

Research on the Theory and Practice of Supervision in Private Universities under the Background of Building a Strong Education Nation

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Abstract: Building a strong education nation is a foundational project for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. As an essential component of China's higher education system, private higher education must develop in a standardized, healthy, and high-quality manner. Effective supervision is a key mechanism to ensure the socialist orientation of private universities, fulfill the fundamental mission of cultivating virtue through education, and prevent and mitigate major risks. This paper, based on the strategic context of building a strong education nation, first elaborates the core principles of the Party and state supervision theory in the new era and its specific significance at the level of private universities, arguing that strengthening supervision is an inevitable requirement for upholding Party leadership, improving corporate governance, and safeguarding public welfare. Second, it systematically analyzes the current status of supervision system construction in private universities, covering multiple dimensions such as Party organization supervision, board (council) supervision, internal administrative supervision, democratic supervision by faculty and staff, and social supervision. It also identifies prominent problems in institutional design, operational mechanisms, and effectiveness, including insufficient exercise of the Party organization's political oversight, imbalance in internal governance structures, fragmented and uncoordinated supervisory forces, and weak accountability mechanisms. Finally, adopting a problem-oriented approach, the paper proposes practical pathways for optimizing the supervision system and enhancing its effectiveness in private universities in the new era—focusing on strengthening political guidance, improving internal governance, building collaborative mechanisms, deepening information disclosure, and reinforcing legal safeguards. The aim is to provide theoretical references and practical insights for promoting the connotative development of private universities and supporting the construction of a strong education nation.

Keywords: Strong Education Nation; Private Universities; Supervision Theory; Supervision System; Governance Modernization; Party Building.

1. Introduction

Education thrives when the nation prospers; education strengthens as the nation rises. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China explicitly includes “building a strong education nation” as one of the overall development goals for 2035, and clearly calls for “guiding and standardizing the development of private education.” Over decades of rapid growth, private universities have become a significant driving force in China's higher education sector and a catalyst for educational reform. By 2022, private institutions accounted for over one-quarter of all higher education institutions nationwide, with a vast student population. Their educational quality, governance standards, and social reputation directly impact the overall ecosystem of higher education and the national talent cultivation landscape.

However, compared to public universities, private institutions face unique challenges due to differences in funding sources, property rights, governance models, and operational mechanisms. Issues such as incomplete legal governance structures, relatively weak party building, non-compliant practices, financial and asset risks, and inadequate fulfillment of public service obligations have emerged during development[1]. These problems not only constrain sustainable development but also pose potential threats to educational equity, quality, and social stability. Therefore, in the context of building a strong education nation, how to effectively apply the new-era Chinese theory of

supervision to private universities and establish a comprehensive, scientific, standardized, and efficient supervision system has become a pressing theoretical and practical issue. Such a system must ensure that private universities consistently adhere to the correct direction, operate legally and transparently, and continuously improve educational quality [2].

This paper integrates perspectives from party building research, higher education management, and law to explore the new requirements posed by the strong education nation strategy for supervision in private universities. It reviews the theoretical foundations and practical basis of the supervision system, analyzes the achievements and challenges in current practice, and proposes targeted and actionable development pathways. The goal is to contribute scholarly insight toward advancing the modernization of governance in private higher education and supporting the realization of a strong education nation.

2. The Significance of New-Era Supervision Theory in Private Universities

Supervision is not merely restriction or control—it is a systemic arrangement for ensuring healthy development and a manifestation of governance capacity. In the context of building a strong education nation, applying the supervision theory from China's national governance system modernization to private universities holds profound

theoretical and practical significance.

(1) Ensuring the Socialist Orientation of Education

China's higher education operates under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and is inherently socialist. All universities must uphold Party leadership, adhere to Marxism, and serve the cause of the Party and the nation. Although privately funded, private universities are part of the socialist education system and must not deviate from their ideological direction. Effective supervision—especially political oversight by Party organizations—is essential to fully implement the Party's educational policies[3][4]. A robust supervision mechanism prevents and corrects deviations, ensuring that private universities remain strongholds for cultivating builders and successors of socialism—the political foundation and soul of building a strong education nation.

(2) Promoting Connotative and High-Quality Development

The essence of a strong education nation lies in quality. With higher education entering the stage of massification, the focus has shifted from scale expansion to quality enhancement. For private universities to transition from “large” to “strong,” they must pursue connotative development[5]. A sound supervision system continuously monitors and evaluates teaching quality, faculty development, discipline construction, academic research, and management efficiency. It acts as both a “health check center” and a “navigation system,” diagnosing problems early, guiding resource allocation, discouraging short-termism, and focusing efforts on core missions—thereby steadily enhancing competitiveness. Without effective quality supervision, connotative development cannot be achieved[6].

