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The Reform of Academic Evaluation Mechanism of College Teachers: Logic, Dilemma and Path — Based on the Perspective of Academic Community

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Abstract: Academic evaluation mechanism is considered as the core of scientific research system. It can not only directly guide and regulate the academic behavior of college teachers, but also affect the knowledge production innovation of the whole country and even human society. Fundamentally speaking, academic evaluation of college teachers is a complex academic activity rather than a simple management activity, but the current evaluation mechanism has shown excessive quantitative, simplification and administrative tendency due to the strong thought of performance management. Therefore, preunderstanding the logic of power operation, classification management and procedure regulation of teachers' academic evaluation based on the framework and theoretical perspective of academic community has unique value in promoting the reform of evaluation mechanism. Through practical investigation, it is found that many problems caused by the interweaving of multiple powers, such as the unclear subject boundary, the lack of full respect for the law of knowledge production innovation, the instability of institutional norms based on procedural justice, and the lack of credibility of evaluation results caused by rent-seeking in academic relations are destroying the subjective status of academic community in academic evaluation. To promote the reform of academic evaluation

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mechanism of college teachers, it is necessary to reconstruct the academic evaluation ecology based on procedural justice and knowledge production law on the basis of separation of management and evaluation operation, so as to give better play to the subjective function of academic community.

Keywords: academic community; college teachers; academic evaluation; mechanism; reform

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Academic evaluation is widely regarded as the core of the research system. It not only directly guides and regulates the academic behavior of individual university faculty members, but also affects knowledge production and innovation for the whole nation and even for human society as a whole. At the policy level, in order to improve faculty academic evaluation mechanisms and eliminate the pursuit of quick success and the atmosphere of academic impatience in research, the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Education, and other authorities have successively issued a number of policy documents, including *Several Measures for Eliminating the Undesirable Orientation of "Papers Only" in Science and Technology Evaluation (Trial)* and *Several Opinions on Regulating the Use of SCI-Related Indicators in Higher Education Institutions and Establishing the Correct Evaluation Orientation*. At the practical level, universities across China have also launched related reform measures. Yet compared with the peer-review mechanisms established in British and American universities on the basis of academic communities, China's current practices are still criticized for their strong utilitarian orientation and weak credibility, both of which stem from insufficient attention to the academic community. Fundamentally speaking, the academic evaluation of university faculty is a complex academic activity rather than a simple managerial one; in essence, it is a form of self-regulation and self-recognition within the academic community. However, under the influence of performance managerialism, the current evaluation mechanism has seriously constrained the autonomy of the academic community as the principal evaluator of university faculty, giving rise to an "antinomy" in the evaluation process (SHEN Hong, Lin Zhendong, 2019).

As Robert K. Merton (1970), a founding figure in the sociology of science, observed: "The standards for evaluating a scholar's research contribution (or whether it is recognized by the community) lie only in whether it meets the technical and scholarly requirements constitutive of truth and in the importance of the new knowledge produced." Compared with quantitative, external, and administratively led evaluation, academic community theory advocates academic self-governance and the autonomy of professional groups. It holds that evaluation standards should be based on faculty members' contributions to knowledge production and innovation, and its answers to the essential

questions of who evaluates, what is evaluated, and how evaluation is conducted are more consistent with the inner laws of academic research and knowledge innovation. Existing studies have indeed explored in depth such problems in university faculty academic evaluation as irrational concepts and procedural unfairness, yet major deficiencies remain. Reinterpreting the power logic, classification logic, and procedural-regulation logic of faculty academic evaluation from the analytical framework and theoretical perspective of the academic community is therefore of distinctive guiding value for promoting reform of the evaluation mechanism. In light of this, the present study takes academic community theory as its distinctive perspective, investigates the policy and practical problems in China's academic evaluation of university faculty, and further proposes reform paths aimed at enabling the academic community to perform its central role more fully.

1.The Logic of Reform: Theoretical Formation of the University Faculty Evaluation Mechanism from the Perspective of the Academic Community

The reform of the academic evaluation mechanism for university faculty is essentially a complex process of interaction and contestation among different actors, including faculty members, universities, and the government. It concerns not only the evolution of the internal ecosystem of higher education, but also exerts major influence on the broader external social ecology. In this sense, academic evaluation is not merely a static result but also a dynamic process. From the perspective of the academic community, evaluation is a dynamic and integrated mechanism that follows academic laws and, in accordance with the inner logic of knowledge dissemination, production, differentiation, and integration, relies on peer review by experts and scholars to make value judgments on university faculty members' academic research and achievements. It is therefore both more operable and more capable of sound judgment.

