Higher Education Governance under Neoliberalism

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Abstract. This paper focuses on the manner in which governance structure of higher education is re-organized under neoliberalism. It highlights how states have centralized their powers in their relationships with the universities through performance-based accountability; research funding mechanisms; quality assurance; and various administrative mechanisms. These control mechanisms have different forms from previous legal regulations, and exert a more intensive and stronger influence on the university than legal regulations. Although states deregulated universities under neoliberalism, ironically universities are more controlled by states through the deregulations. Managerialism is deeply ingrained in university administration and shared governance and collegiality are fading. As a result, universities are losing their institutional autonomy in their relationships with their external entities; and professors are losing their power on campus. These two dimensions represent ‘decentralized centralization’. The author conceptualizes the social phenomena of ‘decentralized centralization’ of higher education governance and provides some empirical evidence based on his research.

Keywords: governance, neoliberalism, institutional autonomy, academic freedom, managerialism

1. Introduction

Governance is a controversial topic in globalized higher education because of its complexity and its impacts on academic life as well as university management (e.g., Shin & Jung, 2013). States have sought governance reforms and changes through neoliberalism or higher education reforms that necessarily accompany governance changes. For example, privatization is closely associated with governance changes because privatization accompanies structural changes as well as the changes in revenue sources from public to private. Among the factors that lead governance reforms, neoliberalism is the strongest single factor (e.g., Considine & Lewis, 2003). Many countries in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and former communist countries since the mid-1990s (e.g., Hood & Peters, 2004; Olsen & Peters, 2005) adopted neoliberalism as a political philosophy for globalization.

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Neoliberalism highlights different dimensions in different contexts. King (2007) summarized the different dimension of neoliberalism by ‘evaluative state’, market, or professional ‘self-regulation.’ Recently, Asian countries have begun to competitively transform their university governance structures from national universities to corporate status (Locke, Cummings & Fisher, 2011).

In the new environment, states seem on the one hand decentralized in their relationships with university; but on the other hand, states became very influential through accountability systems (e.g., Shin & Harman, 2009). In addition, academics seem to have strong power in their relationship with internal university governance; they lose their power because of strong managerialism (King, 2007). These conflicting trends make it difficult for researchers to interpret and understand contemporary higher education governance. In addition, higher education governance is rapidly changing from a traditional one to new forms even as the changes are becoming more complex for higher education researchers to interpret. Shin and Harman (2009) named the complication of higher education governance as ‘decentralized centralization’. Some other scholars also address the complication by applying different lens at the same time.

This paper discusses higher education governance from a conventional perspective and extends the discussion to more contemporary trends especially from neoliberal perspectives. For this purpose, the paper pays more attention to conceptual and theoretical discussions and introduces some empirical evidence from the Changing Academic Profession (CAP) study, which is an international comparative study.

![Conceptual framework of university governance and management](image-url)
2. Conceptualization of higher education governance

Higher education governance is approached from the perspective of the government-university relationship as well as from the relationship between university manager and professors within university governance as represented in Figure 1. Most higher education literature focuses on the government and university relationship which is an external dimension of higher education, but few researchers focus on governance within the university.

2.1. Between government and university

The external dimension highlights ‘institutional autonomy’ in the university’s relationship with government. Institutional autonomy has a long standing history since the emergence of the medieval university in the 12th century when the university emerged as an independent entity from secular or religious powers. However, the relationships have been up and down within the various political environments even for the modern university. For example, the Berlin University was not independent from the Nazi Regime in the 1930s and early 1940s. State involvement has been increasingly growing in mass higher education with growing financial support from public funding (e.g., Scott, 1995). However, state intervention in higher education has been diminishing under neoliberalism which encourages deregulation and institutional autonomy. In contrast, states are getting involved in different ways, e.g., evaluation, quality assurance, funding mechanisms, etc.

