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**Who Serves as the Secretaries of the Party Committees in Key
Universities and Colleges in China?**

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ABSTRACT

In Chinese universities and colleges, secretaries of the Party committees assume more wide-ranging responsibilities. In this paper, secretaries of the Party committees in the 40 Chinese key universities are taken as the objects of research, so as to conduct surveys on the basic social characteristics, life experiences and work responsibilities of secretaries of the Party committees. The surveys discover: the secretaries of the Party committees in Chinese key universities and colleges are male-dominated elite groups with master's degree or above, and aged between 44 and 55 years old. Most of them are experienced in position management, Party and government administration. Part-time secretaries of Party committees in universities have obvious advantages in educational background and professional titles. Full-time secretaries of Party committees in universities have more experience in multiple positions, as well as Party and government administration.

Keywords: *essential characteristics, the Secretaries of the Party Committees, key universities*

INTRODUCTION

Colleges are the source and gathering place of core competitiveness and mainstay of universities. As the basic units of university construction, they serve as the foothold for universities to implement autonomy in school administration and optimization internal governance structures. In China, Party committees of colleges are the political cores in the development and construction undertaking. Secretaries of Party committees in colleges hold unique importance in universities. As the practitioners in the cause of university and college construction, they not only have an impact on university governance structures in Chinese higher education, but also on the future orientation of talent cultivation in universities. Internally, secretaries of Party committees in Chinese colleges engage in governance affairs. Externally, they need to coordinate different relations and serve as the “critical minorities” of college leadership. Hence, research and analysis of the basic characteristics of this group are of important and practical significance.

1. Raising Questions

The joint leadership of Party committee secretaries and college deans in basic-level faculties of universities is a special mechanism and system under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. By analyzing the historical changes of the roles of Party committee secretaries in Chinese universities, the author found out that in different historical periods, Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges play different roles in the leadership system of universities, who also have different role definitions, scopes of functions and inherent requirements. In general, significant changes have taken place in the professional roles of Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges, which changed from the “unitary role” of political guidance to “multiple roles” such as ideological and political leaders, supervisors of college affairs, administrators of clerical work, and organizers of “comprehensive cultivation”. Their scopes of functions changed from the sole political function to “multiple functions” in leadership, education, supervision, management and service. Besides, the connotation of their roles converted from “sheer implementation” to “leadership and coordination of decision-making process”. These changes demonstrate that with the changes in the management system and the lowering focus of management of Chinese universities and colleges, Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges assume more wide ranging responsibilities.

Key universities are the highest-level centers of talent cultivation, technical research and development in China. They shoulder important missions of enhancing the governance of higher education and pursuing excellence for universities. Focusing on strategic demands of national significance, key universities also play demonstrative and leading roles in the construction of Chinese universities. At present, some key universities initiate reform of pilot colleges concerning the following aspects; how to forge new college-university relations, how to resolve the issues in leadership structures, academic and democratic management, improving the governance of affiliated colleges [1]. In these respects, most pilot colleges adopt the attitude of “crossing the river by feeling the stones”, as they often lack a general answer to the problem of handling and coordinating the relations among powers. The “lowering focus” of the university governance system requires college and university leaders to transfer from “administration” to “good governance”, and poses new challenges to the roles and governance capacity of Party committee secretaries in colleges.

Based on domestic and overseas studies in the past, researchers on Party committee secretaries in Chinese colleges were mostly practitioners in domestic higher education. The research content of college Party committees also demonstrates a progressive trend throughout time, which began with obligations of secretaries in departmental Party committees and gradually extended to role definition and capabilities, etc. However, having consulted relevant literature, there are still some defects in studies on Party committees’ secretaries in colleges. On one hand, the achievements of studies are inadequate, which leaves a blind spot in this area of academic inquiry. On the other

hand, the research paradigm is relatively unitary, mainly focusing on the theoretical analysis of practical work instead of conducting empirical research. Hence, taking Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges of key universities as the objects of research, and studying the features of this group are extremely important to enhancing the “binary system” of governance in Chinese universities.

