

# Research on the Reform and Development of Private Higher Education

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## Abstract

The spring breeze of reform and opening up has awakened the development and growth of private higher education, and has played an especially important role in leading and boosting China's education industry. However, due to the complex constraints of many internal and external factors, there are still many problems in private higher education in China, accompanied by poor student quality, weak teachers, weak management team and insufficient school funds. At the same time, there are obstacles such as outdated concepts, unclear property rights and imperfect system within the education system. This paper aims to study the feasible development countermeasures and solutions based on the current situation of private higher education.

## Keywords

Private Education; Reform and Development; Classified Management; Education Policy.

## 1. Introduction

Contemporary Chinese private education has experienced a long development process. This paper started in 1978 to study and analyze its development. Since 1978, after spending the two development climax in 1992 and 2003, China's private education has begun to gradually recover and develop, and has made great achievements. Between 2013 and 2019, the number of private higher education institutions in China increased year by year. In 2019, China had 756 private schools, an increase of 7 from last year[1]. Among them, 322 private specialties, accounting for 42.6% of private universities, and 434 private undergraduate courses, accounting for 57.4% of private universities. The number of private undergraduate schools is slightly more than that of private junior colleges. It is worth noting that private higher education has the education level of master student level. In 2018 alone, the number of master students reached 735 students, 1,490 students, accounting for more than 20% of the total number of colleges and universities[2].

## 2. Background of Private Education Reform

### 2.1. The System of Private Education Reform in the New Era

#### 2.1.1. Private Education Policies at the National Level

According to the national situation of the development of private colleges and universities, we can roughly divide them into three stages: the universal compulsory education stage, encouraging the development stage of private schools, and the stage of implementing classified management to regulate and ban private schools. For the current development of higher education, China is in the third stage, and implements classified management to standardize and ban private schools.

In recent years, the state has gradually strengthened its control of private universities in terms of policies, and taken the law as the primary basis and breakthrough of the reform of private

education, thus actually promoting the reform and development of private education at the national level. On this basis, the state has further carried out the innovative design of targeted education laws and regulations and new education policies. In 2016, at the 24th meeting of the Standing Committee of the 12th National People's Congress, the Decision on Amending the Amendment <the Law of the People's Republic of China on Private Education Promotion>[3], By means of classified management of for-profit and non-profit schools, it provides legal guarantee and policy support for the future reform and development of private higher education. Since then, it has opened a new era of new laws and new policies of private education.

### **2.1.2. The Policies on Private Education at the Local Level**

Since 2017, in order to promote the implementation of the new private education laws and policies, the local governments have responded to the call of the central government to implement the new Law on the Promotion of Private Education, and have further standardized the special documents for the development of specific areas of private education. In September 2017, since the local government of Liaoning Province took the lead in the pilot work of the new law and new policies on private education, 19 provinces, autonomous regions or municipalities directly under the Central Government, including Shanghai, Zhejiang and Jiangsu, have also participated in the pilot work of the new law and new policies on private education. This phenomenon predicts that more provinces will actively participate in the implementation project of the New Deal project, and contribute to the early implementation of the new private education policy to all parts of the country.

## **2.2. Challenges Faced by the Reform of Private Education in the New Era**

### **2.2.1. The Number of Private Colleges and Universities is Large and the Scale Develops Fast**

As can be found from the development data of private universities in recent years, it can be found that from 2007, the number of private colleges and universities in China increased rapidly from 2007 to 2009, and its market share increased from 15.5% to 28.2%. In the following years, its share showed a slight floating trend. By 2019, the number of private colleges and universities has accounted for 28.13% of the number of institutions of higher learning in China[4]. At the same time, the number of fresh graduates from private universities is also growing.

In 2019, a total of 7,088,300 students were private undergraduate and junior college, up 9.12% compared with last year, accounting for 23.38% of the number of college students in China. Meanwhile, a total of 1.696 and junior college graduates in China, accounting for 22.4% of the number of college graduates. With the release of the three-child policy in recent years, private education will face greater opportunities and challenges in the market.

### **2.2.2. Internal and External Problems of Private Education**

#### **(1) Internal issues**

The ① student source quality is poor. In the past, private institutions of higher education have been listed as the "three" institutions, recruiting most of the edge of the undergraduate line, that is, the third batch of students. Therefore, compared with the other two universities, the quality of students is relatively not high, which has also become the fundamental factor restricting the development of private colleges of higher learning. After the reform of the college entrance examination and enrollment system in 2021, the quality of students is expected to improve and coordinate in the next few years, but this is also a slow and difficult process.

The ② faculty is weak. In the early years, private colleges had only a few full-time teachers, so they could only rely on a large number of part-time teachers to meet their daily teaching needs. Most of the part-time teachers are retired old teachers or non-education in-service staff in part time. This problem leads to the obvious lack of teachers in private colleges and

universities. This also affects the reputation of the school and the scientific research and teaching level to a certain extent, which is not conducive to the long-term and stable development of the school.