2.2 Within university

University governance is also complicated. The notion of shared governance has been widely applied in United States’ higher education where state politics, managers, and professors, (students in some states) share the responsibility for university governance under the umbrella of a board of trustees or board of regents (e.g., Birnbaum, 2004). This arrangement is a tradition in United States’ higher education where most public university systems hold independent legal status as a corporation. Traditionally, professors are very powerful in university governance in the German system while they are relatively less powerful in the Anglo-American tradition where the university manager has greater power than individual professors (Shin, 2013). However, academics even in the German system are losing their power under neoliberalism where managerialism is emphasized and as a result provide greater power to university managers. The same trend is found in other higher education systems that adopted the German model, especially in European countries and Japan and Korea where the German model was adopted in the early stage of higher education development.
2.3 Between academics

Although there are power shifts in academic governance in the contemporary university, professors still have strong powers, especially in the higher education systems where the German model is deeply embedded. A core issue in discussing governance is the relationships between academics though this dimension has not been well addressed in the higher education literature. Governance reforms that aim to empower junior academics tend to be blocked by senior academics in many cases. Senior academics have strong influence on university managers; high ranking officials at ministries of education; and they have strong connections with political leaders. It is almost impossible for university managers to reform governance in a way that disfavors senior professors (e.g., Shin & Jang, 2013). Senior and junior relationships are critical in countries with a strong German tradition and which also have a strong seniority culture such as in the Confucian tradition countries. By combining both German and Confucian culture, university governance in the East Asian countries are quite different from that of western countries.

3. Higher education governance under neoliberalism

3.1 Higher education systems and types of governance

Governance has been classified and discussed by higher education scholars. Higher education systems differ in their approach to governance according to their ideas of the modern university. The German model empowers the state and the professors which form two powerful elements of its governance structure. States are powerful in administrative affairs while professors are similarly powerful in academic affairs. In the British model, university managers (vice-chancellor, dean) and professors are empowered and state control is relatively weak compared to the German model. The United States model is similar to the British model, in that university managers have strong power. Compared to these models, the state has strong power in the French university (e.g., Ben-David, 1977). These differences across systems reflect their historical development in their own societies. The systemic features also are reflected in other countries that have adopted these western models. For example, the state and professors have strong power in Japanese universities that adopted German model, and the similar model was exported in Korea and Taiwan during the colonial periods (e.g., Altbach, 1989; Shin, 2012).

One of the most frequently discussed scholars in the area is Burton Clark. In Higher Education System (1983), he discusses different types of governance systems from an historical perspective, and he classifies higher education systems by their coordination powers between state, profession, and market. Although the classification of governance systems does not perfectly fit his typology, he presents some representative models in this classification. For example, he classifies former Soviet Union and communist countries as the state model; European systems as the profession model; and
finally the Anglo-American systems as the market model. However, his typology is perhaps not be valid in current higher education systems because these different dimensions are co-evolving in these countries with political and ideological changes. Current governance systems could be a hybrid model of state, profession, and market in many countries (e.g., Neubauer, Shin & Hawkins, 2013).

As well as these systemic differences across countries, Volkwein and other scholars (e.g., McDaniel, 1996; Volkwein, 1989) empirically classified higher education governance by the centrality of governing powers between university and states. The empirical studies have implications for the conceptual discussion. However, the technical classification of higher education governance is very complicated. For example, state relationships with higher education institutions differ by different areas, finance, management, education, personnel, and students. The different areas are grouped as administrative areas and academic areas by Volkwein (1989), and procedural and substantive areas by Berdahl (1971). However, sorting an item as either administrative (or procedural) or procedural (substantive) areas is ambiguous in the real world. In his governance study, McDaniel (1996) sorted finance and management as administrative areas while education, personnel, and students were part of academic affairs. However, there is controversy regarding which element should be considered administrative and which academic.

3.2 Higher education governance under neoliberalism

University governance has been dramatically changed under neoliberalism. Although defining how neoliberal thought affects higher education governance is controversial, neoliberalism has three commonalities according to higher education literature (e.g., Ferlie, Musselin, & Andresani, 2008; Vidovich & Currie, 2011). First of all, state regulation is minimized to allow more autonomy to higher education institutions. Second, the state is indirectly involved in higher education through evaluation mechanisms. Third, the state funding mechanism is used to make the evaluation function more effective. These three components are interrelated and produce different forms of governance in the relationships between university and government, and also within the university.