(3) Improving Legal Governance and Preventing Major Risks

Private universities typically adopt a president-responsibility system under board leadership, yet their governance structures often suffer from “form without substance.” Excessive power concentration among founders, irregular decision-making procedures, and weak supervision can lead to “family-style” management or “insider control,” potentially harming institutional assets, faculty rights, and student interests[7]. A modern governance-based supervision system emphasizes checks and balances and procedural justice. By clarifying responsibilities among boards, presidents, Party organizations, academic committees, and faculty congresses, and establishing mechanisms where decision-making, execution, and supervision are separated and mutually constrained, power can be regulated, stakeholder rights protected, and risks in finance and operations prevented—laying a solid institutional foundation for long-term stability[8].

(4) Fulfilling the Fundamental Task of Moral Education and Upholding Educational Equity

Cultivating virtue is the very purpose of higher education. Private universities face unique challenges in student recruitment, faculty composition, and campus culture, requiring greater effort to fulfill this mission. Supervision should go beyond hard indicators to assess soft outcomes—such as ideological and political education, curriculum-based moral education, teacher ethics, campus culture, and student mental health support. Additionally, supervision ensures fairness in admissions, tuition fees, scholarships, and degree issuance, protecting students' rights and enhancing public trust in private education.

3. Current Status of Supervision System Construction in Private Universities

After years of policy guidance and practical exploration, China's private universities have established a preliminary supervision framework combining internal and external actors:

(1) Internal Supervision Mechanisms

Party Organization Supervision: A distinctive feature of China's system. According to the *Promotion Law of Private Education*, private universities must establish Party organizations to play a political core role. Party oversight is exercised through participation in major decisions, ideological guidance, cadre management, and political education[10]. Recent years have seen strengthened Party building, with mechanisms like “dual appointments” gradually implemented [11].

Board (Council) Supervision: As the highest decision-making body, the board supervises the president and management team by reviewing development plans, budgets, and key regulations. Some institutions have established supervisory boards or independent directors to enhance oversight[9].

Administrative Internal Supervision: Includes monitoring by the president's office and specialized units such as audit, inspection, and teaching groups. Internal audit reviews financial activities, while teaching assesses classroom quality.

Democratic Supervision: Faculty and staff congresses (FSC) and academic committees enable participatory governance. The FSC exercises rights of review, consultation, and evaluation on issues affecting faculty welfare. Academic committees oversee academic affairs and investigate misconduct.

(2) External Supervision Mechanisms

Government Administrative Supervision: The primary external force. Education authorities supervise through licensing, annual inspections, teaching evaluations, program accreditation, financial audits, and information disclosure checks. Other departments (finance, market regulation, etc.) also participate within their mandates.

Social Supervision: Includes industry associations (e.g., China Association for Private Education), third-party evaluators, media, and public feedback. Rankings and certifications create reputational pressure. Media exposure helps uncover violations. Students and parents exercise influence through choice, complaints, and evaluations.

Overall, the supervision framework is largely in place, with increasingly diverse participants and methods. Strengthened party building and assessment systems have enhanced compliance to some extent.

4. Challenges and Problems in the Supervision System

Despite progress, deep-seated issues remain that limit the effectiveness of supervision.

(1) Weakness and Formalism in Internal Supervision

Insufficient Role of Party Organizations: In some institutions, party work is marginalized (“emphasizing business over party building”). Ambiguous status in governance and inadequate mechanisms for participating in decisions lead to political oversight being sidelined. Low

representation of Party secretaries on boards further weakens their voice.

Imbalanced Governance and Lack of Checks: Decision-making power is often concentrated in the hands of founders or families. Boards become “rubber stamps.” Supervisory boards or independent directors are rare or ineffective. Internal audit and inspection lack independence and authority, enabling “insider control” and risks such as asset transfer and fee irregularities.

Ineffective Democratic and Academic Oversight: Faculty congresses are often ceremonial, with limited real influence. Academic committees lack authority amid capital and administrative dominance, weakening their ability to regulate academic conduct.

(2) Gaps in External Supervision: Overreach, Underreach, and Fragmentation

Suboptimal Government Regulation: Overregulation in some areas stifles autonomy, while under-enforcement in post-approval oversight allows hidden risks. Annual reviews and assessments sometimes lack depth. Inter-departmental coordination is poor, leading to conflicting policies.

