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Exploring The Importance Of Academic Freedom In Higher Education

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1 Introduction

The development of academic freedom in the West has been an issue that has been cherished since the creation of medieval universities in Europe(Lao, 2012). In recent years, along with the continuous reform of higher education in various countries, academic freedom, which is one of the important connotations of a modern university system and one of the important conditions for university development, has gradually become a hot issue in the field of higher education. Germany, Japan and South Korea have incorporated academic freedom into their laws and regulations a long time ago(Jiang, 2004). With the development of society, people, especially some educational scholars, have more kinds of interpretation and definition of academic freedom, which means that they have a deeper thinking on academic freedom, because academic freedom is an important foundation for the development of higher education, and different people have different views of academic freedom(Li & Ouyang, 2004).

What does a university do to produce outstanding people? This hotly debated question may not have a standard answer, but the University of Cambridge, which has produced many scientific giants such as Isaac Newton and Darwin, can certainly provide a good reference, said Cambridge University President Leszek Borisevic in an exclusive interview with Xinhua News Agency recently.

The purpose of this essay is to explore the importance of academic freedom in higher education. The research topic is a big idea that is not only relevant to pedagogy but also to law, which in many countries regulates academic freedom by law. Academic freedom in higher education is also relevant to the development of both professors and students. In addition, as higher education covers a lot of academic fields such as natural sciences and social sciences, which can be subdivided into philosophy, economics, physics and medicine, the realization of academic freedom is also inextricably linked to the development of these academic fields. This reinforces the fact that this is a big idea, as it has relevance to current society, politics and economics, and has led me to think about a range of issues. The importance of academic freedom in higher education needs to be further affirmed and demonstrated.

This essay will begin by explaining the definition of academic freedom, then state why academic freedom is important in higher education. I will present my reasons in the following three ways: the importance of academic freedom in teaching and learning in university curricula, the role of academic freedom in promoting student-teacher relationships and the role of academic freedom in helping students' creativity. In addition, I will reflect on the history and current situation of academic freedom in higher education and make advice and measures to address existing problems, with reference to European and Chinese laws and regulations relating to academic freedom. Finally, the conclusion will be shown.

2 Definition

2.1 The definition of academic freedom

Academic freedom is the freedom to engage in scholarly activity in the academic world. It can be more carefully defined as "the freedom of a professionally qualified person to explore, discover, publish and teach the truth as he sees it, without any force other than the control of rational methods of identification". It has different meanings in different cultural contexts and situations. As for academic freedom itself, while there is a basic consensus in modern times, there are different views on individual disciplines.

Academic freedom is another expression of freedom of thought, a common definition of which is the professional and scholarly contribution of university staff and researchers, free from interference by the systems and forces of teaching and learning within and outside the university, to ensure that scholars are able to explore all areas of knowledge, and the neutrality and credibility of research findings.

2.2 The definition of academic responsibility

What is academic responsibility? The definition in Donald Kennedy's book Academic Responsibility is that "academic responsibility is the responsibility of the university to society as an academic institution, rooted in scholarship, to carry out a variety of activities of transmission and innovation around the characteristics of advanced knowledge". It is clear from this definition that the academic responsibility of the university is primarily to train human resources, develop science and serve society. From a practical point of view, the university's academic responsibility to society is realized through the work of its teachers and scholars, who train students through teaching, develop science and serve society through research, and lead society forward through rational criticism of the realities of society.

3 Why academic freedom is important in higher education?

3.1 The importance of academic freedom in teaching and learning in university curricula

Education is a two-way street, where there is teaching, there must be learning. Only when teachers and students exist can interactive research and learning. No one is indispensable. This is the most basic consensus. Universities need to be empowered by society to create an atmosphere of academic freedom that denies the absolutism of authority and allows for the free exchange and debate of academic views and diverse cultures with different values（Ma & Ma., 2006). Hooker, a famous American scholar, believes that the true meaning of academic freedom is "in order to obtain the truth or obtain conclusions based on the most reliable evidence, professors and researchers should faithfully explore. They have the freedom to research, investigate, experiment, seek truth, and employ knowledge, in addition to the right to participate actively in decision-making related in their areas of specialty. This also applies to students who are entitled to education, course selection, specialization and appropriate time (AlQarni, 2009). Teachers have sufficient set and specific authority to enable them to carry out their educational tasks and responsibilities freely (Haider, 2008). Academic freedom

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has important implications, for example, teaching staff have absolute freedom to change and develop the curriculum as if they need. They can develop teaching standards and methods based on phased data too, and members have the freedom to conduct the research they wish.(Al-Momani , 2020). In accordance with the principles of intellectual freedom, scientific research and ethics, free from any interference from censorship, teachers are supposed to carry out their professional activities without being hindered by anyone in order to intensify their professional skills so that they can apply their knowledge and achieve their goals eventually(-Jackson, 2005). Therefore,academic freedom is an effective way to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to promote the absorption of knowledge (Song, 2011).

3.2 The role of academic freedom in promoting academic prosperity in universities

In Chinese history, during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, society was changing rapidly and many problems were in urgent need of solution. By the Warring States period, various schools of thought arose in society, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and Mohism, who wrote and lectured and argued with each other, giving rise to a flourishing academic scene, later known as the Hundred Schools of Thought. The Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period were therefore the most glorious and splendid times for thought and culture, when the stars shone brightly. During this period, the hundred schools of thought and culture were in full bloom, occupying an important place in the history of Chinese thought. It was this academic freedom of expression that allowed everyone to speak freely, which led to the progress and prosperity of Chinese culture.