1.1 The Theoretical Formation and Analytical Framework of the Academic Community

The concept of "community" first appeared in ancient Greece, where it referred to a mode of collective life characterized by shared interests and normative values. In academic circles, it is generally believed that community theory in the modern sense originated in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Karl Marx (1995) discussed the basic theoretical issues of community at an early stage, and his scientific anticipation that the future society realizing the free and all-round development of every individual — that is, communist society — would be the true community laid the foundation for community theory. Ferdinand Tönnies (2019) held that community is a durable, real, living organism formed on the basis of human will as well as kinship and locality. Its essential characteristic is that human beings remain closely connected and share commonly understood beliefs, wills, and rules. Building on earlier thinkers, Zygmunt Bauman (2003) further extended the connotations and scope of the concept, defining community as various levels of groups and organizations in society formed on the basis of shared

subjective and objective characteristics, which may be either tangible or intangible. It can be said that the rise of community theory bore the clear marks of its era and social background. In essence, it may be broadly summarized as follows: community primarily concerns relations among people in the course of social development; it is a form of common life, authority structure, or spiritual guidance grounded in ideas and social identity; and it gradually evolved from a substantive entity into an analytical tool for understanding social relations. Seen diachronically, community theory underwent a process of development from the social community to the academic community.

In the second half of the twentieth century, British and American scholars drew on community theory to explore systematically the social behavior of the academic research field, thereby triggering a wave of studies on the academic community. In terms of research content, discussions of the value of the academic community mainly unfolded along both external and internal dimensions: externally, it safeguards the social identity and common interests of groups committed to academic research as a vocation; internally, it provides the platform and conditions for the evaluation, exchange, and storage of scientific information. As for value orientation, the studies of Merton and Thomas S. Kuhn (2012) were especially representative. Merton argued that the academic community must abide by the collective value orientations of universalism, communality, disinterestedness, and organized skepticism. Kuhn used the concept of “paradigm” to explain the consensus and norms of the academic community. In his view, a paradigm is a shared commitment within the academic community to practices, exemplars, rules, and beliefs. Since the 1980s, Chinese scholars have gradually turned their attention to academic community theory and have examined such issues as the power structure (Yan Guangcai, 2009) and inner spirit (Tang Songlin, Wei Tingting, 2015) of the academic community. Overall, however, most Chinese scholarship has mainly introduced and transplanted Western theories of the academic community, while localized practical exploration remains insufficient. Viewed as a whole, both Chinese and international research suggests that the academic community is a vibrant, historical, and plural theoretical system. Researchers in different periods, regions, and countries may understand it and construct it differently, yet they have still reached many shared understandings.

As J. E. McClellan (1985) observed, “Academic communities are to a large extent self-governing; they assign socially recognized roles and status to their members, provide qualifications, establish a series of institutions, and organize and stimulate scientific development at all levels”. The academic community has its own intrinsic value standards, procedural systems, and norms, through which it promotes academic prosperity and progress. Based on the existing research consensus and theoretical framework, academic community theory may be examined from four aspects. First is the subjectivity of the members of the academic community. Members of the academic community take academic research as their vocation; the academic community is a collectivity composed of groups sharing the same research paradigm. The academic community itself is not a coercive entity imposed upon its

members, but it balances relations between internal forces and external forces such as administration and the market, while safeguarding scholars' spirit and space of free inquiry and the relative independence of academic research. Second is its distinctive standards of academic recognition. Within the academic community there are special ethics, value orientations, and standards of academic recognition, which allow scholars from different knowledge fields and "disciplinary matrices" to share common resources, culture, and beliefs while also retaining the distinctiveness of their own disciplines. Third is its commitment to fair and just procedures. The academic community follows the principles of institutional fairness and procedural justice, and plays a supervisory and protective role throughout a scholar's academic career in areas such as appointment and promotion, research funding applications, publication and recognition of achievements, and the acquisition of reputation. Fourth is the authority of the academic community. The academic community is marked by professionalism and self-discipline; it is regarded by its members as a source of emotional, intellectual, and spiritual belonging, enabling them consciously to identify with and comply with the authority of leading scholars and academic ethics, and to take responsibility for their own academic conduct.

1.2 The Reform Logic of the Academic Evaluation Mechanism for University Faculty from the Perspective of the Academic Community

In essence, the academic evaluation of university faculty is a form of self-recognition and self-regulation within the academic community; it cannot be separated from academic research, and the two are symbiotically linked (Wang Xuedian,2020). Since its emergence, academic community theory has continuously refined and improved its own theoretical framework so as to provide models for academic research. With the social problems arising in China's transformation and their projection into the field of higher education, clarifying the reform logic of the academic evaluation mechanism for university faculty from the perspective of the academic community is of distinctive significance for identifying problems and optimizing processes. In light of the foregoing theoretical analysis, reform of the academic evaluation mechanism for university faculty is mainly shaped by the overlapping influence of three kinds of logic.

