The Connotation and Denotation of the Spiritual Culture of the University*

XU Mingzhu

Chinese People's Armed Police Force Academy, Langfang, China

WANG Liansen

Shandong Women's University, Jinan, China;

Shandong University, Jinan, China

The spiritual culture of the university is the unique values, beliefs and pursuit, school spirit and study style, and moral sentiments that are condensed and accumulated through thinking and practice, which is recognized by generations of students and staffs and continually exerting an important effect on the late-comers in the long-term development of the university. The spiritual culture of the university mainly refers to the university idea and the university spirit, which has the features of entophytes, collectivity, characteristic, unity, epochal character, stability, accumulation, mixture, and so on.

Keywords: spiritual culture, university culture, university philosophy, university spirit

Introduction

In the booming development of the higher education of the world, the university culture especially the spiritual culture has attracted the increasing attention of the theory and practice circle of the higher education. It is of foundational significance for the construction of the spiritual culture of the university, and then the whole university culture system to explore the connotation and denotation of the concept of spiritual culture of the university.

The Concept of the Spiritual Culture of the University

University is not only an objective "material existence," but it is more a kind of "cultural existence" and "spiritual existence" (Yang, 2006). The essence of university is a function-unique cultural institution, and the institution of higher education that inherits, studies, integrates, and innovates the profound academics and is correlated and separate with the economic and political institutions of the society. It is not only the product of the development of human culture to a certain stage, but also a unique university culture that is gradually formed by historical accumulation, its own efforts and the effects of the external environment on the basis of

* **Acknowledgement:** Thanks for the academic funds from the Humanities and Social Science Research Project of Ministry of Education (Grant No. 15YJA880069) and Research Project of China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Society (Grant No. 2015Y11).

XU Mingzhu, associate professor, Department of Basic, Chinese People's Armed Police Force Academy.

WANG Liansen, associate professor, School of Tourism, Shandong Women's University; researcher, Institute of Higher Education, Shandong Women's University; associate professor, Research Center for Higher Education, Shandong University.

long-term running practice (Wang, 2005). The university culture generally refers to all activities or the mode of activity inside the university, and its cultural elements what have the real and potential effects on all members of the school especially the students include the spiritual culture which is formed mainly by the values, the pursuit of the ideal, thinking mode and moral emotion, and so on; institutional culture which is composed mainly of organizational structure and operational rules of the university; environmental culture which consists mainly of physics space and physical facilities of the university. The spiritual culture is the driving force, the core, the soul, and the key to the construction of the university culture, the institutional culture, and environmental culture rotates around the principle axis of the spiritual culture under the force of spiritual culture, thus forming a harmonious cultural environment (Sui, 2004).

To explore the “spiritual culture,” we need to fully understand the meaning of the “spirit” in the first place. “Spirit,” opposite to “material” and deemed as the synonymous concept of “consciousness” by materialism, refers to the phenomenon of people’s inner world, including conscious aspects, such as thinking, will, emotion, and other mental activities and unconscious aspects. University is a kind of social “subject,” then it must have its own intrinsic values and spiritual orientation.

Synthesizing the point of view of the scholars, “the spiritual culture of the university” is the unique values, beliefs and pursuit, school spirit and study style, and moral sentiments that are condensed and accumulated through thinking and practice, which is recognized by generations of students and staff and continually exerting an important effect on the late-comers in the long-term development of the university.

The Connotation of the Spiritual Culture of the University

Connotation, also known as “inner content,” refers to the specific attributes of objects reflected in a concept. Exploring its essence, the spiritual culture of the university mainly has the following characteristics:

1. Entophytes. The formation of the spiritual culture of the university originates from the internal of the subject of “university,” though has affected by the outside world and has contacted with the outside world, it is not forced by the outside world.

2. Collectivity. The spiritual culture of the university is a kind of group psychological tendency and mental state, in a sense, it is the summarization of psychological and mental state of the teachers and students, it is the common spirit of the students and staff, which cannot be represented by the spirit of a population level or a small number of people’s spirit.

3. Characteristic. The spiritual culture of the university is a reflection of the unique personality of the university. Because of the diversity of the historical background, categories, and levels of the university, the formation and performance of the university spirit must have their own characteristics.