Freedom of expression is part of the academic freedom that is being promoted today. Without academic freedom, without openness of thought and expression, there will be no innovative research. Academic freedom is the driving force behind academic development(Song, 2011). As Bertold Rietberg and Jeremy Richardson put it in an incisive editorial attacking the publication of CEU's law, taking the argument to the extreme: "What happens if we don't defend academic freedom?" There is no introduction, no argument or contribution, no analysis, no future conclusions or avenues of research, no more questions raised. Therefore, academic freedom is conducive to the promotion of academic prosperity in universities. We need to defend the place of academic freedom in higher education.

3.3 The role of academic freedom in helping students' development

Academic freedom is one of the most important rights that a faculty member must have individually or collectively in our universities. Academic freedom in higher education provides students with a good atmosphere in which they can communicate freely and express themselves freely. It can be described as a calm atmosphere in which there are no restrictions and which is not disrupted or protected. Without a calm atmosphere, the university cannot escape and truly lose its creative inspirational role; it will become a shaky workshop that only reproduces old ideas that are outdated and rigid, nor will new ideas be generated (Suleiman, 2006). Academic freedom and universities have a long history. Not only is academic freedom indispensable to the origin and development of universities, but it is also indispensable to the cultivation of students' innovative abilities. Academic freedom as a source of innovation(Song, 2011). As a relatively independent teaching and research institution, academic freedom, tolerance and professorial rule are the dominant spirit of modern universities

and the most important cultural and institutional environment for the growth of innovative talents(Wu, 2006). Therefore, academic freedom is conducive to student development, or at least it helps to stimulate innovation and creativity, as well as opening up students' minds.

4 Critical evaluation

4.1 Evaluation

Academic freedom means a loose structure and minimal interference(Donald Kennedy, 2002). We must be free to pursue our areas of research without the fear of administrators (or others) attempting to stifle the academic enterprise. Our ability to engage in Free Speech is entrenched in our constitutional rights(Sinclair, 2018). However, the freedom in academic freedom is relative, not absolute. Absolute freedom can destroy the academic environment by the absence of rules, and everyone speaks with impunity, regardless of the consequences. Academic freedom can only be maintained if it is relative, i.e. if researchers are allowed to achieve academic freedom under the rules. The goal of an institution should be to increase and disseminate knowledge while placing barriers and restrictions on freedom, not to enjoy absolute freedom.(Standler, 2000).

Throughout the history of the development of university education in the world, it can be said that unrestricted academic freedom has never existed in any era or in any country. Engels pointed out that "freedom consists in governing ourselves and external nature according to the knowledge of the necessity of nature, and therefore it is necessarily a product of historical development". This suggests that legal and political interference in academia is always difficult to avoid, and that universities can never ask for direct or indirect government supervision and control.

Although in reality the main body of the right to academic freedom is researchers from universities and other scientific institutions, it should not be limited to this. As an institution of higher education, the university is rooted in academic activity and enjoys considerable academic freedom, but this freedom must be limited to a certain extent, in terms of loyalty and responsibility to humanity and society. As society evolves, universities have a variety of inescapable responsibilities in the development of science, the training of human resources and the service of society(Zhou & Wang， 2006). Furthermore, in some developing countries, such as China, there are no laws and regulations in place to improve academic freedom. Both the Constitution and the Higher Education Law of China have clear provisions on academic freedom, but they are only a guarantee in principle, with no prohibitive norms to limit academic misconduct, and no single regulation to safeguard academic freedom, lacking specific implementation methods and details. Scholars lack the sense of independence and innovation.

The "XueSen Qian Question", which has aroused strong reactions from society, is the strongest voice calling for a sense of innovation among scholars in Chinese universities.

4.2 Suggestions

The specific content of legislation on academic freedom should include: a definition of the connotation of

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academic freedom, the subjects of the right to academic freedom and the scope of its exercise, the specific content and legal relationship between the rights and obligations of academic freedom, and how to protect the right to academic freedom politically, economically and spiritually. Specific sanctions should also be established for infringement of the right to academic freedom or abuse of the right to academic freedom.

In addition, I need to appeal to the fact that academic responsibility is the meaning of university existence and academic freedom is the true meaning of university life. Academic freedom is necessary to achieve academic responsibility, and only with academic freedom can academic responsibility be better achieved. It would be biased to emphasis one aspect of academic freedom over the other. Only by insisting on the unity of academic responsibility and academic freedom will the university prosper(Xiao, 2000).Academic freedom and academic responsibility go hand in hand. In defending the right to academic freedom, we must not forget to take up the corresponding academic responsibility and maintain a good academic atmosphere.

5 Conclusion

Academic freedom is one of the most important pillars of the University and supports its mission to disseminate science, culture and community service. Without academic freedom, universities cannot produce knowledge(Al-Momani, 2020). Academic freedom is of irreplaceable importance to higher education. Academic freedom, as Finkin and Post explain, is closely linked to the highest aims of the College: it is freedom of enquiry, not freedom from professional standards or job duties(Rapoport,2010). Academic freedom and academic responsibility are two opposing sides of the same coin. While universities and researchers enjoy academic freedom, they also need to assume responsibility within the limits of that freedom. Of course, it is undeniable that academic freedom is an integral part of higher education. Academic freedom allows researchers to keep thinking outside the box and to dare to expand new knowledge, thus enabling the enhancement of the academic value of higher education. The enhancement of the academic value of higher education also feeds society with a constant flow of talent, which drives the sustainable development of all sectors of society.

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