1.2.1 The logic of power relations: clarifying the academic community's status as the principal evaluator

Within the academic evaluation mechanism for university faculty, there exists an intertwined contest among academic power, administrative power, political power, and democratic power. In actual operation, the interaction of these multiple forms of power can easily become uncoordinated or even seriously imbalanced. A large body of empirical research shows that administrative forces may be both a strong driver of university faculty evaluation and a major obstacle to its development. In essence, the academic evaluation of university faculty is an academic activity, and in an ideal state teacher evaluation should — and can only — be undertaken by the academic community.

This can be explained in two respects. First, advanced knowledge systems and their developmental logic constitute the epistemological foundation and source of legitimacy for the operation of evaluative power within the academic community. Without the possession, allocation, or retention of knowledge, power cannot operate effectively (JOSEPH ROUSE,1995). Knowledge helps establish certain self-evidence for the exercise of power, enabling its object to accept that exercise as natural. In other words, the specialization and refinement of advanced knowledge make it impossible for outsiders to grasp or intervene in it, and accordingly the role of evaluator naturally falls to the academic community. Second, academic autonomy is both the logical starting point and the value pursuit of the operation of evaluative power within the academic community. Academic autonomy is the core value of the academic profession, yet the dominance of administration has to some extent become the fundamental reason why this value cannot be fully realized (Yan Caiguang,2003). The academic community is a collectivity of scholars who share the same research paradigm. Having it serve as the principal evaluator of university faculty belongs to the internal management and regulation of academic life and can genuinely reflect the defining feature of academic autonomy.

1.2.2 The logic of classified management: respecting the internal differences and laws of different disciplines

The logic of classified management in the academic evaluation mechanism for university faculty implies diversity in evaluation methods and indicators. Faculty in different disciplines, positions, and categories should no longer be measured and screened by the same yardstick. At present, however, evaluation indicators, methods, and content for university faculty have become increasingly homogeneous, leading to the homogenization of universities and faculty development, the prevalence of “academic GDP-ism,” and the treatment of “publish or perish” as the supreme rule of academic research. This is not conducive to the long-term development of either university faculty or academic research.

Compared with such homogeneous external evaluation mechanisms, the internal evaluation mechanism based on the academic community can be pluralistic according to the nature and characteristics of different disciplines, and its value criteria can vary across professions (Xu Jilin,2014). Different disciplines have clear boundaries in such basic research paradigms as research objects, the logic of knowledge development, research procedures, research standards, and the forms in which research achievements are expressed. There is therefore no single evaluative tool applicable across all academic fields. Tony Becher classified disciplines into pure hard sciences, pure soft sciences, applied hard sciences, and applied soft sciences according to their different knowledge attributes, and argued that only experts and scholars who have undertaken in-depth research in the same disciplinary field are qualified to conduct the corresponding evaluations. UNESCO’s classification of scientific and technological research into basic research, applied research, and experimental development likewise

rests on respect for the differences among types of scientific research. In short, the logic of classified management in the academic evaluation mechanism for university faculty based on the academic community clarifies the differences among disciplines in research orientation, the forms of research outputs, and the indicators and methods by which value is evaluated. In so doing, it safeguards the objectivity and fairness of both the process and the results of academic evaluation, while also generating a positive incentive effect on faculty development.

1.2.3 The logic of procedural regulation: safeguarding fairness and justice in the academic evaluation of university faculty

Procedural regulation means controlling the exercise of academic power within the academic community through procedural means and methods. Whether the academic community's exercise of power is legitimate and reasonable bears directly on university faculty's ability to protect their lawful rights and on the healthy operation of the evaluation mechanism. As a form of social public power, academic power is not regulated merely with regard to an individual member within the academic community; rather, what is constrained is the collective exercise of power by academic community organizations. As Derek Bok noted, scholars know advanced learning best, and are therefore best qualified to decide academic matters such as curricula, teaching, admissions, and evaluation. Yet the autonomy distinctive of academic power also makes it more prone to deviance in operation. In management practice, phenomena such as rent-seeking in academic power and the domination of evaluation by "academic overlords" are by no means rare. In fact, as early as the mid-twentieth century, U.S. federal courts recognized that university faculty enjoy constitutional rights to "due process," such as the right to be informed and the opportunity to defend themselves when facing dismissal (JOHN S B, WILLIS R, 1976). In China, under the broader background of governing the country according to law, "universities, too, should exercise their autonomy in accordance with the principle of administration according to law" (Dong Baocheng,1997). The constraint imposed by procedural regulation on the exercise of evaluative power by the academic community is chiefly manifested in the requirement that fairness and justice in faculty academic evaluation be realized through due process. Such due process includes not only the institutional arrangements embodied in national laws, regulations, and university charters, but also the intangible values, beliefs, and professional conventions within the academic community itself. In this way, the "cage of institutions" can regulate the lawful and proper exercise of academic evaluative power.

