

**Chinese university administrations –
Chinese characteristics or global influence?**

Professor Tom Christensen, University of Oslo and Renmin University

Professor Ma Lia, Renmin University

Introduction

Traditionally, one thinks of universities primarily as what Olsen (2007) has labeled ‘self-governing communities of scholars’, where university activities are governed by internal factors, with shared norms and values, and focusing on academic freedom, free inquiry, truth finding, scientific rationality and expertise (Aberbach & Christensen, 2018). Accordingly, universities should have institutional autonomy, independent of superior authorities and other external interference as they are best qualified to organize and conduct their own activities.

In recent decades, universities around the world, which often lag behind developments in the US (Ramirez & Christensen, 2013), have progressed in a more multi-dimensional direction, becoming hybrid institutions — ‘representative democracies’, ‘instruments for national political agendas’, ‘components of the knowledge economy trend’, and ‘service enterprises embedded in national and international competitive markets’ (Olsen, 2007). These tendencies are connected to a whole range of university reforms (Amaral, 2008; Ferlie, Musselin & Andresani, 2008; Paradeise, Bleiklie, Enders, Goastellec, Michelsen & Reale, 2009; Paradeise, Reale, Goastellec & Bleiklie, 2009). First, decision-making systems have become more democratic in the sense that the professors no longer monopolize the decision-making process, and a range of academic and non-academic staff are included in decision-making bodies. Second, university administrations have grown and become more professional and influential, reflecting not only internal growth and complexity, but also external pressure from public and private stakeholders. Third, more resources are allocated to cater to different external competition demands, whether related to international markets of researchers, research projects and students, reflected in an increased preoccupation with international rankings (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007).

Despite considerable diversity, universities globally have some typical generic features, as influenced by public reforms like New Public Management (NPM) from the early 1980s,

focusing on devolution, competition and efficiency, and post-NPM reforms from the late 1990s, emphasized more centralization and coordination features (Christensen & Lægheid, 2007; Osborne, 2010; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Both reform movements implied that universities, and in particular their administrative apparatuses, should be structured and function in the same way as any other organization. This is in line with the US-dominated neo-institutional studies of universities as formal organizational actors, reflecting global processes (Meyer, Ramirez, Frank & Schofer, 2007; Ramirez, 2006). These studies see the global formalization and rationalization processes influencing universities, furthered by the increasing social embeddedness of the universities.

American universities, particularly the elite ones, are for various reasons often seen as the global template for universities – as the pinnacle of excellence – which reflects instrumental processes, long cultural trajectories, and reputation management (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). Universities in other parts of the world, e.g., Europe, that tried to imitate the US model, have generally lagged behind. However, some progress in this direction has been made, as seen in the case of German universities (Kwak, Gavrilina & Ramirez, 2019). But such a global template may be adopted differently, since the preconditions in other countries are both culturally and structurally different from those in the US – for example, the strong role of the state and the widespread existence of public universities in Europe and parts of Asia (cf. Westney, 1987).

This study focuses on the extent to which and how the administrative units of Chinese universities and their labeling have been influenced by rationalization processes, mirrored in the type or number of special organizational units (Christensen, Gornitzka & Ramirez, 2019). These types of questions have formed the subject of recent studies of American universities, whether related to development offices (Skinner & Ramirez, 2019), diversity offices (Kwak, Gavrilina & Ramirez, 2019), or legal units (Furuta & Ramirez, 2019). These types of

organizational units were, in the study, seen as manifestations of the global rationalization process affecting universities, as described in the neo-institutional theory. They were also seen more specifically as related to the foremost global template, that of the US, in particular the elite US universities, referred to as Ivy+ here.

The Chinese university system, which is similar to that of the US in terms of size and diversity, was probably more standardized originally due to the strong control exerted by the one-party state (Ma & Christensen, 2019). Nevertheless, the Chinese university system has been providing a lot of resources to the best universities to strive for global excellence. China has a long tradition of adopting a variety of private and public solutions from the West, primarily from the US (Christensen, Dong & Painter, 2008), and there is every reason to think that imitating the US university system is prioritized in China.

The main questions discussed in this article are accordingly:

- What characterizes the central administrative units of Chinese universities? Are they standardized or are there variations among Chinese universities?
- In what ways do they try to imitate a global template in their labeling of the units, as alleged in the neo-institutional theory in higher educational studies, more specifically the US trends, and how do they reflect Chinese structural and cultural characteristics?