2. Research Methods and Data Source

At present, among the Party committee secretaries of affiliated colleges of key universities, other than the full-time administrative cadres of the Party and government, those who are both in “managerial positions and professional positions”, also complete teaching and scientific research, as well as talent cultivation. In addition, they take charge of college leadership and administration, thereby holding “dual” roles of administrators and teachers. Assuming “managerial positions and professional positions” is a model with Chinese characteristics that gradually formed in the internal administration of Chinese universities. It is an effective approach for replenishing the cadres of university management the practical activities [2]. For this “special group”, subsequent research and inquiry will further discuss the two different types of Party committee cadres in affiliated colleges.

The research takes the 44 key universities in China, which are rated as the world’s first-class universities, as the objects of inquiry. These universities are the most superior universities in China, ranking top in terms of disciplinary development, talent cultivation, financial resources and infrastructure. They can also be regarded as the archetypal examples of China’s first-rate universities regardless of academic levels, popularity and reputation in society. Hence, Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges of these universities serve as representative samples. In this research, online information tracking and questionnaire survey are the primary research methods. The research data has three sources: 1. Relevant information on Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges publicly released on university websites. 2. Academic information about relevant scholars at universities released on official websites like “CNKI”. 3. Information obtained from questionnaire surveys. Besides, this research also partially referred to information released on online media sites such as “Baidu Baike” and “Google Docs”. However, such information is usually utilized as a reference based upon what is disclosed on websites of government and universities.

Through conducting online information surveys, the research data covered 1092 colleges in more than 40 universities in the “double first-class initiative”. 1070 Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges were selected, in order to obtain the basic data about their group characteristics like gender, age, professional title, educational background and tenure of offices. Then, by conducting random sampling, questionnaires were randomly distributed to 350 of the 1070 Party committee secretaries, aiming to gain more detailed information on their life experience and job content. 223 valid questionnaires were recovered with a rate of 63.7% and the Cronbach a coefficient of 0.8785. Therefore, the surveys have a high degree of credibility and can be used for the next result analysis.

3. Who serve as the secretaries of the Party committees in key universities and colleges in China?

While studying Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges of universities, a prominent phenomenon is the identities of Party committee secretaries in colleges, i.e. part-time and full-time status of Party committee secretaries. Subsequent analysis of basic traits provide further explanation to the part-time and full-time status.

3.1 Significant differences and unbalanced distribution in ratios of part-time and full-time Party committee secretaries in colleges

Until July 2020, among the 1070 Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges surveyed, full-time cadres of Party and government administration accounted for 65.4%, a total of 700. The number of teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries was 370, accounting for 34.6%. To further analyze the factors that influence the ratio and distribution of teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries, correlated variables were utilized in measurement. The ratio of teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries was used as the standard for analyzing the distribution. The computational formula is shown as follows:

$$A = \frac{B}{C}$$

A: The ratio of teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries in an affiliated college

B: The number of teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries in an affiliated college

C: The total number of part-time Party committee secretaries in an affiliated college

The ratios of teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges of key universities are calculated, and the results are shown in Table 1. The numbers of teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries demonstrate obvious differences in different universities. The highest ratio of teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries is about 3.6%, and the highest ratio reaches 96.7%.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of ratios of teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges

Variable	Mean value	Standard deviation	Minimum value	Maximum value
Ratios of teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries	0.519	0.257	0.036	0.967

Ratios of teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries are shown in graphs to directly show the differences among universities, as indicated in Fig.1. In the well-known key universities, such as Tsinghua University and Peking University, teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries account for 97% and 84%. In contrast, in other universities like Jilin University and Lanzhou University, almost all Party committee secretaries are full-time cadres of the Party and government. Different regions and schools show significant differences as well as uneven ratios and distributions.