2. Dilemmas of Reform: Reassessing the Academic Evaluation Mechanism for University Faculty from the Perspective of the Academic Community

The academic community is so important to university faculty evaluation, yet in practice cases that ignore the academic judgment and role of the academic community are all too common, leaving

university faculty collectively silent in the face of administratively dominated evaluation, having grown “accustomed to it and processing it according to regulations” (Shen Hong, Lin Zhendong, 2019). In the eyes of those who prioritize performance and instrumental rationality, evaluation methods that are quantifiable, separable, comparable, and supervisable are better suited to the age of scientific management. Over time, this has become an excuse for departing from evaluation led by the academic community. Academic evaluation has far-reaching implications both for university governance and for individual faculty members’ academic careers. Yet when the academic evaluation of university faculty is examined from the perspective of the academic community, it becomes clear that reform still faces multiple dilemmas relating to evaluators, standards, procedures, and outcomes.

2.1 The boundaries among multiple forms of power remain unclear, constraining the academic community’s autonomy

As the principal evaluator Academic community theory holds that although faculty academic evaluation is shaped both by internal powers — such as individual scholars and the academic community — and by external powers — such as government, institutional administration, and social forces — the boundaries among these powers should remain clear in academic evaluation, an activity with its own distinctive value orientation and ethical norms External forces may intervene in faculty academic evaluation only in a restrained and appropriate manner, and only on the basis of respect for the autonomy of the academic community. In actual operation, however, the interweaving of multiple forms of power within the complex field of the university has blurred the scope and boundaries of each, causing academic power to become excessively dependent on adjustment and intervention by administrative power and severely limiting the autonomy and initiative of the academic community as the principal evaluator of faculty academic work.

On the one hand, governmental and intra-institutional administrative power intervenes in, and even dominates, the academic evaluation internal to the academic community. Nominally, the academic committee — as the university’s highest academic decision-making body — bears full responsibility for faculty academic evaluation. Yet because universities are public institutions, the government manages them by means of public power, which is coercive in nature. The government’s monopoly over important personnel powers such as faculty appointment, professional titles, and positions naturally penetrates academic evaluation, including the recognition of academic achievements, project assessment, and quantitative appraisal. In substance, therefore, the academic community enjoys only very limited autonomy in evaluating faculty (Bie Dunrong, 2019). Moreover, contradictions and conflicts among different rules and institutional definitions — for example, the fact that university presidents must simultaneously attend to academic bodies such as academic committees and to administrative affairs handled through presidents’ office meetings — also leave room for the intervention of non-academic power.

On the other hand, the capture and distortion of interests by third-party evaluation agencies in faculty academic evaluation further obstruct the academic community's evaluative autonomy. Third-party evaluation of academic achievements is based on bibliometric theory and the laws of literature distribution to classify and assess academic journals, and thus appears more practical and scientific. This also meets the needs of administrative departments for allocating and managing academic resources, allowing such institutions gradually to expand and giving rise to seven major evaluation institutions and systems, including A Guide to the Core Journals of China, the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index, and the Important Reprinted Source Journals of Reprinted Newspaper and Periodical Materials. Yet, as Eugene Garfield (2004), the founder of the SCI, pointed out, "its principal function is as a retrieval tool; research evaluation is only a derivative function". Excessive obsession with judging papers by the journals in which they appear and with the pursuit of quantification only encourages the tendencies of professional evaluation agencies toward "interest first, fragmented authority, overstepping in evaluation, and power expansion" (Zhang Yaoming,2015), leading to academic evaluation with too many competing authorities and widespread disorder.

2.2 Insufficient respect for the laws of knowledge production and innovation makes it difficult to reflect the differentiated requirements of academic evaluation standards

Evaluation standards are widely regarded as the core of the university faculty evaluation mechanism, as they bear the function of manifesting the values of objectivity, scientific rigor, and professionalism in evaluation. Standards that conform to the objective laws of disciplinary and professional knowledge production are pluralistic and differentiated, and can evaluate scientifically and reasonably the academic productivity and knowledge contributions of faculty members across different disciplines and professions. At present, the government has attempted through a series of policy documents to reverse the current predicament of insufficient differentiation in faculty evaluation standards. The Guiding Opinions on Promoting Reform of Talent Evaluation Mechanisms by Category issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council, as well as the Guiding Opinions on Deepening the Reform of the Professional Title System for Teachers in Higher Education Institutions (Draft for Comments) jointly drafted by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and the Ministry of Education, explicitly call for faculty assessment by category, level, and discipline. Existing research has likewise proposed building appropriate standards on the basis of different faculty-development types, such as teaching-oriented, research-oriented, teaching-and-research balanced, and application-and-development oriented faculty (Zhang Yong, Zhang Yan,2018). Other researchers, through interviews with faculty members in mathematics, mechanical engineering, history, and accounting at a public research university in the U.S. Midwest, found clear disciplinary differences in the academic evaluation practices implemented in American universities (Shen Hong, Wang Jianhui,2017).