4. Unity. Only when the idea and emotion of the university people interacts with each other and are externalized into the behavior and style to reach the unity of the idea, emotion, and style, can the spiritual culture of the university be able to form and be affirmed. Meantime, only when the unity is achieved, will a huge spiritual influence be produced.

5. Epochal character. The spiritual culture of the university is the reflection of the spirit of the times and social values in the colleges and universities and reflects the distinctive characteristics of the times. The generation and development of the university spirit culture cannot be separated from the background of the development of the society and the influence of the big trend, and cannot be separated from the direction and purpose of running a school under the specific background and conditions (Hao & Sun, 2005).

6. Stability. The main body of the university spirit is the people who live in the university, including the management group represented by the president, the teacher group represented by the professor, and the student group represented by the outstanding students. The university spirit is a relatively stable group psychological mind-set and spiritual state owned by these groups.

7. Accumulation. The university culture is definitely not overnight to form. It is accumulated in long-term education, teaching, scientific research, and social service practice; and the representation of the overall appearance, level, characteristics and cohesion, inspiration, and vitality of a university.

8. Mixture. The spiritual culture of the university is abstract and concrete, invisible and visible, although not necessarily written. It is deeply rooted in the hearts of the people, transmitted in people's deportment, active in every corner of the university. It not only has the "virtual" side, but also has the "real" side (Zhang & Dong, 2005). "Virtual" is because it wanders in the university educational philosophy, development strategy, rules and regulations, and all aspects of specific school affairs, only to be sensed and difficult to explain in words, more difficult to quantify. "Real" is because it is "grounded" in the category of concept and behavior, quietly playing a role in the daily management, teaching, scientific research, and service of the university, in every time and everywhere. That is to say, university spirit culture "can be seen nowhere," but also "can be observed everywhere."

The Denotation of the Spirit Culture of the University

Denotation refers to the object with special attributes reflected in concepts that are all things that are referred to in the concept. To be specific, the concept of the university spirit culture refers to the university philosophy and the university spirit. University philosophy is basically ideal, it is an epistemic and comprehensive structural philosophical concept on spirit and consciousness level, it is theoretical and systematical ideal system, which has relatively stable, continuous, and directive cognition. While the university spirit is fundamentally realistic. It refers to the values, the moral sentiments, and behavior styles, which are formed during the development of history, created and identified by teachers and students, as well as the unique quality that can be reflected. The university philosophy will gradually form university spirit, and which will affect the establishment of it (Qin, 2005).

University Philosophy

University philosophy is an abstract summary for ideas, spirit tendency, and philosophical belief formed after long-term rational thinking and practicing. It is primarily a rational understanding summary to the cognitive object. Some cognitive object can be recognized from different perspective and different aspect, therefore, it tends to form a series of relative ideas to recognized them and constitute a system of concept.

University is an entity substance or organization institution. Any entity or organization has certain function and the rules of survival and development, as well as the ways of realizing and refining its function. University philosophy is the overall view and basic concept of the university, and is also the judgment to the metaphysical value of university. It includes three organic components: What is university, how to run it, and how to educate in university. Concept system consisted of understanding to the above questions is university philosophy.

Core philosophy. The answer to what is university forms the qualitative concept in the philosophy/concepts of university. It is mainly used to identify the nature of university, that is what is it more likely to be?. While position/orientation concept is mainly used to ascertain the university liability, that is the orientation of

university. And the orientation embodies universally the missions of university which emphasizes the social responsibility and the responsibility of seeking knowledge and truth, university education and academic as well.

Philosophy/concept of running a university. Essentially, the university-running ideas refer to create a university itself. The rational knowledge of the university-running idea is actually a systematic future-oriented ideal based on realistic foundation. And the rational knowledge on “how to run it” is more incline to realize the university’s ideal on internal operation principle, rules, and behavior. This ideal and operation for the ideal are the power source of university development. University-running idea is the sum of deal, position, aim, and methods of running a university, and it is also an open theoretical system which directly instructs university’s behavior, impacts the play of the functions of training on students and research development, and serving the social community as well.

