

# The Enlightenment of Max Weber's Sociological Thought to Chinese Educational Research

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**Abstract:** In the past 30 years, many scholars in the social science community in mainland China, especially in the field of sociology, have interpreted, discussed and expounded Weber's thoughts, social theory and its methodology, and have also produced many inspirations and influences on the field of education. Review Max Weber sociology thought of Chinese education research enlightenment course and key areas, is beneficial to understand Max Weber sociological thought spread in China, but also to understand the development of Chinese education theory and practice, for deep understanding Max Weber sociological thought is of great significance, and for the development of modern university provides new ideas and new material.

**Keywords:** Max Weber; Rationalization; Bureaucracy; Academic freedom; Value neutrality.

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## 1. Introduction

As a great thinker and social theorist of the 20th century, Max Weber focused his life on the two core themes of academia and politics. Over the past 30 years, the social sciences in mainland China, especially in the field of sociology, there are many scholars of Weber's ideas, social theory and methodology, discussion and elaborated, and the rise of a visible "Weber heat", they strongly promoted the Max Weber research as the development of a specialized field [1]. Over the past 40 years of reform and opening up, with the acceleration of China's social economy and social transformation, social problems have emerged constantly, and academic concerns about the institutional design and policy response to these new social status quo and problems have become increasingly important. Max Weber's academic thoughts are cited as authoritative opinions and knowledge in modern social thoughts [2]. Max Weber's related theories and works have also produced a lot of inspiration and influence on the field of education, and generated enthusiasm and inspiration for many issues related to education in China. Review and outlook Max Weber sociological thought of Chinese education research enlightenment course and key areas, is beneficial to understand Max Weber sociology thought in China, but also to understand the development of Chinese education theory and practice for 20 years, but also beneficial to analyze Max Weber sociology thought after entering the Chinese education research field of some reaction, for deep understanding Max Weber sociology thought is of great significance.

## 2. Overview of Max Weber

It is well known that Max Weber is one of the contemporary German thinkers with international influence. In terms of sociology, Max Weber in the contemporary influence of much, his life, involving sociology, history, political science, economics, philosophy, and many other research areas, is an influential thinker, with Karl Marx and emil du kem and called the three founder of sociology.

Max Weber lived in a time when German historicism and Neo-Condoctrine were widely popular, and his academic thoughts were deeply influenced by the German cultural spirit

represented by the historicism and Neo-Conderism at that time. Weber described himself as a disciple of the historicist school and accepted some important ideas of neo-Condoctrine, especially the Lee Celtic and Zimmel ideas. It was in this era and cultural background that Weber created the school of humanistic sociology, which made the humanistic sociology rise to prominence. In Weber's era, Weber formed an important town where the positivist sociology represented by sociology divided the equal level of the world.

After that, humanism sociology has the momentum to overwhelm the positivist sociology. In contemporary times, "anti-positivism" and "post-positivism" have become the fashion of sociology. As the first comprehensive and systematic expression of humanistic sociology, Weber's understanding of sociology is completely different or even opposed from positivism in many aspects, especially in the field of methodology. American sociologist science think sociology can be divided into former weber period and weber period, in the former weber period, weber broke the integration of positivism of sociology, since the two classes in society, create a brilliant modern sociology. Weber ended an era of — positivist sociology, and at the same time began an era of post-Weber era — sociology [3].

In the time when Max Weber lived, the German higher education system was undergoing the gradual infiltration of the government bureaucracy. From the unification of Germany in 1871 to 1907, Artehoff, as the head of the education department in Prussia and even Germany, actively promoted a higher education and scientific management system that emphasized national regulation and management [4]. In 1911, Weber in the United States and Germany, while affirmed the althoff made important contribution to German university, but still emphasize " artehoff system of Germany in the future of scholars have direct influence with corrosion, and the prevailing system, trying to change a new generation of scholars into academic 'businessman', into no ideological system of screws, mislead them, make them into a conflict of conscience, into the wrong path, even though their entire academic career, have to bear the resulting pain. "Therefore, what it means to be a person of academic ambition in a university increasingly permeated and controlled by the administrative bureaucracy is actually Weber's basic perspective of thinking about the academic freedom in the

university [5].