In practice, however, constructing faculty academic evaluation standards on the basis of the laws of disciplinary knowledge production is a long historical process. Disciplinary differences exist not only among broad disciplinary categories, but also among different disciplines within the same broad category and even among different fields within the same discipline. For example, history and mathematics are both foundational disciplines, yet the different laws of knowledge production in each lead them along different developmental paths. Moreover, the tension between the requirements of teaching evaluation and research evaluation makes the formulation of corresponding standards even more difficult. Although the government, the academic world, and a small number of elite universities such as Peking University and Zhejiang University have been exploring classified evaluation standards, the evaluation model that conforms to administrative criteria and appointment-and-promotion systems in order to secure one's place in academia has not undergone any fundamental change under the long-standing influence of a highly centralized and instrumentally rational bureaucratic management system. In fact, constructing differentiated evaluation standards for university faculty ought first and foremost to be an academic matter. Yet in Chinese universities, the logic of administrative power operation often prevails, seriously constraining the healthy development of academic self-governance and the effective performance of the academic community's evaluative functions. Under the guidance of the current "administrativized" standards, utilitarian value orientations have been induced among members of universities. Faculty members have become increasingly preoccupied with publishing research outputs and with personal reputation and influence in the academic world, making it difficult for academic evaluation standards to reflect differentiated requirements. Indeed, the situation risks becoming precisely what Max Weber (2006) worried about: under the domination of the "state," the benefits that scholarship enjoys, as well as the freedom to choose scientific work out of genuine interest and to develop one's scholarly strengths, deteriorate in ever more respects.

2.3 The instability of institutional norms grounded in procedural justice makes it difficult to highlight the legitimacy of the academic evaluation process

Instability in institutional norms grounded in procedural justice may, to some extent, lead to the erosion of the academic community's evaluative autonomy, intensify the risk that administrative departments or third-party institutions will interfere with and manipulate the academic community, and threaten academic freedom and autonomy. Although the Higher Education Law and the Regulations on Academic Committees in Higher Education Institutions provide relatively comprehensive provisions on the operation of academic committees' powers, they still offer comparatively little with regard to the procedural arrangements governing the exercise of the committees' evaluative power. This may not only lead academic community organizations, in matters of university faculty evaluation, to make arbitrary judgments or to tolerate hidden corruption such as rent-seeking arising from procedural "discretion"; it also exposes academic evaluative authority to judicial scrutiny. In the case of "Yu Yanru

v. Peking University over the revocation of a doctoral degree,” for example, the degree evaluation committee failed to hear the party’s views in the course of evaluating the revocation decision, thereby violating procedural justice. Accordingly, both the trial court and the appellate court ruled that “Peking University failed to perform due process before making the decision to revoke the degree, thus committing a procedural violation” (Wang Yijun ,2017).

At the level of university charters — the highest internal law within each institution — the instability of institutional norms for faculty academic evaluation is manifested in several respects. First, existing provisions are mainly substantive, with relatively little attention to procedural norms. Current rules focus largely on such substantive matters as the composition of academic committees, qualifications for office, meeting systems, and members’ rights and obligations, while providing few clear operational norms for such crucial procedures as dispute resolution, academic accountability, and academic conflicts. Second, the methods and rules for remedies of rights remain underdeveloped. Where faculty members disagree with an academic committee’s determination and wish to appeal, the relevant rules are often vague; most universities allow only one round of internal reconsideration, while offering no explicit provisions or explanations concerning further appeal if objections remain unresolved. Third, there is an institutional deficiency in disclosure procedures. Most university charters state that “decisions made by the academic committee shall be made public” and that “the operation and performance of the academic committee shall be summarized annually,” yet such provisions leave key questions blurred: to whom information should be disclosed, what exactly should be disclosed, who is responsible if disclosure does not occur, to whom the summary should be reported, and who should be held accountable. This further undermines the legitimacy of the academic community’s evaluation procedures.

2.4 The absence of the academic “gatekeeper” and academic rent-seeking undermine the authority and credibility of evaluation results

For an autonomous academic community, peer review functions as the academic “gatekeeper.” It plays a pivotal role in scientific evaluation, the allocation of academic resources, and the maintenance of the academic community’s self-reproduction and development. It may be said that peer review is both an essential component and the clearest expression of autonomous evaluation by the academic community. Yet the peer evaluation currently operating in China is in fact detached from the academic community. This is reflected in the anonymous voting mechanism used in current peer evaluation deliberations. In other words, the extent to which evaluators follow the values and norms of the academic community and uphold academic responsibility is not itself subject to the supervision of the academic community. This leaves room for academic rent-seeking. Within an academic network marked by “power domination, personal relations, and lack of standards” (Li Jianming,1989), peer review — the most important evaluation method of the academic community — finds it difficult to perform its proper

function, and the authority and credibility of evaluation results have come under intense public doubt. In recent years, incidents such as “Dr. Zhai” at the Beijing Film Academy being unfamiliar with CNKI, the Nanjing University “404 professor” controversy, and the repeated retraction of Chinese scholars’ papers by international journals have left the academic world facing an embarrassing loss of dignity. Although these cases do not directly target the internal faculty evaluation activities of university academic communities, the problems they reveal — such as deviant academic conduct and the decline of academic spirit — have further damaged the authority and credibility of academic evaluation results.

