A Survey of Degree Standards System in China's Higher Education

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\textbf{Abstract.} The degree standard is a significant channel to improve the connotation development of higher education. It is believed that to acknowledge scientifically and rationally degree system is the prerequisite condition to establish degree standards framework. This paper aims to expound degree conferring and degree standards in China’s higher education. Several elements were considered it included longitudinal and horizontal dimensions of degree system, and the interaction between the elements of degree system. Based on this, it provides a new perspective from the classification of talents cultivation types to reconstruct degrees standards framework in China’s higher education.

1. \textbf{Introduction}

The Standing Committee of National People's Congress approved the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Academic Degrees in 1980. In 1981, the State Council approved the Provisional Measures for Implementing the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Academic Degrees in which the academic standards are regulated for three grades of academic degrees, such as Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree and Doctor's Degree. The degree system has been set up from then on, which has strongly promoted the quality of China’s higher education, and standardized and systematic management. According to the Regulations and Provisional Measures, Bachelor's Degree shall be conferred after the undergraduate study, and Master's and Doctor's Degree shall be conferred in the period of the graduate study. However, the degrees standards system is a significant channel to improve the connotation development of higher education. It is believed that to acknowledge scientifically and rationally degree system is the prerequisite condition for establishing degree standards system. In this paper, to expound the degree standards system framework in China’s higher education, several elements were considered, included bachelor’s degree, master’s degree and doctor’s degree as the longitudinal levels dimensions and horizontal types dimensions divided into academic degrees, professional degrees and honorary degree, and the interaction between elements of degree system in China’s higher education.

2. \textbf{China’s Higher education degree system}

2.1 \textbf{China’s higher education Degree system constituting analysis}

In the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Academic Degrees (1980), it was dictated that higher education would carry out degree institution, including bachelor’s degree, master’s degree and doctorate degree three grades or levels at present. The degrees’ categories in China’s higher education are divided into academic degree, professional degree and honorary degree; three types, only one of which is honorary doctorate degree. As a result, China’s higher education degree system framework in essence is a 3-3 matrix model (as fig.1), which is composed of bachelor’s-master’s-doctor’s three degrees levels and academic-professional degree-honorary three degrees types.

Academic degree is yet called "scientific degree" in China, and that is one type of degrees divided into by the nature of the award of academic degree requirements and characteristics. The academic requirement of academic degree conferring generally focuses on the theory and academic research,
such as it has creatively academic activities and higher level scientific research ability, and grasps on this subject as well as solid theoretical knowledge and so on. However, in Europe and America, philosophy degree is the main academic degree type.

Professional degree is another type of degrees, also called "vocational degree", which different from academic degree. The mission of the professional degree education is to meet the needs of society economic development for specific profession or job, and to cultivate the high-level application talents acclimatizing oneself to actual work need of these professions or posts. The China professional degree is equal of UK Postgraduate taught degree in graduate education level.

Honorary doctorate degree is to honor foreign outstanding scholars, scientists or famous statesman and social activist in academic, economy, education, science, culture and health, and other fields, as well as the social development and human progress in the cause of outstanding contributions. Honorary doctorate degree is approved by the academic degrees committee of the state council to award prominent individuals abroad.

![Higher Education Degree System Framework in China](image)

Figure 1. Higher Education Degree System Framework in China.

### 2.2 Degree conferring ways and quantitative analysis

#### 2.2.1 Academic degree conferring ways and quantitative analysis

Academic degree conferring ways are according to vertical stratification and transverse classification. In the vertical stratification dimensionality, academic degree is awarded by bachelor’s degree, master's degree and doctorate degree. In the transverse classification dimensionality, academic degree is awarded by disciplines, such as philosophy, economics, law, education, literature, history, science, engineering, agronomy, medicine, military science, management science and arts for a total of 13 disciplines (as fig.2). By 2012, the total number of postgraduate students by academic field in China’s higher education has already hit 396,976[1], and that occupies 71.61% of amount (486,455) in graduates (exclusive of honorary degree conferring students).
2.2.2 Professional degree conferring ways and quantitative analysis