Max Weber's representative work mainly include: the Weber on university (2006), academic and political (2016), in Munich famous speech "academic career" (1917), in Munich university titled "scholar career and mission" report (1918), wrote the American university and German university (1911) and the university academic freedom, etc.

Weber on university is mainly based on Max Weber in the Frankfurt newspaper and other publications articles and the summary, is a collection of Webers, involving Weber itself involved in Bain hard events, Michelle incident debate, comments in the German university teachers conference and "social science methodology" and "academic" the related part of the two articles. Academic in politics is late Marx Weber, derived from the final stage of two speech, in the first speech "academic", Weber in addition to review the twentieth century discipline differentiation and the different western countries academic system arrangement, also special emphasis on the value of subjectivity and diversity characteristics, Max Weber, therefore, teachers stand platform, should be a "value involved" or "value neutral" stage. In the second speech, "Taking Politics for a Business", Weber reviewed the formation of western bureaucracy in detail, and gave a detailed explanation on the modern political phenomenon of party politics. He hoped that politicians should be a responsible and realistic politician to reality, rather than empty talk and fantasy.

Max Weber's works of sociological thought has great contribution to education research, on the one hand embodies the Max Weber's sociological thought is education problem as the starting point and the core reveals the overall social operation mechanism, on the other hand to reflect on today's education problem provides a powerful theoretical tools and research enlightenment.

### 3. Literature analysis of Max Weber's sociological thoughts on Chinese education research

To understand the nearly 40 years Max weber theory in the spread of Chinese education and research, academic literature provided by the analysis object, with "Max weber" as the theme search condition, time to 2021, a total of 60 articles in the field of education research, the literature keywords distribution to "academic freedom" "value neutrality" higher proportion. To some extent, this shows that the study of Max Weber in Chinese education circles mainly focuses on the discussion of his theory of academic freedom and value neutrality. To further increase the number of samples, the study added "academic freedom" and "value neutrality" to the key department search terms, with a total of 731 educational articles and a publication span from 1989 to 2021.

According to the trend of literature publication in the past 40 years, the research on Max Weber's sociological ideas in Chinese education circles can be roughly divided into three stages, namely, the preliminary understanding stage (1989-1999), the extensive exploration stage (2000-2010) and the in-depth discussion stage (2011-2021), as shown in Figure 2-1. In the preliminary understanding stage, there were few relevant studies in China, and the number of published literatures was the lowest in nearly 40 years. At this time, the understanding of Max Weber was not very common. Until the beginning of this century around 2000, related research gradually rise, although the number of individual time

published is less, but the overall number of published on the rise, the understanding of Max Weber popularity, widely explore about Max Weber sociology theory, the number of published papers also increased. Then, in 2011, after extensive exploration Max Weber theory, some people in order to continue to explore about Max Weber sociology theory related thought, the further exploration, and the other part is not choose to explore about Max Weber sociology thought scholars, the following ten years related research literature published number generally presents a downward trend.