Education philosophy/concept. The answer to how to cultivate students in college consists of the education philosophy/concept among university philosophy/concept. University education philosophy/concept is rational cognition of the education subjects on university education and its phenomenon, and is the value orientation of university education. The university undertakes the important responsibility of the students’ improvement which is the fundamental function for itself. Therefore, the question which the educators and administrators of every college and university must answer is that what kind of people are going to be trained and how to train. The answer to such two questions makes up of education philosophy/concept. The answer to what kind of are going to be trained makes up of the education purpose, education ideal, and education belief of university philosophy/concept; the answer to how to train makes up of the education thought, education idea, education content, and education method. These philosophy/concepts act as the guide and direction of education practice.

University philosophy/concept which belongs to an ideogenetic and spiritual category reacts to the relevant operational and behavioral practicing activities and plays a role of theoretical guidance for practice. As for the concept connotation of university philosophy/concept, first of all, from the horizontal point of view, different universities have different university philosophy/concepts. The answers to the three questions above reflect the characters and features of a university. Secondly, from vertical perspective, no university keeps always remaining the same university philosophy/concept. The university evolves with the development of the society; so does the university philosophy/concept. Namely, university has social conditionality and distinct characteristics of the era (Yuan & Li, 2004).

In conclusion, university philosophy/concept is people’s general view and basic concept about university world, is the ontology of university’s basic views, and rational knowledge of the university itself as well. University philosophy/concept has ontology meaning on university, which makes people understand and grasp the outside world in mind, and has huge impact on the university development once formed. As for the presidents, university philosophy/concept becomes the core idea and philosophical premise before their taking actions during managing a university. It is because they could grasp university philosophy/concept in a rational basis that university presidents could stick to his basic position and clear the university development direction while managing (Sui, 2000).

The Spirit of the University

The spirit of the university is formed and developed in the course of the development of the university, which has a stable and rich connotation after a long history. University spirit embodies the value and the

survival significance of the university, which shows that the university is different from other organizations. Free spirit, “independent spirit,” “scientific spirit,” “humanistic spirit,” “creative spirit,” and “critical spirit” are the common and general sense of university spirit.

The spirit of freedom and independence. The spirit of freedom is the soul of the university spirits, which is also the foundation of the emergence and development of the other university spirits. The spirit of freedom is mainly reflected in the following three aspects: The first is the freedom of thought, which makes universities become places where ideas freely develop. Modern universities are the birthplace of knowledge, ideas, and the rational spirit. Not only do modern universities train high-quality personnel, they also generate ideas and knowledge and provide the society with moral ideals. A university that can really take its social responsibilities must have free spirit space. The second is academic freedom, which mainly involves the freedom of teaching, the freedom of research, and the freedom of learning. Brubacher (1982) incisively pointed out in *On the Philosophy of Higher Education* that freedom is the prerequisite for the pursuit of truth, that “to ensure the accuracy and validity of knowledge, scholars must be able to pursue their activities guided only by the canons of truth, a guidance independent of such extraneous pressures as those of church, state, or economic interests” (Brubacher, 1982). The third is freedom of speech, which makes universities become places where academic ideas are freely expressed. University should have the courage to emancipate the mind, supporting and encouraging open and free communication.

Academic independence epitomizes the consciousness of the pursuit of truth. The university people are supposed to have independence and creative awareness that are featured as self-reliance and self-reinforcement, and consciously combining the academic research with social development and human ideals, and are supposed to have the spirit to reform and innovate and to change the world. German educator Karl Jaspers said that the university is a public place for the pursuit of truth, and all the studies should serve for the truth, that it is the basic requirement of the human spirit to pursue truth in the university. He also pointed out that the teachers and students are free to pursue truth without any direct and actual responsibilities that they are only responsible for the truth itself that the researchers jointly struggle for truth (Karl, 1999).

