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INTERNATIONALIZING SOCIAL SCIENCES IN CHINA: A STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AT TSINGHUA UNIVERSITY

Abstract:

Social sciences are assuming growing significance against a backdrop of increasing problems within and between societies. While cultural diversity has permeated into various dimensions of our social life, the paradigms of the social science have remained dominated by the West, failing to meet new demands. Major Western societies set standards, provide models, and give directions as the pinnacles for social sciences in the global system. Non-Western societies adopt these standards, models and directions in their social sciences in various ways. In an era of globalization, a more multi-polarized academic system is emerging, enabling non-Western societies to challenge the hegemony of Euro-American models in the social science. In China, modern social sciences are foreign transplants from Western cultures, and their models have been dominated by Western academic systems throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Social sciences in China have been fragmented throughout the modern period. For China, a fundamental issue to develop social sciences is to integrate Chinese and Western patterns. Although there has been intensive documentation of the internationalization of social sciences, both within the Chinese academic community and in the media, systematic research on the theme is rare, and studies based on empirical data are especially lacking.

The study aims to be systematic and empirical. It selects Tsinghua University as its case. Ranked at the top in the Chinese higher education system, the University has historically had the most comprehensive engagement with the West, particularly with the United States. It started to establish modern, Western-style social sciences in the early 20th century. The development has since experienced ups and downs. This study investigates why and how the University has been internationalizing its social sciences using an academic discipline - Sociology as example. One major focus of this research is to look at how Tsinghua's social scientists are integrating Chinese and Western learning in the process of internationalization. The study is qualitative in nature. Through triangulating various data collection approaches including semi-structured interviews and document analysis, it aims to gain a deep understanding of the dynamics of social science development, with particular focus on possible tensions between internationalization and indigenization. Through the lens of three elements of disciplinary development - knowledge, culture and organization - this research examines the twists and turns, and costs and benefits of China's social sciences development in a global context of the coexistence of the continuing dominance of Western paradigms and a rising Chinese power.

Keywords:

Social sciences, Internationalization, Tsinghua University

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