In most countries, neoliberalism emphasizes university deregulation. Government tends to minimize rules and regulations to provide more institutional autonomy. Instead, government prefers to evaluate institutional performance through various evaluation mechanisms such as accountability, and quality assurance. These functions are conducted by semi-independent government agencies (e.g., Campbell, 2003; King, 2007). For example, quality assurance agencies are established in most countries. States tend to link evaluation results to its funding allocation, so that the evaluation mechanism has a strong influence on the university. Although the university appears to be deregulating, the state has strengthened its power through evaluation and funding mechanisms more than ever before. The question is whether the university has more institutional autonomy under neoliberalism than before.
Figure 2. Conceptual framework of university governance under neoliberalism

Under neoliberalism, higher education governance has changed. Government is indirectly involved in universities rather than directly through its agencies (e.g., quality assurance agency), and accountability mechanisms as represented in Figure 2. This involvement is more profound, stronger, and detailed (e.g., Shattock, 1999). These types of involvement are easily transformable from one direction to another one with minimum legal responsibility (King, 2007) and are accomplished mainly through performance indicators. There are many evaluation indicators for quality assurance, accountability, and rankings. Governments accomplish their policy intentions indirectly through evaluation and funding mechanisms. As Ferlie et al. (2008) describe, “the state holds the rings rather than intervene directly” (p.333) or King (2007) calls it as “remote steering at a distance” (p.415).

The new mechanisms have brought dramatic changes in higher education governance:

- Funding has become the major policy tool in the relationship between government and university;
- Managerialism and efficiency have become the main concern of university administrators;
- Formal forms of governance are moving toward private corporation status; and
- Academics are evaluated by external evaluators, e.g., research funding agencies
These changes also accompany power shifts in government as well as in the university. Power moves:

- From Ministry of Education to Ministry of Finance;
- From university to government agencies (“agentocracy”); and
- From professors to managers

These changes differently impact academics depending on their academic ranks. The governance changes do not have much effect on senior professors whose status is already established; however, senior professors who wish to be involved in university wide decision making may be feel isolated from the decision-making process. Junior professors feel comfortable with the changes because they have strong desires to change their environment through external power. Performance-based management may empower junior professors because they tend to be more productive than senior professors. Therefore, governance reforms lead to changes in academic governance within an academic unit (department, program, college, or university). These dimensions are not well addressed in the literature.

Finally, our area of interest is whether the governance reforms bring enhanced institutional autonomy with smaller resources. The basic assumption of neoliberalism is that deregulation and institutional autonomy will lead to better institutional performance (e.g., Kaplan, 2004). However, empirical studies (e.g., Shin, 2010) report that there is little evidence that neoliberalism contributes to institutional performance in the higher education sector whether it is accountability or management systems. Some studies (e.g., Kolsaker, 2008) found positive effects while others (e.g., Shin, 2010) found no effects. This may be related to the conflict dimensions of deregulation and evaluation-based approaches in neoliberalism because both cancel out the effects of each other instead of interactively contributing to institutional performance. The following matrix of goals and different dimensions of neoliberalism (deregulation and evaluation-based approach) in Table 1 explains the complexity of goal attainment of neoliberalism.

Concerning the goal orientation of new public management, Olssen and Peters (2005) propose that clearly defined goals and a results orientation as well as flexibility of management are the main features of new public management. One primary goal underlined in neoliberalism is to enhance institutional performance through reforms. However, ironically the goals of neoliberalism are not so clear. A second goal is budget reduction in public affairs including higher education. The neoliberal approach was developed and adopted mainly for budget cutting in the United Kingdom and the United States during economic recessions (e.g., Alexander, 2000). Also, budget cutting is the main reason that states adopt a neoliberalist approach. Third, academics might be interested in whether the new governance approach contributes to academic freedom which is highly related to academic quality as well as productivity.
Table 1. Goals and dimensions of neoliberalism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals of Neoliberalism</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Budget Cut</th>
<th>Academic Freedom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deregulation</td>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation-based approach</td>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Institutional performance may or may not be increased by deregulations or evaluation-based approaches, and deregulation may contribute to budget cuts through efficient use of public funding, but an evaluation-based approach may not contribute to budget cutting because it incurs more costs, e.g., establishing new agencies, increased paper work, additional administrative processes. In addition, universities often misuse their funds to meet the evaluation criteria. They use their resources to win the evaluation competition or to defend themselves from potential risk (risk management strategy) (King, 2007). Deregulation contributes to academic freedom, but an evaluation-based approach constrains academic freedom. Given the conflicting effects between deregulation and an evaluation-based approach, neoliberalism cannot accomplish its goals in the long run.

