ISSN: 2637-6067 DOI: 10.6918/IJOSSER.202103_4(3).0030

Charm and Confusion: An Analysis of the Professional Status of University Teachers in China

Chengxia Hu[1], Xin Yang[2]

[1]School of Literature and Communication, Sichuan University of Arts and Science, Dazhou, Sichuan, 635000, China.

[2]School of Foreign Languages, Sichuan University of Arts and Science, Dazhou, Sichuan, 635000, China.

Abstract

Universities are at the top of the education chain for their functions of cultivating high-end talents and conducting professional quality education. Therefore, university teachers are endowed with high professional authority. While the academic professional identity of university teachers has already been acknowledged, they have also enjoyed higher professional reputation confirmed by their academic professional attributes. Based on the academic professional attributes of university teachers, this paper explores the real situation of the professional status of university teachers with great reputations, and analyzes their professional charm and career development bottleneck in China.

Keywords

Academic career; University teachers; Professional status; Professional authority.

1. Introduction

University teachers, working in higher learning institutions, have been widely regarded as a professional authority with advanced knowledge. Moreover, the continuous improvement of the professional admittance system and the deepening of specialization have further highlighted their advanced professional status. As an academic specialist, university teachers can enjoy the charm brought by their high level of authoritative professional status. However, on the other hand, they also have to face some difficulties in their career development.

2. The Professional Reputation of University Teachers

As a professional category, teachers have always been regarded as noble because of their professional efficacy of educating people and their companionship of knowledge. They are praised highly as "the most sacred people under the sun" and "human soul engineers", and they are even compared to "candle" and "spring silkworm", which sacrifice themselves for others' sake. Among them, university teachers, as employees of higher education institutions, because of their advanced educating objects, profound knowledge and professional refinement, have become the leading force in the teaching profession, which makes university teachers enjoy more halos than primary and secondary school teachers, and have a higher professional reputation. These appellations for teachers are the public's external cognition of teachers' profession, indicating the image of teachers in the traditional concept, which is the result of artificially adding charm to university teachers. Most of the appellations for teachers are based on the emphasis on education or the spirit of teachers' dedication. It does not go deep into the internal level of the teaching profession. In addition to these seemingly illusory professional halos, there is a lack of exploring the real professional status of university teachers behind the

ISSN: 2637-6067 DOI: 10.6918/IJOSSER.202103_4(3).0030

reputation, to interpret the internal professional charm under the bright professional appearance of university teachers.

3. Academic Characteristics of University Teachers

University teachers are academic professionals, which has been widely recognized in the research circle of sociology and higher education. According to the theory of Parsons Functional School in sociology, the profession which is paid by a specific institution (such as a university), engaged in professional research recognized by a certain discipline and included in a promotion system, is an academic one. Based on this standard, university teachers can be defined as a kind of academic profession. As a modern academic profession, although teaching and management are the basic professional requirements for university teachers, the highlight of their research function endows them with higher professional reputation, professional autonomy and professional status. Professional status is not only the guarantee of teachers as academic practitioners, but also the premise to establish their own professional identity and professional status.

4. The Professional Charm of University Teachers

Compared with elementary and secondary school teachers, because of the different functions of higher education and the different objects of education, the academic professional characteristics of university teachers are more remarkable, though they are all engaged in education. Their academic professional attributes determine their professional charm, which can be shown in the following aspects.

4.1. The Freedom of Teaching for University Teachers

Due to the influence of the imperial examination system in ancient times, China has adopted the college entrance examination to select talents. As a result, the college entrance examination has become the baton of basic education, which in turn has influenced every aspect of teaching in primary and secondary schools, and the ultimate goal of teaching has become to win students the opportunity of entering their ideal universities. So the focus of teaching is to get enough scores in the examination and to be admitted by universities. Therefore, with the teaching content established and the teaching pace unified, the practice of teaching is greatly restricted. In contrast, China's higher education is not bound by the pressure of helping students enter a higher level of education, and there is no occupational pressure to improve the enrollment rate and compete for the ranking. In essence, higher education is a kind of professional education. University teachers have more freedom in teaching than primary and secondary school teachers. They can choose their own teaching materials and teaching content, arrange their own teaching progress, and design their own assessment. Compared with primary and secondary school teachers, to a certain extent, they have the freedom from external intervention in teaching decision-making and curriculum designing. (Shi Kecan, 2019, p. 7).

4.2. Academic Identity of University Teachers

The clarification of academic professional attributes of university teachers has essentially defined their advanced intellectual and academic identity, making them undisputedly become the academic researchers and enjoy the reputation of engaging in teaching and scientific research. With the identities of educators and researchers, teaching is still the basic obligation of university teachers. However, the traditional teaching task is no longer the only work of university teachers, and the identity of university teachers has also changed accordingly, from

ISSN: 2637-6067 DOI: 10.6918/IJOSSER.202103_4(3).0030

the original single function to the overlapping functions of teaching, researching and managing. University teachers are endowed with academic professional attributes, because they undertake the task of scientific research and knowledge creation. Thus, college teachers have gained a higher status and reputation than primary and secondary school teachers.