To answer these questions, we collected and analyzed data from the websites of 174 Chinese universities. We start by discussing perspectives on what kind of reform trends and global features have influenced the administrations of modern universities, alluding to three strands of organization theory. This is followed by a section about recent studies of US university administration, a section placing Chinese universities in context, and a section comparing the Chinese and US university systems, leading to a set of hypotheses. The data about the

organizational units of Chinese universities are then described and analyzed. Finally, we draw some conclusions and consider their implications.

National and global processes influencing university administrations

Focusing on *instrumental factors* means that universities organize their administrations to cater to internal organizational factors or to the external technical environment, or a combination of the two (cf. Scott & Davis, 2006). Internal factors deal with growth and diversity in the student body, an increase in administrative and academic staff, and/or inflow of more research fund. These, in turn, are influenced by a variety of stakeholders in the environment. Public authorities and private stakeholders providing resources may require more planning, performance management and reporting, demand stricter rules and quality assessment related to examinations and curricula, as well as high ethical standards and codes of conduct, all of which require administrative resources and (re)organization (Bleiklie, Enders & Lepori, 2017). The media may also seek more information about the activities of universities (Wæraas & Sataøen, 2019). In addition, international contacts and collaboration, whether related to recruitment or promotion, generate administrative tasks and require facilitators.

Looking at university administrations through an instrumental or structural lens raises the crucial question of how to specialize and coordinate administrations vertically and horizontally (cf. Egeberg 2014). The more complex the environmental demands, for example related to a global template, the more complex and elaborate the internal administrative structure (Thompson, 1967).

A second perspective on administrative development of universities is a cultural one (Selznick, 1957). What informal norms and values characterized the era when a university was established and what impact did these have on the university's later trajectory in a path-dependent process? (March, 1994). This means that administrative units established early on

may have a high survival rate when faced with pressure for change (Kaufman, 1976), especially if the potential changes are culturally incompatible (Brunsson & Olsen, 1993). Chinese scholars often say that Chinese cultural characteristics are very special (Lan, 2001), which may or may not be true. It is, however, crucial whether a global university template is seen as ‘culturally appropriate’ (cf. Selznick, 1957).

A third perspective envisages that universities and their administrations are embedded in institutional environments characterized by taken-for-granted notions of how universities should function and be organized (cf. Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Global templates that define academic/university excellence stipulate how universities ought to organize their administrative apparatuses, are spreading (Meyer et al., 2007; Ramirez, 2006).

Increasing social embeddedness of the universities is furthering this trend (Christensen , Gornitzka and Ramirez, 2019). Historically, this is a fundamental characteristic of American universities, less so in Europe, but is emerging now (Ramirez & Christensen, 2013). One aspect of this is the emergence of national and global markets of students, researchers, research programs and collaborative agreements, which increasingly creates global communities and communications. Another is the increasing contacts and interactions with national and international university organizations, which are participating in developing national and global standards (Meyer et al., 2007). The third aspect relates in particular to international university rankings; universities use reputation management and branding for promotion (Carpenter, 2010; Wæraas & Maor, 2015).

Main results from recent studies of US university administrations

There are overall few studies of changing university administrative structures as a result of increasing adaptation to the environment. What about studies of the US global template in this respect? Ramirez et al. have given some unique insight into three types of modern US

university administrative units – development, diversity, and legal affairs – that reflect increasing social embeddedness, competition and imitation among universities, showing both convergence and divergence (Christensen, Gornitzka & Ramirez, 2019). Fund-raising activities, especially from private sources, are a long tradition in US universities, and increasing competition has resulted in the institutional buildup and professionalization of organizational units catering to such needs. Skinner and Ramirez (2019) have shown that the pure existence of so-called development offices is near universal, but the name of the office varies greatly. The average size of the development office is 120 staff in the Ivy+ university sample, but only 30 in the random national sample.

Creating an open and inclusive university that allows for gender, racial/ethnic and religious diversity among students and staff reflects both internal complexity and external pressure. Kwak, Gavrila and Ramirez (2019) have shown that diversity offices exist in 96% of all Ivy+ universities, but only in 59% of the broader random sample. All private elite universities have diversity offices, while 96% of the public universities have such offices.

American society is saturated with formal rules for most aspects of life, and US universities are no exception. When it comes to the rights of students and staff, and in many aspects of dealing with public and private external stakeholders, accountability questions and legal activities are increasingly important. Furuta and Ramirez (2019) have found that 88% of the universities in the elite sample have a legal office, compared to 35% of the random sample. The average size of the legal offices in the elite sample is about three times higher than that of the random sample.