The ③ management team composition is complex. The in-service staff composition of private institutions of higher learning is complex. Many senior school managers are not full-time personnel in the education industry, or even other industries who never know about the education industry. Some studies also show that the management team of private colleges is over-commercialized and corporate, which affects the evaluation of private colleges by the society, the government, parents and private education practitioners to a considerable extent.

④ tuition is high. The state invests less in private education, so the daily education funds of private universities need to be prepared by the school itself, so it is difficult to get bank loans. At the same time, the social influence of private education and alumni resources are relatively weak, so it is difficult to get donations and the lack of other favorable channels for fund raising. Due to various factors, tuition fees have become the main source of funds of private universities, and the high tuition fees also affect the stability of running schools to a certain extent.

## (2) External issues

① people misposition private education. Due to the influence of the previous old ideas and the laws and policies related to private education issued by the state, the masses have been deeply rooted in the "three books" concept of private education for a long time, which leads to people's lack of correct understanding of private higher education, and always have prejudice and doubts about private higher education.

The ② property rights are not clear enough. Private higher education still has defects in property rights, which greatly affects investors' enthusiasm and confidence in private education investment, and thus affects the investment enthusiasm of the whole society for private universities and even the whole field of private education.

③ is difficult to implement various preferential policies. Due to regional differences, different local governments have launched different preferential policies for private higher education. Many preferential policies cannot really play legal benefits after their launch, and play a role of policy incentive and become effective.

The ④ was unable to gain autonomy in running a school. In order to distinguish between the characteristics of different categories of education, the state has formulated various rules and regulations to manage private education, which makes it difficult for private colleges and universities to truly obtain the autonomy in running schools.

## 3. Analysis of the Status Quo of Private Education Reform

### 3.1. Key Key Points of Private Education Reform in the New Era

The key point of the reform of private education in the new era should be that the state provides high-quality private education resources to improve the overall quality of private education and teaching. From the government level, on the one hand, we should strengthen the encouragement, support and guidance of private universities. We will encourage private colleges and universities to offer courses and majors with regional characteristics, focus on bringing private education brands to the international public perspective, and improve the international status and competitiveness of China's private education. We will support private vocational institutions of higher learning in planning special training directions for technical talents, deepen the integration of industry and education, further serve regional economic and industrial development, and promote the sharing of private educational resources through cooperation, entrustment and authorization. Guide private primary and secondary schools to

expand diversified teaching modes to adapt to the popular needs with rich and colorful campus life.

At the same time, private colleges and universities should base themselves on their own educational resources, develop their own characteristic teaching, and give more positive guidance to the society in the external publicity. We will increase social attention to private higher education, improve the people's confidence in private higher education, and strive to create a good atmosphere of private education.

### **3.2. The Characteristics of Private Education Reform in the New Era**

#### **3.2.1. Set the Transition Period for Classification Management**

Anhui, Hebei and Zhejiang provinces have all chosen five years for the transition period of classified management, while Liaoning and Gansu provinces have not yet made a choice, and the rules of different provinces for the transition period vary. Private institutions of higher learning in Anhui province will only limit the term of classified management by the end of 2022. Hebei and Zhejiang provinces restrict the five-year transition period on all private institutions of higher learning established before the Decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on Amending <The Law of the People's Republic of China on Private Education Promotion>, adopted in November 2016. In the latest third draft of the People's Education Law, there are no hard time requirements for the private schools to choose for non-profit or the existing non-compulsory education direction.

Although the establishment of the transition period of classified management leaves a certain choice space and time difference for local governments and schools, it hinders the comprehensive implementation of the reform to a certain extent. In terms of the current trial operation stage effect, the transition period according to local conditions is more suitable for the operation of classification management.

#### **3.2.2. Implement a One-way Ticket System**

Hebei Province stipulates that the implementation of the one-way ticket system that private non-profit schools can not be transformed to private non-profit schools, while private non-profit schools can be transformed to private non-profit schools [5]. Although the one-way ticket system encourages private schools to change to non-profit nature, and guarantees the number of private non-profit schools, it still cannot guarantee the teaching quality of these schools.

## **4. Promoting the Reform Strategies and Measures of Private Education**

### **4.1. Strengthen the Construction of Private Colleges and Universities with the Party as the Core**

Strengthening the Party's leading role in private schools and implementing the Party building work to the end is a major task of education reform in the new era, and also the key point of concern for the joint implementation of the document by the five provinces. The new policy emphasizes the improvement of the Party organization structure of all kinds of private colleges and universities, rationally selects and distributes the positions of Party organizations and the decision-making power and discourse power on major related matters, and proposes to assess and examine the contents and achievements of Party building work in private colleges and universities every year. Liaoning province has also launched relevant documents stipulating that each class has at least one head teacher, and at least one counselor for every 200 students with a full-time counselor to strengthen the teaching quality in universities. In addition, other provinces also pointed out in the document to consolidate the party organization and system construction of private colleges and universities, including the full implementation of the party building work, strict allocation of responsible persons, the party building action into the year-end audit, so as to further strengthen the party building work of private colleges and

universities to promote the long-term and stable development of private colleges and universities[6].

