China's Higher Education Policy: Policy Communities, Issue Networks and the Impact of Research on the Policy Process

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In modern society, many governments consult with universities and individual researchers in the process of higher education policy-making. On the one hand, it is a growingly recognized idea that policy is better informed and implemented with the aid of academic research. On the other hand, whether and to what extent interest groups are involved in the policy process influence not only policy per se, but also possible policy outcomes. The interaction between government and interest groups can take many forms. Policy network is one of the approaches. Whilst it is a common practice in most western countries, the concepts of "policy community" and "issue network" are fairly new to the People's Republic of China. More importantly, whether these concepts are different from western ideology considering that Chinese system is fundamentally different from western ones is an issue demands further research.

The study attempts to explore the historical development of Chinese government's interaction with interest groups in formulating higher education policy, and how the idea of policy network is evolved along the process. The study argues that China's policy-making process in higher education has developed from a "government monopoly" to "policy community" to "issue network", especially showing the combined characteristics of the latter two. The main research method employed is document analysis. It is followed by a case study of China's higher education policy-making process—Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020). It is regarded as one of the most important and influential education policy in China. Essentially exploratory in nature, the paper hopes to contribute to the understanding of China's policy process in the field of higher education.