The Chinese university system – general and specific features

Chinese universities are much younger than US or European universities. Although China has a long history of academic study and colleges going back to ancient times, the earliest modern

universities were only established in the late 1890s. More universities were established after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, run by the sole ruling party, the Communist Party of China (CPC). All were publicly owned, and they operated in the shadow of socialist ideology and the centrally planned economy. Many universities were shut down or restructured in 1953 for ideological reasons, and were restored in the late 1970s. Universities were affiliated with either central ministries or local government, and their graduates were dispatched to the corresponding party-state apparatus and state-owned enterprises.

China started to liberalize its economy in 1994 and universities became more autonomous. In the early 2000s, universities were encouraged to enroll more students to help boost the share of the population with higher education. Private universities and colleges were allowed to cater to the higher education market, which had international impacts. The universities mainly rely on government funding; while the endowment contributed by alumni is increasing, but is still a marginal source of revenue. The central government favors the top universities with disproportionate financial support and preferential policies with the aim of making them world class universities. Since November 1995, 116 good universities have been added to the 211 program¹. Since May 1998, 39 universities have been covered by the 985 program,² which aims to put them on a par with the world class universities. The two programs were upgraded to the Double World Class program in 2017, which aims to boost world class universities and disciplines. The government also supported Shanghai Jiao Tong University in developing the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) in 2003, to help benchmark top Chinese universities.

Universities in China are mainly organized similarly to the US university system, with schools as the most important subunits coordinating education and research. Departments,

¹ The figure 211 refers to the abbreviation of the 21st century (21) and approximately 100 universities (1) included in the program.

² The figure 985 means that the program is established in May 1998 (98/5).

institutes, and centers are the main units coordinated by schools, but their autonomy has been substantially reduced since the installation of the school system in the late 1990s.

The CPC has branches in every university, and party and administrative agencies are juxtaposed, similar to how they are in local government. The university president is usually more senior than the party secretary, and the CPC is overall relatively weak in university governance. For the purpose of comparison and due to the lack of information, we only analyzed administrative agencies and party units were excluded, even though it would definitely be interesting to analyze such units, but in another context. Autonomy varies among universities, with higher-ranked prestigious universities enjoying greater autonomy, as the government recognizes that autonomy is key to improving leading universities' international reputation, contacts and collaboration.

No earlier studies have focused on whether there are diversity offices in universities in China, like in US. As we know, China is a multi-ethnic country with fifty-six ethnic groups, and Han is the predominant ethnic group making up 91.5% of the population. The government has formally adopted the principle of regional ethnic autonomy, and students from ethnic minorities enjoy various kinds of preferential treatment related to enrollment and scholarship, both in their own areas and in larger cities. Given that about half the Chinese population still lives in rural areas, diversity management in China's universities may be related to the rural-urban divide. The number of students from rural areas has been shrinking over the past two decades, which is a concern to the central authorities (Liang, Dong, Ren & Lee, 2017). Admissions offices and student affairs offices are usually responsible for balancing the rural-urban divide in students' enrolment and scholarship. Furthermore, there is a growing percentage of female students in Chinese universities. Thus, we question whether these ethnic, geographical and gender factors will result in the setting up of diversity offices in the universities.

Given the increasingly important role played by global university rankings, China's universities have been very keen to promote the internationalization of faculty and students. Many universities have an office of international affairs to coordinate international exchange programs. Universities set up and operate Confucius Institutes in other countries to promote Chinese education and cultural exchange, and may have specific agencies to coordinate faculty recruitment and operations. Offices of foreign students have also been established to cater to their accommodation, food, and language training needs. The international contacts of Chinese universities are largely well-known international universities, primarily American, and they are also keen to be recognized by international accreditation organizations. We analyzed whether this alleged internationalization has diversity connotations.

We also examine the potential rise of development offices in China entrusted with fundraising, alumni affairs, and private/public university cooperation. Development offices in the West are usually set up to raise funds from private companies and nonprofit foundations. Universities in China are tapping into their growing alumni base of entrepreneurs and millionaires as the key sources of funds. These also help to incubate startups in the commercialization of scientific findings by professors and students at universities. Science parks, university enterprises, publishers, and consultancy firms are common forms of commercialization adopted by universities. Is this scenario translating into formal development offices?

Chinese universities have also gradually been increasing their emphasis on legal rationalization, which corresponds to the procedural dimension of organizational reputation (Carpenter 2010). By setting up legal affairs offices or appointing legal officers, universities could potentially strengthen procedural justice. Common disputes in China may arise from faculty and staff contracts, intellectual property rights, and students' accidents. China seems to be in the pre-institutionalized stage in this subject, and the rule of law is a big concern in a

society without an independent judiciary. Thus, we ask whether this is leading to the emergence of formal legal units.