Weak Social Supervision: Industry self-regulation remains limited. Third-party evaluations vary in credibility and may encourage gaming behaviors. Media focuses on scandals rather than constructive oversight. Student and parent feedback channels are underdeveloped and costly to use.

Poor Information Disclosure: Despite requirements, many institutions disclose little, especially on finances, assets, and related-party transactions, depriving external stakeholders of critical information.

(3) Lack of Systemic Coordination

Internal and external supervision bodies operate in silos. Information barriers persist, and findings are not shared. For example, government evaluations fail to drive internal reforms; Party oversight struggles to influence board decisions; social ratings do not integrate with official regulation. This fragmented landscape prevents the formation of a closed-loop supervision system.

5. Practical Pathways for Supervision System Development under the Strong Education Nation Strategy

To address these challenges, a systematic, problem-oriented, and multi-stakeholder approach is needed to build a modern, co-governed supervision system.

(1) Fundamental Guarantee: Strengthening the Political Core and Supervisory Role of Party Organizations

Clarify the legal status of Party organizations in governance via university charters[10].

Implement mechanisms such as Party secretaries joining boards and presidents serving as deputy secretaries. Focus on political supervision: monitor implementation of Party policies, ideological work, faculty ethics, and key personnel appointments. Enhance Party capacity through training, staffing, and funding; include Party performance in institutional evaluations[11].

(2) Institutional Core: Establishing a Charter-Based Internal Governance and Supervision Mechanism

Improve board composition by adding educational experts and faculty representatives. Establish supervisory boards or independent directors accountable to founders, focusing on legality, finance, and executive conduct. Ensure

presidential autonomy under board leadership; require regular reporting and evaluation. Empower internal audit and inspection units with vertical management to enhance independence. Activate democratic and academic oversight: strengthen faculty congress functions and grant academic committees supreme authority in academic matters.

(3) Key Support: Precision and Coordinated Regulation under the “Delegation, Management, and Service” Reform

Reduce administrative approvals and expand institutional autonomy. Implement differentiated supervision based on institution type (non-profit vs. for-profit). Shift from pre-approval to ongoing, dynamic monitoring using digital tools. Build credit records for institutions and founders; apply cross-departmental joint incentives and penalties. Establish inter-agency coordination mechanisms (led by education authorities) to share data and enforce jointly.

(4) Important Force: Building a Multi-Actor Social Supervision Network

Empower industry associations to set standards, conduct peer reviews, and manage exits. Guide professional third-party evaluators to develop credible, science-based assessment systems. Mandate full public disclosure of financial, enrollment, and fee information. Establish accessible complaint and feedback channels for students and parents; incorporate satisfaction into performance metrics.

(5) Technological Empowerment: Enhancing Supervision Efficiency through Digital Tools

Develop smart supervision platforms integrating academic, financial, HR, and asset data for real-time analysis and early warning. Connect with national education data platforms for seamless regulatory access. Use big data and AI to detect trends in teaching quality decline, financial risk, or campus instability—shifting from post-event punishment to pre-event prevention and mid-process intervention.

6. Conclusion

Establishing a modern supervision system tailored to private universities is essential for guiding and regulating their development and serves as a strategic lever for achieving connotative, high-quality growth. This is a complex, long-term endeavor requiring coordinated top-down design and bottom-up innovation, blending rigid rules with flexible guidance.

First, the importance of supervision must be recognized at the national strategic level. Building a strong education nation requires both public universities as the main force and private institutions as vital contributors. Only through comprehensive supervision can private universities maintain educational equity, quality, and social trust while expanding resources.

Second, innovation must respect both international best practices—such as checks and balances and procedural justice—and China’s unique context, particularly the leadership role of the Party. Supervision is not a constraint but a safeguard—a means to promote healthy growth within norms.

Finally, success depends on sustained collaboration: governments must refine systems and services; founders must act responsibly; managers must strengthen internal controls; faculty and students must participate actively; and society must provide rational support. Together, they can create a healthy ecosystem of government regulation, industry self-discipline, institutional autonomy, and social

oversight—enabling private universities to become true contributors to and beneficiaries of the strong education nation vision.

Looking ahead, with deeper implementation of policies like the *Implementation Regulations of the Promotion Law of Private Education* and wider application of digital governance tools, the supervision system for private universities will become more scientific, efficient, and transparent. We envision a future where private institutions overcome bottlenecks, leverage their strengths, and work in synergy with public universities to write a new chapter in building a strong education nation.

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