As Chen Xiaochan (1989) once remarked, “When a practicable ideal is about to disappear, when pragmatism rises and mediocrity is applauded, when false science already proceeds unchecked, and scholarship has not yet freed itself from rigidity and vulgarity — this is a tragedy” (Zhang Bin,2012). The absence of peer review as an academic “gatekeeper” has triggered a domino effect of doubt among university faculty regarding the fairness and justice of the academic community. Relevant data show that faculty members’ average level of recognition with respect to project review and academic autonomy is only 4.57. In fact, in Western countries with strong higher education systems, peer review has undergone a long evolutionary process, and its superiority has long been widely recognized across society. It is broadly applied in the humanities and social sciences, natural sciences, philosophy, and other fields. The United Kingdom’s Research Excellence Framework (REF), for example, adopts an evaluation method in which peer expert review plays the primary role and bibliometric indicators serve only as support, thereby helping ensure fairness in the allocation of academic resources. At present, China’s relevant authorities have launched a series of initiatives aimed at overcoming the “four onlys,” the “five onlys,” and “SCI supremacy” in academic evaluation, which to some extents have curbed academic rent-seeking. Yet deeply entrenched problems cannot be reversed overnight, and the utilitarian impatience, crisis of trust, and erosion of academic faith in faculty evaluation cannot be remedied in the short term.

3. Pathways of Reform: Optimizing the Academic Evaluation Mechanism for University

Faculty from the Perspective of the Academic Community

Fundamentally speaking, the optimization of the academic evaluation mechanism for university faculty ultimately depends on the independence and maturity of the academic community. An autonomous and free academic community is the premise and foundation for achieving the greatest possible objectivity and fairness in academic evaluation (Guo Weilu, Lin Chuili,2012). The academic community has its own organizational structures and institutional arrangements and is fully capable of maintaining its own metabolism and ecological balance. In fact, in order to ensure the full implementation of the academic community and academic power, developed countries generally establish academic senates or councils and have formed relatively complete institutional designs concerning organizational setup, basic

responsibilities, operational mechanisms, and relations with administrative teams (Yao Rong,2016). Although there are many differences between domestic and foreign academic ecologies, the irreplaceable value of the academic community in maintaining fairness in faculty evaluation and promoting academic development is beyond doubt. On the basis of the foregoing theoretical analysis of the academic community, improving the academic evaluation mechanism for university faculty requires breaking free from the habitual opposition between academic power and administrative power and, on that basis, carrying out fundamental reform of the evaluation mechanism so that the academic community can more fully perform its central role in faculty academic evaluation.

3.1 Improving the operating mechanism of academic evaluative power on the basis of separating academic and administrative affairs

As noted above, reform of the academic evaluation mechanism for university faculty is essentially about rebalancing multiple power relations — in other words, the question of who evaluates. If the boundaries of evaluative power remain unclear and chaotic, then a faculty evaluation mechanism sustained only by regulations will fall into a vicious cycle in which the more it is controlled, the more disorderly it becomes, and the more disorderly it becomes, the more it is controlled. Faculty evaluation that relies excessively on direction from administrative departments can no longer meet the needs of the times or of university development. Therefore, in the current reform of university faculty academic evaluation, administrative departments should make the necessary transfer of power, returning the authority to evaluate faculty to the academic world and promoting the proper positioning of both academia and administration so that peer review can play its central role.

First, educational administrative departments should proactively transfer the authority to evaluate faculty academic work and promote academic peer review from the top down. In the current Chinese context, this is both necessary and urgent. Reforming the long-established faculty academic evaluation mechanism dominated by administrative power will encounter strong path dependence produced by entrenched distributions of power and interest; this requires the cooperation and active adjustment of government public power. On this basis, it is necessary to improve the foundational institutional supply for peer review, providing clear operational norms regarding such key matters as the rights and obligations of peer experts, organization and management, supervision, and accountability. Academic matters should return to academia, and administrative matters to administration, thereby implementing the academic community's principal status in faculty academic evaluation.