Scientific spirit and humanistic spirit. Considering the responsibility of era to achieve the prosperity of the nation, to respect science is not only the radical and fundamental task of the national cultural construction, but also another feature of the spiritual culture of the universities in the new century. The university, with the persistent spirit to pursue truth and goodness and beauty, reveals the mysteries of the universe and inquires about the philosophy of human culture. The ideal university should be the place where we explore the mystery of life and the universe, transfer, create, and apply the profound knowledge, generate ideas and knowledge, enlighten the society, and cultivate high-level specialized talents that the society needs, where we criticize and change the society with our conscience and provide the society with social and moral ideals. All above actually represent the great scientific spirit that humanity and science are in unity. Without this spirit, the university might spread falsehood and sow mediocrity, making mankind grope in blind, and wander at lost and even away from the path of virtue, leading to the destruction of the human peace.

The innovative spirit and critical spirit. University of the new era should guide every aspect and every link of the university construction with the innovative spirit, make it the core and source of the construction and development of the university in particular high-level university to enhance the capability of independent innovation, grasp the main line of concept innovation—innovation of talents cultivation—science and technology innovation—theoretical innovation—construction of innovation capacity—institutional innovation,

constantly promote the concept innovation, education innovation, technological innovation, theoretical innovation, and institutional innovation, reinforce the cultivation of innovative talents, and constantly promote the construction of the innovation capacity and the innovation system.

The main feature of the critical spirit is seeking difference and transcending, which is the existence value of the university and a magic weapon for a university to maintain its status and vitality in the social organism. Social development is inseparable from criticism, because the development of society will never be perfect. Many Western scholars believe that criticism is the essence of the university, which is the essential factors that distinguishes the university from the other organizations, that the university always criticizes the current truth with a higher truth. The reason why university possesses a critical spirit is closely related to the fact that it is a place to study profound knowledge. University is the place to pursue knowledge, to explore the unknown, and to study science, and what it pursues is the actual essence of the object.

Therefore, the process of the pursuit constantly transcends and denies itself, in which common sense is constantly exceeded, criticized and negated. Therefore, it can be said that the critical spirit of the university is determined by the university functions, as long as the functions of the university do not change, the critical spirit of the university does not change.

Conclusion

The spiritual culture of the university is the unique values, beliefs and pursuit, school spirit and study style, and moral sentiments that are condensed and accumulated through thinking and practice, which is recognized by generations of students and staffs and continually exerting an important effect on the late-comers in the long-term development of the university. As a kind of implicit culture, the core of the university culture, spiritual culture has the features of entophytes, collectivity, characteristic, unity, epochal character, stability, accumulation, mixture, and so on. The spiritual culture of the university mainly refers to the university idea which includes core philosophy, philosophy/concept of running a university, education philosophy/concept, also to the university spirit characterized by freedom and independence, scientific spirit and humanistic spirit innovative spirit and critical spirit.

References

- Brubacher, J. S. (1982). *On the philosophy of higher education* (p. 44). San Francisco, Washington, London: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Hao, G. R., & Sun, Y. C. (2005). Spiritual and cultural construction in college campus. *Journal of Jinzhou Medical College (Social Science Edition)*, 3(4), 68-70. (in Chinese)
- Karl, J. (1999). *What is the education* (p. 69). J. Zou (Trans.). Beijing: Joint Publishing Company. (in Chinese)
- Qin, S. D. (2005). Chinese university culture research (p. 18) (Doctoral dissertation, Fudan University, Shanghai). (in Chinese)
- Sui, Y. F. (2000). University mission: The concept of the university's orientation and its practical significance. *Exploring Education Development*, (9), 18. (in Chinese)
- Sui, Y. F. (2004). Good idea of university and the construction of university culture. *Educational Research*, 290(3), 14-21. (in Chinese)
- Wang, J. S. (2005). Scientific connotation of university culture. *Journal of Higher Education*, 26(10), 5-10. (in Chinese)
- Yang, F. J. (2006). The university's mission and the responsibility of students. *Wenhui Daily*, 2006-6-18. (in Chinese)
- Yuan, Y. K., & Li, R. (2004). University idea, university spirit and university culture. *China Electric Power Education*, 81(4), 8. (in Chinese)
- Zhang, J. X., & Dong, Y. C. (2005). Review and ideas of university culture research. *China University Teaching*, (3), 22. (in Chinese)