Professional degree conferring ways are also according to vertical stratification and transverse classification. In the vertical stratification dimensionality, professional degree is awarded by bachelor's degree, master's degree and doctorate degree too. In the transverse classification dimensionality, professional degree conferring ways based on majors. Generally speaking, professional degree is only awarded for master level. For instance, now in China higher education professional master’s degrees include education, art and so on 39 types, however professional bachelor’s degree is only awarded in architecture and professional doctorate degree is awarded in engineering, education, clinical medicine, veterinarian and stomatology 5 types. Besides, every year national professional degree grant number from China’s government is presenting the rapid growth trend, such as 1995-2009 academic year national professional degree grant number (as fig.3). By 2012, the total number of postgraduate students by professional degree in China’s higher education has already hit 89,479 and that occupies 18.39% of amount (486,455) in graduates (exclusive of honorary degree conferring students).

Figure 2. Academic degree conferring ways and types in China’s higher education.\textsuperscript{[1]}

Figure 3. 1995-2009 Academic Year National Professional Degree Grant Number.\textsuperscript{[3]}
3. Honorary doctoral degree conferring quantitative analysis

Honorary Doctoral Degree conferring in China aims to recognize excellence scholars, scientists or famous statesman and social activist in academic, economy, education, science, culture and health, and other fields, as well as the social development and human progress in the cause of outstanding contributions both at home and abroad. In China, the honorary doctorate degree is firstly awarded in 1983. According to the statistical analysis, by 2013 the total of China’s honorary doctorates number has already reached 290 [4]. In the total persons’ status there are 28 scholars, 27 scientists, 20 social activists and 15 heads of government (including 13 heads of state) that accounted for 31%.

Based on 1983-2013 year distribution of honorary doctoral degree conferring (see Fig.4), the honorary doctorate degree conferring annual number of 2009 is 23 persons maximum of amount, and annual number of 2010 is 22 persons taken second place.

![Figure 4. The year distribution of honorary doctoral degree conferring (1983-2013).](image)

According to statistical analysis, the number of nationality or region distribution for 1983-2013 honorary doctorate degree conferring is total up to 64 nationalities or regions, and among them greater than 2 person-time as is shown in Fig.5, the top 5 for person number nationalities or regions are US (87 person-time), Hong Kong (25 person-time), Germany (24 person-time), Japan(19 person-time) and UK(18 person-time). The proportion of person number for honorary doctorate degree conferring from the top 5 nationalities or regions is about 59.66% of amount.

![Figure 5. The nationality or region distributions of honorary doctorate degree conferring (1983-2013, person-time greater than 2).](image)
According to quantitative analysis, the number of conferring institutions for 1983-2013 honorary doctoral degree is total up to 67 universities or educational institutions, and among them greater than 3 person-time honorary doctorate degree conferring institutions distributions as shown in fig.6. In the fig.7 there are 7 universities doctorate degree conferring person number more than 10 person-time, namely Peking University (50 person-time), Tsinghua University (20 person-time), Fudan University (15 person-time), Nanjing University (13 person-time), Shanghai Jiaotong University (13 person-time), Renmin University of China (12 person-time) and Nankai University(10 person-time). The 7 universities doctorate degree conferring person number is total up to 133, accounted for 45.86% of the amount (total of 290).

![Figure 6](image.png)

Figure 6. The number of conferring institutions for honorary doctoral degree (1983-2013).

4. Conclusion

Rapid change generates new needs. New industries look to higher education for help in the provision of new skills, specialized advanced training, consultancy and research support[5]. Considered deconstruction and reconstruction is the essence of critical transformation[6]. Therefore, China’s higher education degree system and standards framework should be in a process of continuous change with Chinese society and economy developing.

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5. References