Comparing China and the US – some expectations

There are obvious differences between the two university systems. First, historically the American university system was founded and developed on a much more decentralized basis, drawing on regional and local initiatives and resources, whether from private or public stakeholders (Ramirez & Christensen, 2013). In contrast, in China initiatives often come from the central government, although the provinces and municipalities have been involved in the establishment of some universities (Ying, Fan, Luo & Christensen, 2017).

Second, the US has traditionally had a weak central control over education, where the department of education (as a cabinet level agency) was established much later. China, on the other hand, as a one-party state, has had both a strong central control and a dominant Ministry of Education for many years.

Third, diversity is of paramount importance in US universities, be it gender, racial, or religious diversity, and has many connotations in the context of what Carpenter (2010) has labeled ‘the moral dimension’ of reputation. Being inclusive and integrating with everyone in a friendly and open learning environment are strongly valued in US universities, while little is known about this aspect in universities in China.

Fourth, US universities tend to celebrate the individual as a deep-rooted part of the culture much more than in the one-party state of China, where at least on a symbolic level, the focus is more on collectivism (Ma & Christensen, 2019). However, there are tendencies of breaking with this overall trend. Life in China, including university life, is characterized by hierarchy. More generally, China is in many ways a super-capitalist society well attuned to international consumer trends since the reform and opening-up in the late 1970s (Naughton, 2017), which

may also imply diversity and the celebration of individual freedom – an image far removed from the controlling communist state where everyone is a small cog in a large authoritarian system.

Similarities between the university systems of the two countries are also evident. First, they are both huge, with about the same number of universities and colleges. University types are diverse and have been characterized by strong growth in recent decades. Second, they both have official university ranking systems. The Ivy+ universities in the US are deemed as a global template to imitate, while China has a similar elite group of thirty-nine universities in the so-called 985 program (Ying et al., 2017). Overall, the large and famous universities in both China and the US have more resources catering to excellence.

Third, US universities are historically very strongly oriented towards competition in segmented markets, whether nationally or internationally, but their degree of entrepreneurship varies considerably. Competition is rather new and emerging in China, but has been evident over the last decade. Nationally, there is stronger competition than before concerning researchers, research projects, students, and various sources of public and private funding. Internationally, Chinese universities, supported by the authorities, have become much more active than before in attracting academics back to China.

What do the differences and similarities outlined above lead us to expect concerning modern administrative units in Chinese universities? The first hypothesis deals with the overall administrative development profile.

H1: Administrative units in Chinese universities, including the modern ones related to a global template, will tend to be more standardized and widespread compared to those in the US.

This expectation is based on the fact that strong centralized state is the main driving force behind standardization in China, which also means that new special units would eventually be widespread.

H2. Given the expectation of limited internal variety in China, the largest and highest-ranked universities are supposedly those, like in the US, that most often have new administrative units based on global templates.

The reason for this expectation is that the largest and highest-ranked Chinese universities are those, like in the US, with the most resources and internationally oriented activities, reflecting a systematic central government policy. They also have more autonomy to pursue the global template.

H3: Chinese universities will supposedly follow the US-inspired global template pertaining not only to development offices, but also information/communication units and internationalization units, but to a lesser extent diversity and legal offices.

This hypothesis is based on the fact that Chinese universities are deeply involved in obtaining resources from public and private stakeholders, and are stepping up their national and international communications, increasingly participating in the international market for researchers and students, as well as enhancing collaborations with excellent Western and other universities. We have also added information and internationalization as expected components of the imitation from the global template.

Data and methods

Sample and data sources

By the end of 2017, there were 2631 institutions of higher education in China, comprising 1243 universities and 1388 colleges, accommodating 27.54 million students. The key universities in China are all owned and controlled by various levels of government, and it is reasonable to use a sample to describe the general pattern of administrative units. Universities are classified into different grades according to the programs with which they are affiliated, and the two most prestigious programs are the 985 and 211 programs, which were upgraded to the Double World Class program in 2017. Our data cover all the 985/211 universities in China, which are the most important institutions.

To compare these top-tier universities with non-elite universities, we randomly sampled two universities from each province. A total of 177 universities were selected, including 61 ‘mediocre’ universities not covered by the 211/985 programs. Due to missing data, the lack of relevant information on their websites, the final sample used in this study was 174. These universities are diverse in terms of geographical location, size, affiliation, history, reputation, and specialization, which enabled us to compare their administrative profiles across key organizational attributes.

We accessed universities’ web portals and looked at their organigrams to understand their organizational structures. All administrative agencies in each university were included, with the exception of party departments and affiliated service units. The data are reliable in that they are highly standardized across universities, as controlled by the Ministry of Education.