3.3 Complexity of higher education governance: Three narratives

Nevertheless, the current governance of higher education is quite difficult to explain in terms of neoliberalism alone. At first glance, it is more intensively controlled by agencies, especially by the pre-determined indicators; however, higher education institutions and professors enjoy flexibility in their governance and management. The complexity of current higher education governance is explained by Ferlie, et al. (2008). They discuss three narratives to interpret current higher education governance and management – new public management, network governance, and neo-Weberian narratives (although they focus on management, the same logic can be applied to governance discussions). They also provide some symptoms that represent each perspective.

The new pubic management emphasizes market-based reforms; charging real prices to their customers; monitoring performance through indicators; strong managerial powers; and reward systems. The network governance emphasizes networks for effective policymaking, non-governmental stakeholders, collaboration and strategic alliance, soft leadership skills, and reward teams rather than individuals. The neo-Weberian governance highlights states steering roles, representative democracy of university governance, reaffirming administrative law, job security and self regulation, and professionalization of public service (academic manager as an expert of academic affairs).

These symptoms are not as clear in the real world as Ferlie, et al. (2008) argue. According to
the aforementioned discussion of neoliberalism, universities are tightly controlled by government agencies; nonetheless, universities still enjoy flexibility and rewards (Kolsaker, 2008). For example, universities reflect their preferences in selection processes through various ways, participating in the process as a stakeholder; as a committee member; or even as a chair or president of the agency. Universities and professors are well networked with government agencies and policymakers. In addition, staff who are working at the agencies are academically well trained with advanced degrees. The bureaucratic systems of the agencies differ from those of government ministries. Therefore, one narrative such as the new public management might not fully explain current higher education governance.

4. Power dynamics under neoliberalism: Empirical evidence

4.1 Procedural and administrative areas

When they discuss institutional autonomy or governance, higher education scholars (e.g., Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1982; Volkwein & Malik, 1997) focus on whether the university or the professors hold power in their academic and or administrative affairs. Professors do not pay much attention to administrative affairs in their academic life but they are very sensitive to academic affairs because these are highly related to their job. However, the differentiation between administrative and academic affairs is not clear. There have been some initiatives by higher education scholars to clarify this, especially in the United States, but it is still unclear. In general, finance and management are related to administrative affairs whereas curriculum, teaching methods, content, faculty hiring and promotion are related to academic affairs. However, there are some gray areas between administrative and academic affairs. Student admissions may or may not be related to administrative affairs; faculty personnel for university administration may or may not be related to academic affairs.

The decision between academic and administrative affairs is related to the institutional context of higher education. For example, student admissions has been considered to be under administrative affairs in Europe while it is a part of academic affairs in the United States (McDaniel, 1996). The Changing Academic Profession (CAP) data also include governance related questions and the survey asks who holds power in some academic and administrative affairs. The survey provides 11 survey items on the issue of governance. These items could be classified as administrative, academic, or both academic and administrative affairs although it is controversial as discussed above.

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1 The CAP survey is an international comparative study which has 19 higher education systems – Anglo-American countries (the US, UK, Canada, Australia), European countries (Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Finland, and Portugal), East Asian countries (Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia, and Hong Kong SAR), Latin American countries (Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina), and South Africa.
4.2. Power relations under neoliberalism

Neoliberalism was widely adopted from the Anglo-American countries in the mid-1990s when globalization began to spread. Consequently, university governance differs before and after the mid-1990s. However, there are rare data that compare governance between different time points. For example, the CAP data provide empirical evidence on the faculty perception of governance before and after neoliberalism because the data collection was in 1992 and 2007. Unfortunately, both data sets use different survey questions so that we cannot compare governance between two time points. Table 2 shows how powers distributed differently in academic, administrative, or both academic and administrative affairs. For this analysis, the ambiguous items are split into an independent category. For the purpose of this study, the 11 items were classified in one of three types of affairs (administrative, academic, or between both) as follows:

[Administrative affairs]
- Selecting key administrators
- Determining budget priorities

[Academic affairs]
- Choosing new faculty
- Faculty promotion and tenure decision
- Evaluating research
- Decision of research priority
- Approving new academic programs

[Between Academic and Administrative Affairs]
- Determining overall teaching loads
- Setting admission standards for undergraduate students
- Evaluating teaching
- Establishing international linkages

According to this analysis, academics still feel powerful in academic affairs (46.5%) while they feel less influential in administrative affairs (18.9%). Academics perceive that university managers (administrators) have more influence in both academic (47.6%) and administrative (72.1%) affairs while the government and external stakeholders have relatively weak influence in both academic (5.9%) and administrative (9.1%) affairs. Figure 3 presents a simpler graphic presentation of the power relationships between stakeholders. The result is quite different from our proposition that academics perceive the government and external stakeholders to be stronger in relation to academic and administrative affairs. In terms of administrative affairs, university managers have relatively strong influence in Anglo-American countries; however, there is newly emerging strong managerial influence in Korea, China, Hong Kong, the Netherlands, and Norway. In terms of academic affairs,
professors possess strong influence in Canada, Italy, Finland, Japan, and Mexico while professors are losing influence in Germany, Norway, and the Netherlands.