Second, the academic evaluation function of third-party evaluation agencies should be understood scientifically, and both external and internal evaluation should be used rationally. As noted earlier, third-party evaluation has its own scientific and objective merits. The original intention behind such indicators as SCI, SSCI, and CSSCI was likewise to provide a basis for academic evaluation. Regrettably, once academic research became tied to the distribution of interests, it generated an

excessive and distorted pursuit of indicators. Administrative departments should therefore abandon as soon as possible the “one-size-fits-all” and “piece-rate” style of evaluation, and by regulating the entry, exit, and supervision of third-party evaluation agencies in the academic market, create a diversified evaluation mechanism in which academic peer review is primary while third-party and governmental evaluation play supplementary roles. Japan’s General Guidelines for National Research and Development Evaluation, which explores ways of combining third-party evaluation with internal academic-community evaluation —for example, by encouraging the establishment of third-party evaluation institutions and giving full play to their supervisory and review functions — also offers useful lessons for third-party participation in China’s university faculty academic evaluation.

Finally, it is necessary to improve the peer-evaluation system based on the academic community. In concrete evaluation practice, universities should strengthen the selection and allocation of experts within academic community organizations at the institutional level. In response to the increasingly fine specialization of disciplines, “small-peer” expert evaluation should be implemented. Evaluation by experts from the same second-level or third-level disciplinary field is more professional and scientific when assessing frontier developments and innovative academic achievements within that field. By making use of modern technologies such as the internet and big data to overcome geographical constraints, universities can also introduce international academic peers into faculty academic evaluation, so as to assess more objectively the international influence of faculty members’ representative academic achievements and realize compatibility between domestic and international, and between academic and social, perspectives.

3.2 Optimizing classified academic evaluation standards on the basis of the laws of knowledge production and innovation

From a structural perspective, classified evaluation standards for university faculty serve as the “guiding light” for the implementation of concrete evaluation activities and play an irreplaceable role in regulating the order of academic development. Faculty evaluation often affects the whole system once it is set in motion: it involves multiple levels of government administration in science and technology, finance, and education; universities in different regions; and various kinds of social evaluation organizations. This means that formulating new evaluation standards is time-consuming, difficult, and highly sensitive. In the history of higher education, scholars such as Ernest Boyer, Lee S. Shulman, Robert M. Hutchins, and Tony Becher, drawing on university positioning and faculty functions, proposed different views of the classification of scholarship. Boyer’s well-known categories — the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application, and the scholarship of teaching — have all laid a solid foundation for further exploration of classified academic evaluation standards.

On the one hand, the academic community should play the principal role in the formulation of

classified evaluation standards for university faculty. Those under the eaves know where the house leaks; those in the fields know where governance fails. The judgments of academic experts and peers regarding the essential laws and frontier trends of scholarship and disciplinary development must be respected. It is necessary to establish dynamically adjustable value standards that combine scientific rigor with pertinence, current performance with developmental potential, and qualitative with quantitative evaluation methods. At the same time, a certain degree of evaluative autonomy should be granted to grassroots academic community organizations. Because the university is a bottom-heavy organization, the autonomy of grassroots academic community organizations is an internal requirement for activating its academic heartland (Yao Rong,2016). Faculty evaluation based on grassroots academic community organizations can set and use evaluation indicators more reasonably in light of disciplinary differences, realize differentiated evaluation, and encourage faculty of different types and positions to pursue excellence.

On the other hand, classified evaluation standards should be implemented for the recognition of faculty achievements, appointment and promotion, and the allocation of resources in accordance with the internal logic of disciplinary knowledge production. Different disciplines differ in knowledge structure and educational objectives, and their forms of academic output and influencing factors also vary significantly (PELZ D C, ANDREWS F M,1976). Basic disciplines take the exploration of the origins of knowledge as their primary task and represent an endogenous mode of knowledge discovery; evaluation of faculty in such disciplines should therefore place greater emphasis on the intrinsic value of knowledge and its academic influence. Applied disciplines, by contrast, place greater emphasis on the practical utility and social value of knowledge, and evaluation should accordingly focus more on economic and social benefits and actual contributions. In addition, philosophy and the social sciences, the natural sciences, and the humanities each have their own disciplinary logic of development.

3.3 Reshaping safeguards for academic-community self-governance on the basis of procedural justice

As Jürgen Habermas argued, the root of the legitimacy crisis in modern society lies in the dominance of purposive-rational action, whereas legitimacy itself depends on the due procedures through which law is produced. Due process applies equally to faculty academic evaluation. The basic precondition for the academic community to become an important factor in academic evaluation is that the information it provides must be procedurally fair, impartial, and consistent with professional norms. Yet when academic experts rely mainly on moral self-discipline to make value judgments about the academic level of university faculty, it becomes difficult to determine by relatively objective means whether evaluation results that carry subjective tendencies are fair. Under such circumstances, reasonable and fair procedures can lead those being evaluated to respect and trust the results. In this sense, procedural justice effectively becomes a sufficient as well as necessary condition of substantive justice. So long as procedure is proper, the legitimacy of the result follows necessarily. It is therefore

both necessary and urgent to safeguard the fairness and legitimacy of academic evaluation procedures for university faculty through institutional regulation, to protect the lawful rights and interests of the parties concerned, and to reduce the frequency of academic injustice and conflict.