4.3. Professional Authority of University Teachers

With the function of the high-end talent cultivation and professional quality education, colleges and universities are at the top of the whole formal education chain. Because of the "high-end" status of colleges and universities, the teachers of colleges and universities are also endowed with extremely high authority. Ye (2008) pointed out that “The authority of teachers is closely related to their professional role, and the professional attributes determine that teachers need a variety of forms of authority to adapt to different requirements of the professional role” (P. 31); As Xiao (2017) has noted, the source of university teacher's authority “originated from multiple channels, which is produced by the educational rights and status in terms of the laws and the social tradition of respecting teachers, and also personal factors of university teachers. It can be accepted by students consciously, influencing and changing students' psychology and behavior. The authority of teachers mainly comes from four aspects: legal authority, traditional authority, professional authority and personality charm” (P. 116). The former two come from the traditional culture and the institutional and legal aspects, while the latter two come from the personal characteristics of teachers. The legal authority is the authority given to university teachers by the official government or relevant educational management institutions in the form of laws and regulations. The Teachers’ Law promulgated in 1994 defines teachers as "professionals who perform educational and teaching duties", which establishes the professional status of teachers in the legal sense for the first time and ensures the professionalization of teachers' profession from the legal level. "Law on Compulsory Education, the Teachers ’ Law, the Vocational Education Law, the Higher Education Law and other laws and regulations on the professional status of teachers, teachers' rights and other aspects, are the concentrated embodiment of the institutionalized authority of teachers, to give teachers the most effective authority with external mandatory provisions. Traditional authority refers to the authority evolved from following the long-term historical customs and cultural traditions. For example, since ancient times in China, there has been the educational practice of the integration of officials and teachers, in which heaven, earth, monarch, relatives and teachers are juxtaposed. "The monarch and the teacher are the foundation of governance". In addition, for a long time, the central rulers have advocated the subtle influence of respecting teachers, and university teachers have been regarded as the royal (social) spokespersons since ancient times, who have been highly respected, with the traditional authoritative status given by the government. In the process of disseminating the ruler's thoughts and strengthening the centralized politics, the institutional authority of teachers has the characteristics of compulsion. Professional authority refers to the authority developed by university teachers due to their own knowledge reserve, professional quality and professional skills, which is the basic premise to guarantee the authority of teachers. Since ancient times, as the embodiment of knowledge, teachers have been endowed with the professional function of "preaching, teaching and dispelling doubts". With advanced and professional knowledge, university teachers have the knowledge authority and professional authority. In the eight categories of occupations, teachers are classified into the category of "professional and technical personnel", which can justify their occupation status. The establishment of the teacher qualification certificate system and teacher's professional admittance assessment mode has further consolidated the professional monopoly position of teachers in the aspect of professional admittance. It clarifies the boundary between the teacher profession and other professions, thus confirming the monopoly of teachers' profession and making it impossible for those without professional education, systematic training and professional qualification training to engage in the teaching profession, so as to ensure the

ISSN: 2637-6067 DOI: 10.6918/IJOSSER.202103_4(3).0030

monopoly of the teaching profession, that is, professionalism. Personality charm is also known as the charismatic authority of teachers, which mainly refers to the charisma generated by teachers' personal virtue. It belongs to the category of personal characteristics. As noted by Li Hui (2019, P.2), “charismatic authority is a powerful spiritual power, which can subtly change the psychology and behavior of others in the respect, trust and appreciation of teachers. Personal character and charismatic authority should be based on personal character and professional cultivation, so that students can be influenced by the charm of teachers' character while learning knowledge and extending their horizon. Teachers are life mentors, educating students through their knowledge and moving them by virtue. Charismatic authority is an endogenous authority, and it is also a spiritual force that has the deepest influence on students. Legal authority, traditional authority, professional authority and personality charm are four factors in one. The formation of teachers' professional authority is the result of the above four aspects. "In order to get students' recognition and obtain certain authority, teachers should not only rely on the external system to grant them the legal authority, but also rely on their own morality, ability, diligence and knowledge to win the internal authority." (Li Xiaochuan, 2018, P. 37).

5. Career Confusion of University Teachers

At the top of China's education system, universities are known as institutions of higher learning, for they are cultivating high-level talents. University teachers have also become high-end professionals with their own aura of divine knowledge. In addition, due to the urgent need of building a new country with higher professional talents, the public's yearning for universities in the elitist era of higher education and high social evaluation of university teachers in the ivory tower, university teachers have been highly regarded. Without consideration of those external reputations, the development of China's higher education has entered a period of comprehensive reform and development. In the information age, the professional development of modern university teachers has encountered a bottleneck. The educational management system, the product of cultural transplantation from the west, has evolved from learning from Japan in the late Qing Dynasty and imitating the Soviet Union in the early days of the founding of the People’s Republic of China. The essence of the system is not localized, and the university system lacks the fundamental accumulation of autonomy culture, which is also the congenital focus of the insufficient professional autonomy of university teachers in China. Due to the limitation of the organizational attributes of the management system, there is also a lack of the organizational system guarantee of professional autonomy. Therefore, the development of professional autonomy of Chinese university teachers still has a long way to go in the future.

Acknowledgements

This paper is partly the finding of the project of Struggle and Reflection—The Theoretical and Practical Research of the Professional Autonomy of University Teachers from the Sociological Perspective supported by the university-level Major Research Program of Sichuan University of Arts and Science (Grant No. 2019JJ001Z).

References

[1] Li Hui. Construction of Teacher Authority based on caring Theory [D], Unpublished MA dissertation, Nanning: Master's Thesis of Guangxi Normal University, 2019, (6): 2.

[2] Li Xiaochuan. Three Sources of Teacher Authority [J]. Moral education China, 2018, (6): 37.

ISSN: 2637-6067 DOI: 10.6918/IJOSSER.202103_4(3).0030

[3] Shi Kecan. Chinese Traditional Teacher Authority and Its Modern Evolution [J]. Journal of Hebei University: Education Science edition, 2019, (1): 7.

[4] Xiao Xin. The Decline of University Teachers' Authority and its Outlet [J]. Anhui Literature, 2017, (12): 116.

[5] Ye Fei. Analysis on the Legitimacy of Teacher role and Authority [J]. Chinese Journal of Education, 2008, (3): 31.