The measurement of administrative structure

To examine in what ways Chinese universities vary in terms of organizational structure, we started by looking at a wide range of units and functions (see Table A in appendix). Subunits were then grouped according to the main administrative units (Table 1): teaching, internal administration, research, infrastructure, student affairs and international affairs.

To compare the university administrative units in China with the more specific US data on an equivalent basis (see Christensen, Gornitzka and Ramirez, 2019), we regrouped these subunits into more specific categories. Development offices were divided into subunits of development, continuing education, and alumni. The diversity office's primary subunit is internationalization, while the legal office has no subunit.

The measurement of independent variables

We would expect Chinese universities of different sizes, ages, rankings, and types to be structured differently to a limited extent. The universities were classified into three types according to their major disciplines or areas; general or comprehensive (with a balance of disciplines), science and engineering (natural and medical sciences), and others (mainly humanities, arts, and social sciences). In our sample, the proportion of the three types were 33%, 31%, and 36%, respectively.

The status of the universities was gauged by mainstream international and domestic rankings. We divided the universities into three categories by their relative standing in the rankings: (1) high-ranked, (2) medium-ranked, and (3) low-ranked. As a rule of thumb, we treated universities participating in the 985 program and 211 program as high- and medium-ranked (i.e., elite universities), respectively, and otherwise as low-ranked. In the sample, the proportion of the three categories were 22%, 44%, and 34%, respectively.

The age of universities was measured by the number of years since their founding. We divided the universities into old and young using 1949 (when the PRC was founded) as the dividing line, with 53% classified as old and 47% as young (i.e., founded in or after 1949).

The manpower and finance indicators were closely related, and we used the total number of students as a measure of organizational size. We classified the universities into two groups (large and small) using the median as the dividing point.

We also considered the relevance of geographical location of universities, as was done in the US study. We grouped the provinces into three regions by their geographic proximity and socioeconomic development: half of the universities (51.1%) were located in the Eastern and most developed region, 26.1% in the Western (least developed) region and 22.7% in the Central region.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Each university has 18.8 administrative units on average, with a standard deviation of 3.8 and a median of 19, indicating quite a high degree of standardization. About 60% of universities have less than twenty agencies, while about 5% have more than twenty-five agencies (see Figure 1). There are moderate variations in the number of administrative units among the universities, suggesting convergence and homogeneity of the organizational structure.

< Figure 1 >

Table 1 shows that two categories of administrative functions exist in all Chinese universities: teaching and internal administration, and nearly all universities have research and infrastructure units as well. Around 55% of all units are related to internal administration and infrastructure,

while only about 25% are related to teaching and research. Student affairs and international affairs have a similar profile with regard to coverage and standard deviation. 94% of the sampled universities have set up a specific international office to promote international research collaboration, and student exchange.

<Table 1>

Some universities have separate offices providing services to international students. We should acknowledge that while internationalization can be seen as part of diversity management, other aspects of diversity (e.g., gender, ethnicity) are not well established in China's universities; thus these offices are not really diversity offices in an US sense. Diversity has not been prioritized as part of strategic management as in US universities. This is consistent with the fact that the performance dimension is the most prominent aspect of reputation management among China's universities (Ma and Christensen 2019).

The data show that 57% of the universities have development-related offices, with a high standard deviation. 36% have development offices, suggesting that they leverage professional agencies to develop partnerships with external sources of funding and other resources. About 36% also have alumni offices, which are used to solicit resources from alumni or the broader society. Development offices have various remits, including technology transfer, industrialization, university-sponsored enterprises, domestic cooperation, collaborative innovation, and entrepreneurship.

Offices of legal affairs are rare, with only four universities having such a dedicated office, all being in the 211/985 programs. It appears that legal issues are not a priority among the universities, even though legal disputes between universities and their employees (faculty and staff) and with students (and their parents) have increased over the past decade (Miao, Liu, &

Li, 2018). While many universities do not have a separate legal office, legal affairs are usually covered or handled by other administrative offices, e.g., the president's office.

These results suggest that H1 is largely supported, meaning new administrative units in Chinese universities are standardized, which are different from those in the US. However, some US universities have a wider range of new units connected to global templates.

Variations across universities

Pertaining to H2, we find that type, rank, age, location, and size matter in the universities' administrative structuring to varying degrees (see Table 2).

<Table 2>

Universities of science and engineering and other universities are slightly more likely to have the general category of development offices than comprehensive universities, although the differences are not significant ($p > 0.1$). Higher-ranked universities are much more likely to set up development offices ($p < 0.01$). Old and small universities are more likely to have development offices, but the differences are not significant ($p > 0.1$). Eastern and Western universities are more likely to have development offices than Central universities, but the differences are not significant.