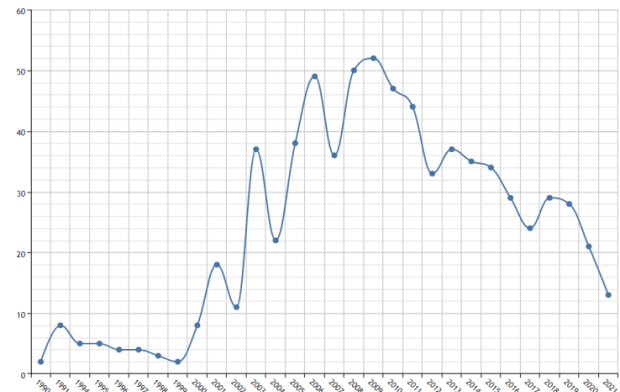


Figure 1. The published annual trend chart

## 4. Domestic understanding of several core concepts of Max Weber

According to the previous analysis of the key words of Max Weber's sociological thought in the Chinese educational research literature, "academic freedom" and "value neutrality" are the core concepts that are widely used. In addition, Max Weber's concept of "rationalization" has gradually attracted more attention, which has exerted a certain influence and inspiration on the research of related educational issues. In general, the relevant core concepts in Max Weber's sociological thought mainly include: academic freedom, value neutrality, and rationalization.

### 4.1. Academic freedom

Academic freedom is an important part of the educational philosophy thought system of Weber University. From youth in the university to become a university professor, Weber to university has continuous attention and thinking, at the same time with extensive knowledge and excellent debate, he happened in the major events in the field of higher education a thorough analysis and debate, which involves the most theme is "academic freedom". With the development of economy and the progress of science and rationality, Weber was dissatisfied with the destruction of the bureaucracy (bureaucracy) to university autonomy and academic freedom, but he also saw the inevitability of the formation of the trend of bureaucracy system. In Weber's thought of academic freedom, the bureaucracy is a vertical line, and the academic freedom is a horizontal line, and they are nervously intertwined [5]. Weber is with such a contradictory and complex psychology, for the university of the "academic freedom" and cry.

The university is based on academic study, free thought is the soul of academic research, and academic freedom is the most important representation of the vitality of the university. Weber advocated that in the academic kingdom of the university, freedom is the basic spirit of the university, which

includes the freedom of learning, the freedom of teaching, and the research freedom. Here, both the supreme professor and the humble teaching assistant are academically equal. The university should provide every member with freedom of mind. Weber's academic freedom, where academic ideas can collide freely in a "state of anarchy" [6].

On academic issues, Weber argued that both teaching assistants and professors must be equal. There is no absolute authority in the face of academic. The spirit of freedom is the basic spirit of a university, which is mainly reflected in the academic, including the freedom of teaching, research and learning. Only under the principles of freedom and openness, different academic ideas stir each other, can new ideological direction. Free thought is the soul of learning. Without the idea of free thought, it is impossible to have true knowledge. Weber compared the traditional "academic freedom" with his own academic freedom to further clarify his own academic freedom proposition [7]. In Webb's view, "Real academic freedom" is such a face: (1) when there is a vacant teaching position, Candidates are not only subject to scrutiny of academic and academic qualifications, Also limited by political positions and religious beliefs, When considering who can be a college teacher, Teacher candidates must be subordinate to the government and the church; (2) When the professor speaks in public places outside the university, Consider whether this behavior becomes a barrier to your own occupation, University teachers are state officials, A blatant challenge to political authority in public places could be removed from the professorship; (3) In the class, Scholars who have been hired as university professors, You can speak freely on the university platform. Weber's "true academic freedom" should be: (1) do not discriminate or even refuse for any belief reason; (2) university teachers should have dual status and dual freedom. When participating in political activities in public places outside the university, they are legal citizens of the country and have political freedom, which does not interfere with his teaching position; 3) Unlike participating in political activities, university teachers must maintain value neutrality in values and world view, and insist on "abstinence on the podium" [8]. Weber believes that university teachers should establish a lofty sense of responsibility, and take the academic work as their own ambition, and even their first duty [9]. We should take academic as our destiny, academic as our duty, be full of deep love and calm passion for academic, be willing to be lonely and enjoy it, and have the enthusiasm of "crazy". Only in this way can we gain freedom, which is a kind of academic freedom derived from the heart [5].