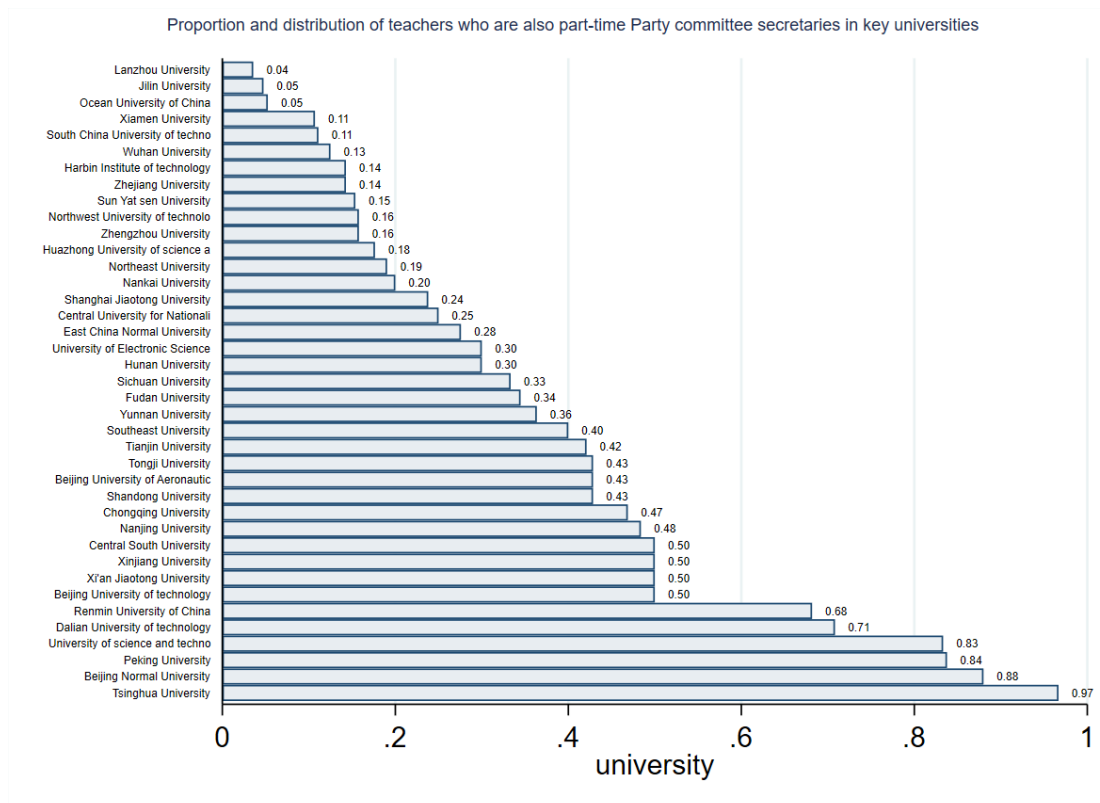


Fig.1: Proportion and distribution of teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries in key universities (July, 2020)

Several top universities have more than 50% part-time teachers, mainly Beijing Universities, including Tsinghua University and Peking University. Most key universities have less than 50% of teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries, including comprehensive universities with top rankings, such as Fudan University, Shanghai Jiaotong University and Zhejiang University. According to the overall distribution, the ratios of teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries and university rankings do not demonstrate direct linear relations. Instead, they are more likely to be influenced by historical inheritance, system culture, standards of cadre appointment, practical competence of faculty and teaching staff.

3.2 Basic social characteristics of Party committee secretaries in colleges

According to the basic social characteristics like gender, age, educational background, professional title and disciplinary background, the research depicted the group of Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges. Considering the prominent feature that teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries among them, the research will further explain this point.

3.2.1 Gender: Male secretaries are the majority. The ratio of female secretaries is not high

According to the data of surveys, males are the majority of Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges of key universities, while the ratio of female secretaries is not high. The data indicates that males account for 75.2% of Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges of key universities, while female secretaries account for 24.8%. Based upon further analysis, among the teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries, males account

for 82.16%, which is about four times the ratio of females. It shows that male teachers are more likely to make academic achievements and serve as leaders of Party affairs at the same time.

3.2.2 Most secretaries age between 45 and 55. Part-time Party committee secretaries are relatively older in age

At present, the average age of Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges is 48 years old. 75.3% of them age between 45 and 55. It can be seen that Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges require the long-term accumulation of experience. Based on further analysis of part-time and full-time situations, teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries are 51 years old on average, slightly older than the overall average age of Party committee secretaries. Only nine Party committee secretaries are less than 40 years old, accounting for 2.47% approximately. In addition, the youngest teacher and Party committee secretary is 32 years old from Hunan University. He holds this position because of his superior academic competence and leadership. He only published articles in the top science magazine *Nature*, but also was rated as one of the “Innovators Under 35” by *MIT Technology Review*. Until July 2020, teachers who are also Party committee secretaries with the highest seniority are 60 years old, and there are four of them in total.