The result suggests that institutional managers emerged as strong stakeholders under neoliberalism although their influences in decision making differs by the types of affairs and by higher education systems. Presumably, the external demands given by external stakeholders (government, their agencies, industry, and political parties) are interpreted by the institutional managers and these demands are reflected in their institutional decision making processes as institutional responses to the external demands. Additionally, through the transformational processes institutional leaders reflect their visions and philosophies in their managerial strategies and academics perceive their managers as strong stakeholders in their universities. Institutional managers expand their influence from administrative affairs to academic affairs that used to be considered the purview of professors or their committees in the past. With managerial reforms, managerial influence might be expanded further in the future in other countries as well as in the Anglo-American countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Administrative affairs</th>
<th>Academic affairs</th>
<th>Both academic and administrative affairs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>91.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>89.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>81.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>10.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: The Changing Academic Profession data of 2008
Notes: - Means of combined items
- Includes only academics with teaching functions (exclude research only academics)
- Includes only bachelor degree granting and above institutions
Figure 3. The influence between stakeholders in academic and administrative affairs

Academics’ perceptions of their influence in academic and administrative affairs differ according to their generation. Academic generations are divided into junior and senior according to academic ranks: full-professors are considered seniors, and assistant and associate professors are in the junior academics category. According to the analysis, seniors are not much stronger in their influence on both academic and administrative affairs than their junior colleagues. Between academic and administrative affairs, seniors are more influential in academic affairs than their junior colleagues. This finding suggests that senior academics are deeply involved in academic affairs but not much in administrative affairs. However, juniors are influential in their academic affairs than
their senior colleagues in some countries (e.g., Australia, Finland, Portugal, Malaysia, and Argentina). Presumably, junior academics are influential when their university adopts merit-based decision-making systems in their academic affairs.

5. Concluding remarks

Neoliberalism has had a huge influence on higher education governance. According to neoliberalism, universities are moving toward more efficient and output-oriented systems. The neoliberal ideology is reflected in the new public management under which the relationship between government and the university is decentralized, but the government regulations remain in higher education through its agencies and evaluation mechanisms. In addition, the government empowers both agencies and evaluation mechanisms by combining both with public funding mechanisms. As a result, universities are controlled by the agencies and evaluation indicators. The control by agencies is marked by details, more direct, and stronger through their “indicators”. The strong involvement of these agencies might be equivalent or more serious than the direct regulation by government bureaucracy. The change brings different types of bureaucracy by agencies (“agentocracy”). As a result, even when the government has decentralized its power, universities are still more controlled by government agencies and their indicators.

Nevertheless, university professors remain influential stakeholders in their decision making, especially in their decision making in academic affairs as the CAP data show. In academic life, academics actively participate in campus wide decision making. It would be rare for academic decisions to be made without professors’ participation. In addition, academics are actively involved in policy making and implementation at the agency level as well as at the government level. Consequently academics perceive that they control academic matters. These are explained by different narratives such as network governance. In the real world, higher education governance becomes more complex in the modern society than the three narratives discussed in this paper. University governance is not simply about the relationships between the government and the university, and between the university administration and professors; further, external relationships with society, especially the community, is becoming an important stakeholder in higher education governance.

This paper also found that governance discussion differs according to the generation of the academics. Senior academics have stronger influence on their academic affairs while junior academics feel less. These may be related to the fact that senior academics frequently participate in campus wide decision-making while junior faculty do not; seniors are also influential in their external relationships and well networked to policymakers while juniors are not. Nevertheless, juniors become influential by highlighting their performance assuming they are more productive in research; however, they are pressured by performance criteria while the seniors are free from the pressure. The
different perceptions between generations are a source of the complexity of academic governance in contemporary academia. Generational gaps should be discussed in depth in the academy because the gaps will be wider in the future.

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