More concretely, first, the institutional regulation of the exercise of academic evaluative power should be improved. The academic community's exercise of academic judgment, evaluative authority, and discretion is a concentrated expression of academic freedom, but academic freedom without constraints easily breeds rent-seeking and academic misconduct. Because evaluation results are closely related to faculty development, the academic community's evaluative activities must establish clear systems governing the exercise of academic power and strictly follow the rules of academic evaluation, so that evaluative power is exercised only within the bounds of institutional regulation. Second, an effective and timely information-disclosure system should be established. Before, during, and after evaluation, relevant information should be disclosed selectively to different stakeholders. Basic evaluation information should be disclosed to the party being evaluated, without involving the personal information of review experts. The basic information of the evaluated faculty member and the corresponding evaluation results should be disclosed to the school, the department, and society, thereby accepting democratic supervision through multiple channels. Third, a dual relief mechanism combining academic and judicial channels should be established for university faculty academic evaluation. Given the strong professionalism and autonomy of university faculty evaluation, not all academic disputes should be handed over directly to judicial departments. On the basis of improving the systems of academic appeal, academic adjudication, and academic reconsideration, judicial review may be introduced appropriately. In this way, universities can retain relative independence and freedom in handling academic affairs while faculty members' lawful rights and interests are also protected.

3.4 Cultivating a community evaluation environment grounded in a healthy academic research ecology

In the academic context, academic ecology refers to the cluster formed by the academic community together with the rules, norms, moral principles, and scholarly ethos generated in academic activities. In essence, the current absence of the academic "gatekeeper" and the frequent disorder associated with academic rent-seeking stem from an imbalance in the ecology of academic research, which has prevented the academic community from fully exercising autonomy and initiative in academic evaluation. Put differently, academic ecology and community-based academic evaluation interact with and shape each other. The special nature of academic research lies in the fact that academic problems cannot truly be solved merely through constraints and regulation imposed by external forces such as administration and society. Only by forming strong mechanisms of academic self-discipline and self-purification within the academic community itself can the academic ecology be transformed qualitatively from the inside out and from isolated points to the broader whole, thereby rebuilding the public credibility of academic evaluation for university faculty.

On the one hand, a mechanism of academic self-discipline should be formed within the academic community, regulating evaluative behavior through the inner psychological adjustment and self-restraint of academic individuals. First, a sense of responsibility should be cultivated within the academic community. This sense of responsibility is not externally imposed; rather, it is a purely self-conscious academic value judgment made on the basis of the evaluator's own academic values in the course of evaluating university faculty. Second, academic character should be forged within the academic community. Respect for the value of university faculty's academic achievements should be a basic scholarly virtue of evaluators. Whether academic evaluation is reasonable has important consequences not only for the individual development of the person being evaluated, but also for the academic reputation of the university and even of the academic world as a whole. Those who hold evaluative power must therefore possess sound academic character and assess breakthrough, original, and disruptive academic achievements in a fair and reasonable manner. Third, the moral principles within the academic community must be upheld. Moral principles are the decisive factor in forming a mechanism of academic self-discipline and are the basic requirement for academic individuals engaged in scholarly activity. In concrete faculty evaluation, academic individuals must remain steadfast in their enduring pursuit of morality and truth and defend academic integrity.

On the other hand, a mechanism of academic self-purification should be established within the academic community, regulating evaluative behavior through the collective scholarly atmosphere and institutional constraints within the group. First, an academic integrity system for evaluation experts should be established, recording such evaluation-related academic information as experts' basic information and records of academic misconduct. Review experts are the main participants in university faculty academic evaluation, and their academic integrity directly affects evaluation quality and the credibility of evaluation results. A system of academic integrity should therefore be made as open and transparent as possible, so that interference from non-academic factors has nowhere to hide. Second, systems of evaluative accountability and withdrawal should be developed. Faculty academic evaluation is not about immediate gains and losses; experts' evaluative activities should proceed from an academic standpoint responsible to intellectual history, and their judgments should stand the test of time and practice. All evaluation should therefore be approached with caution, for no one can escape the judgment of history (Yang Yusheng, 2010). In addition, the circumstances under which evaluation experts must withdraw should be clearly specified. Experts should be permitted to apply for voluntary withdrawal, while academic individuals who have been subjected to administrative or criminal penalties, or who have engaged in impersonation, abuse of power, disclosure of evaluation information, or other conduct obstructing fairness and justice in evaluation, should be prohibited from continuing to participate in faculty academic evaluation.

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