3.2.3 High level of education. Over half of the secretaries specialized in humanities and social science, and most of them are deputy seniors and above

More than 85% of Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges of key universities have a master’s degree and above. About 24.4% of full-time Party committee secretaries have obtained a doctorate, while over 91% of teachers who are also Party committee secretaries obtained a doctorate and above. It demonstrates that different types of Party committee secretaries in colleges have significant differences in terms of highest academic degrees.

Humanities and social sciences, engineering and others rank among the top three academic backgrounds of Party committee secretaries in colleges, accounting for 57%, 24% and 19% respectively. Hence, it can be seen that most Party committee secretaries in colleges used to specialize in humanities and social sciences.

More than 75% of Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges of key universities have obtained professional titles of deputy to a senior position or higher. Among them, about 30% of full-time college secretaries have obtained the professional title of senior. The proportion of teachers who are also Party committee secretaries with a senior title reached 80.81%. According to the surveys, most teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries have higher professional titles than full-time secretaries, and their academic experiences are also more abundant.

3.3 Life experiences of Party committee secretaries

According to Max Weber, human activities are the object of study in social sciences, which are quite sophisticated, complicated and fickle. Even a single behavior may be limitless for independent observation[3]. Hence, considering the fact that roles are neither unitary nor invariable, the research and studies on basic features of Party committee secretaries have conduct analysis in their period of employment, career experience and position experience, etc.

3.3.1 The period of employment by Party committee secretaries

According to the surveys, more than 60% of Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges have been in this position for three to ten years. 30% of them have been in this position for three years and less. Those who have been college secretaries for over ten years account for a smaller ratio of 9.7%. Most of them were appointed as Party committee secretaries after gaining adequate work experience or academic qualification.

3.3.2 Career experience of Party committee secretaries

Based on their career experience, before Party committee secretaries held this position in affiliated colleges, 53% of them had worked in three and more sectors (or colleges). According to the categorization of secretaries, among the teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries, 49% of them worked in one department (or college), 20% of them worked in two departments, and 31% of them worked in three departments and more. Among the full-time Party committee secretaries, 16% of them worked in one department (or college), 30% of them worked in two departments, and 54 % of them worked in three departments and more. Thus, full-time Party committee secretaries worked in several different sectors, while the teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries mainly worked in one or two sectors.

3.3.3 Position experience of Party committee secretaries in colleges

According to the data from questionnaire surveys, 88% of Party committee secretaries used to work in positions related to Party and government administration (Party departments, Party branch secretaries, deputy secretaries, Party members, counselors). Among them, positions in Party committees, deputy director-general levels and counseling accounted for 45%、38% and 37%. Moreover, different types of Party committee secretaries also have various experiences; for teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries, they used to work as deputy secretaries or deans, members of discipline inspection commission or Party committee, as well as Party branch secretaries. In contrast, they had less experience of working in counseling and departmental Party committees. Only 3% of them used to engage in temporary posts, assistance and aid programs for Xinjiang, Tibet and Yunnan, etc. For full-time college secretaries, more than 50% of them used to work in Party committees and departments in universities. 39% of them once worked as counselors and Party branch secretaries. Furthermore, 33% of them served as deputy secretaries or assistant deans before being appointed as Party committee secretaries, and 16 of them once engaged in temporary posts, assistance and aid programs for Xinjiang, Tibet and Yunnan, etc. Full-time secretaries worked in more positions and had more experience than teachers who are also part-time secretaries.