Concerning the two subcategories of development offices, higher-ranked universities are more likely to have a development office in a narrower sense ($p < 0.1$), and the percentage of difference as compared to lower-ranked universities is nearly 23. While type, age, and size matter less, old and large engineering universities score slightly higher. Central universities are significantly less likely to set up development offices than Western and Eastern universities ($p < 0.01$). With respect to alumni offices, again rank matters the most ($p < 0.01$). Science and

engineering universities tend to use development offices instead of alumni offices, which can be attributed to the fact that scientists and engineers often generate patents to run startups. In contrast, faculty and students in social sciences and humanities are more inclined to networks.

As regards the setting up of international offices (see Table 3), only rank matters, with ordinary universities scoring the lowest. Universities in the 985 and 211 programs are more likely to have separate offices to handle global affairs than ordinary universities ($p < 0.01$), suggesting that universities with strong profiles are more proactive in tapping into the global higher education market to partner with oversea universities. The findings suggest that Eastern and Central universities are more likely to have information offices than Western universities ($p < 0.1$).

< Table 3 >

Science and engineering universities are much more likely to have information offices than the other two categories. This is mainly because these universities have strong science backgrounds to support the use of ICT (see Table 4). Higher-ranked universities are much more likely to have information offices to disseminate information within the organization and to external stakeholders. The results also show that Eastern universities are more likely to have information offices than universities in the other two regions.

Given that only a handful of universities have legal offices, we did not examine their variation among universities. The results suggest that legal rationalization has not been institutionalized among Chinese universities, which is consistent with their reputational profile, characterized by a weak procedural dimension (Ma & Christensen, 2019).

The findings partly support H2, as mainly the largest and highest-ranked universities in China have established development and internationalization offices based on global templates, but the variety based on the diverse independent variables is more limited than that in the US.

The above results show that H3 is supported, as Chinese universities have followed global templates to establish development offices, but legal offices and diversity offices in a Western sense are not well represented.

Discussion and conclusion

Main characteristics and variations of administration among Chinese universities

What characterizes the central administrative units of Chinese universities? The results of this study reveal two structural attributes of Chinese universities. First, Chinese administrations are highly standardized in respect of their main structure, meaning both traditional and some new units are widespread and similar. This could be interpreted in different ways: while it may reflect instrumental control by the central government, it may also simply be a natural development of administrative units that carry out core functions based on historical learning from the West. A third possibility is that it is an example of the global standardization of university administrations (Ramirez 2006).

Second, there is not much variation among Chinese universities, as shown by the independent variables regarding different types of administrative units. The most important independent variable seems to be rank, which carries special connotations in China. The highest-ranked universities, which often are the oldest and largest, have had highest autonomy and privileged access to resources, either from the government or private stakeholders. The government often gives most of the funding for high-profile programs to a few high-ranked universities (Ma & Christensen, 2019), and leading Chinese universities compete fiercely to become top international players. The highest-ranked universities often have a long, glorious

history with a celebrated cultural path, which is reflected in their structures. They are also far more active in the international arena, using reputation management strategies (Wæraas & Maor, 2015), where the likelihood of adapting to international templates is greater.

Divergence of Chinese universities from the global template

In what ways do Chinese universities imitate the global template represented by the US model? Our findings suggest intriguing structural differences, reflecting Chinese structural and cultural characteristics. First, compared with US universities, Chinese universities have fewer categories of administrative units directly related to adaptation of global templates and increasing social embeddedness. The most typical is the development office, but far fewer universities in China have a development office than those in the US. The standard deviation is larger in China and is much more rank-sensitive (Skinner & Ramirez, 2019).

Concerning the main content, the units in Chinese universities seem to be rather similar to those in the US and are often established and organized for some of the same purposes. The development offices usually manage university-sponsored enterprises, science parks, foundations and other facilities to generate alternative sources of income. The existence of development offices also shows that the traditionally introverted profile of Chinese universities is changing and the universities are adapting to a new culture of external resource provision (Ma & Christensen, 2019). Through their fact-finding missions and extensive contacts with Western universities, the large Chinese universities also imitate how they organize their development offices. The higher-ranked Chinese universities in particular have agreements with many of the best Western universities to support Chinese scholars and students going abroad, and are very proactive in bringing well-educated Chinese scholars back (Jokila, 2015).