#### **4.2. Private Education Optimizes the Education Plan on the Basis of Public Welfare**

In order to protect the rights and interests of the organizers of private universities, the government can strengthen the financing efforts of private education from three aspects. In the first aspect, relevant laws, regulations are introduced to solve the problems of property rights, land use, taxes and fees in private colleges and universities. According to the relevant documents of classified management, different measures should be taken in the merger and reorganization and property rights transfer to ensure the rights and interests of different types of private colleges and universities. In the second aspect, to improve the school quality and credit evaluation system of private colleges and universities, while increasing the confidence of banks to provide loans to private colleges and universities, but also to seek more relaxed loan policies for private colleges and universities. Third, according to the annual performance evaluation of private colleges and universities, we will provide the national evaluation of special private education funds, and make up for the difference in fund income between private universities and public colleges and universities through special fund subsidies.

#### **4.3. Implement the Responsibilities of Local Governments and Further Promote Classified Management**

##### **4.3.1. Strengthen the Leadership of the Central Government and Promote Local Pilot Projects First**

Classified management is a comprehensive policy involving both the innovation of school management system and the change of interest distribution of organizers. Due to the current many education organizers for classification management this system involved part of the theory is controversial, and the feasibility of the management mode is lack of practice, so according to the general office of the State Council on the notice of national education system reform, in Shanghai, Shenzhen, Zhejiang and other private for-profit and non-profit university classification management pilot, while the relevant national departments also need to synchronize the pilot work summary and data sorting.

##### **4.3.2. Coordinate Multi-department Cooperation and Conduct In-depth Research on Supporting Systems**

The development of the pilot classified management in local private education should be carried out simultaneously with the government's research on the classified management adaptation system. As the implementation of the new policy requires the coordinated operation of multiple departments, the country needs to implement the multi-department cooperation mechanism and work tasks in a timely manner. In addition, in order to improve the efficiency of the pilot work of classified management of the private colleges and universities, the local governments need to timely feedback the opinions and work reports of the private schools to the national level. It should be noted that the trial operation of the pilot work also requires the establishment of a time limit. Once the government studies a comprehensive and feasible supporting system, the classified management system should be formally implemented throughout the country.

##### **4.3.3. Strictly Examine and Approve the Registration Information of Newly Built Private Universities**

The relevant government departments should strengthen the rigor of the examination and registration of the pilot pilot and adaptation of classification management system [7]. On the one hand, through the examination and approval information to determine the interest value that private for-profit colleges and universities can provide in the civil affairs and industrial and



commercial departments. On the other hand, relevant policies are formulated to manage and control the investment market of private schools [8]. It is stipulated that investors in the education industry shall not disturb the normal market order to seek personal interests to ensure the public welfare of private non-profit education.

#### **4.4. Strengthen Supervision and Management, and Standardize the Rules and Regulations of Privately-run Colleges and Universities**

Relevant laws and regulations will be formulated to make the routine information of private colleges and universities and some important temporary matters open and transparent to the outside world. General information includes, but is not limited to, school rules, education programs for each grade, and the number of students at different stages. Important temporary matters include, but are not limited to, changes in school name, class, division, merger, organizer and principal [9].

Education departments will optimize the design of the open channels for the annual examination results of private schools, and expand the publicity time and scope of the annual examination results, so that more parents and social people can choose their favorite private schools through the annual examination results. The local government needs to focus on strengthening the supervision of the internal management system of private colleges and universities, and standardize the financial management of schools.

#### **4.5. Clarify the Value of Private Education and Strengthen the Financial Supervision System**

The newly released Law on the Promotion of the People clearly classifies private education as public welfare undertakings, but because the concept of "high tuition fee" of private education has long been deeply rooted in the people, the people's perception of the nature and status of private education deviates [10]. In addition, the cooperative relationship between the government and private education organizers also needs to be improved. At present, the national financial support policy for private universities is relatively short of public universities, which directly leads to the private universities that can only maintain their daily teaching work by increasing the amount of tuition fees. The imbalance of financial support policies also indirectly leads to the imbalance of the social status of public schools and private schools. The fundamental reason for this problem is that the low quality of private education and teaching is difficult to get government funds to support, and the private schools that lack government financial support and fund-raising channels are difficult to improve the teaching quality, which cannot be compared with public schools.

Therefore, the government needs to put private schools, public schools, for-profit private schools and nonprofit private schools on the same measurement line under the education reform policy in the new era. We will guide profit-profit private schools to make legal profits, provide financial support policies for non-profit private schools, reach mutual beneficial and win-win cooperative relations with local private colleges and universities, and strive to achieve excellent educational achievements and cultivate outstanding talents in the new era to obtain recognition from the society and the public for private education.

### **5. Conclusion**

From the national, government, social level and school level, this paper discusses the current social recognition of private education, the cooperative relationship between the government and private education, and the national financial support for private education. Through the analysis of education reform policies in the new era, we can find that the fundamental part of improving the development of private education lies in whether it can break the old concept of private education and put private education with public education in an equal social

status. Therefore, to this end, the central government needs to increase its support in the private education fund support policy, and the private schools should also synchronize the classified management mechanism. Although the education reform project is huge and difficult, and many rules and regulations are still being piloted and in operation, this initial first step is also the most important step in the reform and development of private education.

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