Table 2: Statistical table of position experience by Party committee secretaries colleges of key universities

Category	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Part-time	31%	41%	36%	15%	13%	3%	17%
full-time	20%	33%	35%	52%	39%	16%	6%

A: Members of Party committees or discipline inspection commissions

B: Deputy secretaries or deputy deans

C: Party branch secretaries

D: Work in Party committees and departments

E: Counselors

F: Temporary posts in assistance and aid program for Xinjiang, Tibet and Yunnan, etc

G: No experience in working in the above positions

3.4 Job content of Party committee secretaries

Even though the Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China has regulations on responsibilities and procedures of Party committees in universities, they are mainly concerned with Party organizations, and lack feasible enforcement regulations [4]. Based on the current practical situation, there has been no specific rule on the role behaviors of Party committee secretaries in universities and colleges. Therefore, further explanations on the actual job content for Party committee secretaries in universities and colleges are of great importance in subsequent research.

This section of the survey includes seven items and probes into the job content of secretaries of Party committees in affiliated colleges from seven aspects: ideological guidance, cultural development, decision-making, reform supervision, team building, resource management and conflict coordination. The results of the survey are that Party committee secretaries in affiliated colleges devote their energy to the following proportions of work; 71% in ideological guidance, concerning Party construction, learning and conducting ideological and political work for students; 57% in decision-making for important matters, overall guidance and planning of work; 43% in conflict coordination, such as handling the relations between various parties in colleges, consulting and resolving conflicts, mobilizing initiatives; 39% in reform supervision, concerning the development of college reform, monitoring policy implementation and safeguarding fairness; 31% in team construction, such as handling personnel affairs and talent introduction; 23% in resource management, concerning scientific management and rational allocation of college resources, and involvement in administrative affairs; 21% in cultural construction, such as creating a positive cultural atmosphere of unity in colleges.

4. Conclusion

On the whole, Party committee secretaries in colleges of key universities are elite groups with a male majority educated to master's degree level and aged between 45 and 55. Most of them have a lot of experience in multiple management positions. Over half of Party committee secretaries in colleges used to work in relevant positions of government departments (or colleges), such as deputy deans, temporary posts in assistance programs for Xinjiang, Tibet, Yunnan, etc. With their abundant experience, they maintain close contact with teachers and students, as well as other cadres, aiming to strengthen cohesion and improve the work style and efficiency of the colleges. In terms of handling affairs concerning the Party and government administration, Party committee secretaries also demonstrate high quality and competence. More than 88% of the secretaries used to work in Party committees and departments with a ratio of counselors at the deputy-director level. Work experience in Party and government administration is conducive for Party committee secretaries to play effective roles as decision-makers, ideological guides and cultural constructors, so as to implement Party construction, learning and guidance in ideological and political work for teachers and students.

Besides, part-time tenure is also a prominent feature of Party committee secretaries in colleges of key universities. Part-time and full-time Party committee secretaries also demonstrate notable differences. Teachers who are also part-time Party committee secretaries not only complete teaching and scientific research, as well as talent cultivation, but also serve as leaders of administration, thus working dual roles. Compared with full-time Party committee secretaries, teachers who are also part-time secretaries have obvious advantages in educational background (doctorate) and professional titles (professor), enabling them to be more involved in academic meetings and talent cultivation. In contrast, full-time Party committee secretaries tend to be more experienced in multiple positions in Party and government administration. This advantage is obviously superior to part-time Party committee secretaries. Hence, they are more capable of dealing with comprehensive affairs and conducting Party construction. The diverse team structures play their roles in different ways and behavior patterns in affiliated colleges of universities.

By studying the basic features, the research discovers that experience of working in multiple departments enables Party committee secretaries to effectively handle college governance and relevant issues. Moreover, experiences and roles of working in multiple departments facilitate the selection of cadres and development of college governance. However, despite the superior academic quality and experience of working in various departments, they still lack scientific, systematic and effective theoretical guidance. Their competence and governance capacity still lags behind the modern requirements and expectations of society. Hence, the training system and mechanism of Party committee secretaries require further improvement and construction.

The increasingly open operational environment of school also complicates the administration of universities and colleges, inducing various challenges in areas such as ideology and politics, academics and democracy [5]. For this reason, achieving new development is a pressing issue for affiliated colleges of key universities to handle in the new era. University presidents, teachers, students and counselors are hot spots of research on higher education management. But Party committee secretaries in colleges receive insufficient attention in this respect. The study on the basic features of this particular group will place them in the “front line” of research. It is also expected to provide useful reference to subsequent research on Party committee secretaries in colleges.

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