Second, concerning diversity, the US trend in establishing administrative offices to cater to this purpose is much weaker in China. This in some ways appears paradoxical, since China has

many ethnic minorities. However, even though there are no comparable university units for diversity, there are in fact other university administrative units that give preferential treatment to universities in ethnic minority areas, such as setting up mentor programs, dispatching scholars to help, or including ethnic students in specific programs. It is, however, probably not politically appropriate to label these units diversity offices as the China authority prioritizes centralization and unification over diversity. As such, this may be an example of a global template being filtered through domestic structural and cultural factors (cf. Westney, 1987).

Third, China has not imitated the US university trend to establish and expand legal offices. However, this may be partly misleading, since some of the functions related to legal affairs are handled by other parts of the university administration. For instance, legal functions are incorporated into the general office or spread across administrative offices.

Fourth, information activities seem to be well established in Chinese universities. They reflect both domestic image building and efforts to adjust to internationally competitive university markets (Wæraas & Sataøen, 2019). Information offices have increased in size and priority over the past decade, partly to cater to reputation management.

Finally, some limitations of the study must be noted. This is not a general comparison of the university systems in China and those in the US, nor a study of all aspect of the US system as a global template. It only covers certain aspects documented in recent studies related to developing administrative units (Furuta & Ramirez, 2019; Kwak, Gavrilu & Ramirez, 2019; Skinner & Ramirez, 2019). Further, this is a study about structure, not substantive content. It might be that university organizational structures vary cross-nationally but with regard to substantive content, like curricula, they are more universal and standardized.

References

- Aberbach, J. D., & Christensen, T. (2018). Academic Autonomy and Freedom under Pressure: Severely Limited, or Alive and Kicking? *Public Organization Review*, 18(4), 487-506 doi:10.1007/s11115-017-0394-2
- Allison Jr, G. T. (1988). Public and Private Management: Are They Fundamentally Alike in All Unimportant Respects. In R. Stillman (Ed.), *Public Administration: Concepts and Cases* (pp. 689-718). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Amaral, A. (2008). Transforming higher education. In A. Amaral, I. Bleiklie, & C. Musselin (Eds.), *From governance to identity. A Festschrift for Mary Henkel*. Berlin: Springer.
- Bleiklie, I., Enders, J., & Lepori, B. (2017). Organizational Configurations of Modern Universities, Institutional Logics and Public Policies—Towards an Integrative Framework. In I. Bleiklie, J. Enders, & B. Lepori (Eds.), *Managing Universities: Policy and Organizational Change from a Western European Comparative Perspective* (pp. 303-326). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Boston, J., Martin, J., Pallot, J., & Walsh, P. (1996). *Public Management: The New Zealand Model*. Auckland: Oxford University Press.
- Brunsson, N., & Olsen, J. P. (1993). *The Reforming Organization*. London: Routledge.
- Carpenter, D. P. (2010). *Reputation and Power: Organizational Image and Pharmaceutical Regulation at the FDA: Organizational Image and Pharmaceutical Regulation at the FDA*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Christensen, T., Dong, L., & Painter, M. (2008). Administrative reform in China's central government -- how much 'learning from the West'? *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 74(3), 351-371 doi:10.1177/0020852308095308
- Christensen, T., Gornitzka, Å., & Ramirez, F. O. (2019). Reputation Management, Social Embeddedness, and Rationalization of Universities. In T. Christensen, Å. Gornitzka, & F. O. Ramirez (Eds.), *Universities as Agencies: Reputation and Professionalization* (pp. 3-39). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Christensen, T., & Lægreid, P. (2007). The Whole-of-Government Approach to Public Sector Reform. *Public Administration Review*, 67(6), 1059-1066 doi:10.1111/j.1540-6210.2007.00797.x
- Egeberg, M. (2014). How Bureaucratic Structure Matters: An Organizational Perspective. In B. G. Peters & J. Pierre (Eds.), *Handbook of Public Administration* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Ferlie, E., Musselin, C., & Andresani, G. (2008). The steering of higher education systems: a public management perspective. *Higher Education*, 56(3), 325 doi:10.1007/s10734-008-9125-5
- Furuta, J., & Ramirez, F. O. (2019). The Legal Rationalization of American Higher Education. In T. Christensen, Å. Gornitzka, & F. O. Ramirez (Eds.), *Universities as Agencies: Reputation and Professionalization* (pp. 229-247). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Gavrila, G. S., & Ramirez, F. O. (2019). Reputation Management Revisited: U.S. Universities Presenting Themselves Online. In T. Christensen, Å. Gornitzka, & F. O. Ramirez (Eds.), *Universities as Agencies: Reputation and Professionalization* (pp. 67-91). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Jokila, S. (2015). The internationalization of higher education with Chinese characteristics: Appadurai's ideas explored. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 35(1), 125-139 doi:10.1080/02188791.2014.940029
- Kaufman, H. (1976). *Are Government Organizations Immortal?* Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

