century for Chinese modern higher education, is the important choice of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, is the dream of several generations, and is the goal we strive for. As long as we worked hard, this goal can achieve (Liu, 2002).

The characteristics of Chinese research university presidents can be found when they spread the educational ideas and conceptions.

First, the opinions of the university president are following the national policy. The role of follower and executor of policy and politician represented significant. University presidents are not the action promoter. We can rarely find any different opinion with government policy of the research university presidents. Second, the opinions of the university president are similar, lacking of constructive and critical ideas. They are lacking of innovative educational ideas and conceptions, which an educator should have. The views of the university presidents often look not precisely. Third, the university presidents frequently use official discourse expression. The linguistic styles are similar and just like the government officials; we cannot find personal style or traits, so that it is difficult for public to make a deep and good impression on them.

In the public's eyes, educator are great master, like Cai yuanpei, Jiang menglin, Hu shi, Mei yiqi, Pan guangdan, Zhang bolin, Tang wenzhi, Zhu kezhen. Cai used to say, the university president is not a government official, but a organizer and pioneer of academic research. He/She need not obey the order of government request; has not the authority to judging the academic ideas. His most important responsibility is advocating the freedom of thought, to maintain academic dignity and fight for the independence education (Zhi, 2006). These characteristics can help us to put forward some advice for the Chinese research university president.

University president as educator should adhere to the concept of academic freedom, freedom of thought. The conceptions of university are come from the historical traditions and the development circumstances of the university, not come from the government policies, and each university is different. Educator should dare to put forward new ideas, new conceptions.

University president as educator should use simple and common words, use as less officially language as possible. They should shape the image of educator through language.

## CONCLUSION

This study is based on the analysis of texts related to research university president, in order to find the real roles and expecting roles from the public's eyes. And we have compared the actual roles from university presidents' work with the real and expecting roles. There are some mismatch and we try to analyze the possible reasons. However, the mass media can only reflect the roles of university presidents to some extent. We can only find part of the characteristics, but this is helpful for the continuing researches. Besides, the major mass media has the responsibility of filtering the affection of official standard, on the basis of academic, trying to report the news related to university presidents or colleges as natural as possible, and creating a more proper background for spreading educational ideas and conceptions.

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