- Kwak, N., Gabriela Gavrilă, S., & Ramirez, F. O. (2019). Enacting Diversity in American Higher Education. In T. Christensen, Å. Gornitzka, & F. O. Ramirez (Eds.), *Universities as Agencies: Reputation and Professionalization* (pp. 209-228). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Lan, Z. (2001). Understanding China's Administrative Reform. *Public Administration Quarterly*, 24(4), 437-468
- Liang, C., Dong, H., Ren, Y., & Lee, J. (2017). Social Transformation and Elite Education: Changes in the Social and Geographic Origins of China's Educated Elites 1865-2014. *Sociological Studies* (3), 48-70
- Ma, L., & Christensen, T. (2019). Reputation Profiles of Chinese Universities—Converging with Global Trends or National Characteristics? In T. Christensen, Å. Gornitzka, & F. O. Ramirez (Eds.), *Universities as Agencies: Reputation and Professionalization* (pp. 93-115). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- March, J. G. (1994). *Primer on Decision Making: How Decisions Happen*. New York: The Free Press.
- Marginson, S., & van der Wende, M. (2007). To Rank or To Be Ranked: The Impact of Global Rankings in Higher Education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3-4), 306-329 doi:10.1177/1028315307303544
- Meyer, J. W., Ramirez, F., Frank, D. J., & Schofer, E. (2007). Higher education as an institution. In P. J. Gumpert (Ed.), *Sociology of higher education. Contributions and their contexts* (pp. 187-221). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 83(2), 340-363
- Miao, Z., Liu, G., & Li, W. (2018). *How can universities not to be defendants: An analysis of the legal cases about the rule of law by universities*. Beijing: Law Press.
- Naughton, B. (2017). Is China Socialist? *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(1), 3-24 doi:10.1257/jep.31.1.3
- Olsen, J. P. (2007). The institutional dynamics of the European university. In J. P. Olsen & P. Maassen (Eds.), *University dynamics and European integration* (pp. 25-55). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Paradeise, C., Bleiklie, I., Enders, J., Goastellec, G., Michelsen, S., & Reale, E. (2009). Reform policies and change processes in Europe. In J. Huisman (Ed.), *International perspectives on the governance of higher education. Alternative frameworks for coordination*. New York: Routledge.
- Paradeise, C., Reale, E., Goastellec, G., & Bleiklie, I. (2009). Universities steering between stories and history. In C. Paradeise, E. Reale, I. Bleiklie, & E. Ferlie (Eds.), *University Governance. Western European Comparative Perspectives* (pp. 227-246). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Pollitt, C., & Bouckear, G. (2017). *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis - Into the Age of Austerity* (4th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ramirez, F. (2006). The rationalization of universities. In M.-L. Djelic & K. Sahlin-Andersson (Eds.), *Transnational governance: Institutional dynamics of regulation* (pp. 225-244). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ramirez, F. O., & Christensen, T. (2013). The formalization of the university: rules, roots, and routes. *Higher Education*, 65(6), 695-708 doi:10.1007/s10734-012-9571-y
- Scott, W. R., & Davis, G. F. (2006). *Organizations and Organizing: Rational, Natural and Open Systems Perspectives*. New York: Routledge.
- Selznick, P. (1957). *Leadership in Administration*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Skinner, N. A., & Ramirez, F. O. (2019). Marketing the American University: Professionalization of Development in Entrepreneurial Universities. In T. Christensen, Å. Gornitzka,

- & F. O. Ramirez (Eds.), *Universities as Agencies: Reputation and Professionalization* (pp. 185-207). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Thompson, J. R. (1967). *Organization in Action*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Wæraas, A., & Maor, M. (Eds.). (2015). *Organizational Reputation in the Public Sector*. New York: Routledge.
- Wæraas, A., & Sataøen, H. L. (2019). What We Stand For: Reputation Platforms in Scandinavian Higher Education. In T. Christensen, Å. Gornitzka, & F. O. Ramirez (Eds.), *Universities as Agencies: Reputation and Professionalization* (pp. 155-181). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Westney, D. E. (1986). *Imitation and Innovation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ying, Q., Fan, Y., Luo, D., & Christensen, T. (2017). Resources allocation in Chinese universities: hierarchy, academic excellence, or both? *Oxford Review of Education*, 43(6), 659-676 doi:10.1080/03054985.2017.1295930