The study of academic freedom in China can be roughly divided into history and theory. The first category is the academic freedom research that runs through the development history of Chinese universities. One of the representative works is the *One Hundred Century of Higher Education in China* written by Mr. Pan Maoyuan and *The History of the Development of Chinese University Education* written by Qu Shipai. The study sorts out the development history of universities in modern China, and sorts out the connotation of academic freedom in different periods and the system construction. From the macro history, China's understanding of academic freedom has been deepened. Although the system construction is insufficient, it is still constantly improved. The second category is a thematic study on academic free thought. Chen Xuefei's paper "The Historical Evolution of Western Academic Freedom Thought"

published in *Educational Research* in 1993 is an important document for the study of academic freedom in the historical process of building a modern university in China. He pointed out that academic freedom is the basic principle and concept of the construction of modern universities, which has become a consensus of people, and many scholars began to pay attention to the study of academic freedom [10].

## 4.2. Value neutrality

Value neutrality, as one of Max Weber's famous doctrines, has had an enduring influence on the academic world. The so-called value neutrality means that universities and scholars, when pursuing academic studies, should try to exclude subjective value judgment as much as possible, strictly observe the objectivity based on facts and logical reasoning, and strive to draw the conclusion that "not influenced by value", also known as value freedom [11]. As a research method of social science, value neutrality lies in "avoiding the freedom of value judgment" (Freedom from Value-judgment) [12]. Weber did not completely eliminate values from the research content, but only restricted the research attitude, methods and teachers' teaching, because values themselves are also the content studied [13]. He advocated that academic activities should strictly abide by the position of value neutrality, and that value judgment issues related to beliefs should be answered by politicians or religious prophets, and no choice should be made in the forum [14]. Therefore, as a research method of multiple values, "value neutrality" is the most objective. At this time, scholars need not only the buffer force brought by academic freedom, but also need politics to maintain relatively rational tolerance and rationality for academic [15].

The reason why Weber emphasized that "he should not impose his own values on materials" in social science research is that he saw the great differences in different social consciousness formed by people's different social existence, especially the subjectivist danger brought by values to social science research. Weber demanded to resolutely avoid the dangers of subjectivism in social science research, in order to maintain the objectivity of social science and establish a veritable social science, which fully reflects the spirit of scientists [16].

Now most scholars have maintained a certain academic consciousness, including academic dedicated for the truth, but we can't deny the individual "pseudo intellectuals", which is our common to "business scholars" "near rich scholars", the so-called scholar intellectuals is actually in the name of academic and scientific for special interest groups or class service. These people give up the sense of responsibility and academic consciousness that scholars should have, resulting in a significant decline in the social credit degree of China's academic circle. In this critical period of social transformation, we should be vigilant that these politicized or commercialized intellectuals will merge into the field of scientific research. In other words, Weber's "value neutrality" has a great enlightenment and guiding effect on regulating the research methods and style of Chinese academic circles [17].

## 4.3. Rationalization

As a unique universal historical phenomenon in modern West, rationalization systematically uses the power of an anti-tradition to create the way of life and social order of modern life. Rationalization is the institutionalization and organization of the revolution, which is a lasting revolution.

It transforms the transition state and the crisis situation into the scale that completely shapes the way of human life and the social order. "Rationalization", especially the "revolutionary force" that can constantly "brand" shape the way of life and social order, has become the spiritual temperament of the western cultural world. According to Weber's sociological analysis, any social action must point to a certain legitimate order. The effect of this proper order on action can not only rely on customs or interests, but always depends on the "belief" of the participants in this proper order, and the "sense of obligation" caused by this belief. That is to say, it must contain the factor of "value rationality" [18].

Max Weber admits that instrumental rationalization has indeed led to many "rational" social progress, and that the rationally institutionalized bureaucratic bureaucracy also holds the unique advantages of its own rationality, but it is this "revolutionary power" that makes the hard and cold iron cage. In his opinion, the suppression and alienation of individual by the increasingly large bureaucratic system will only get deeper and deeper. The fate of modern people is to be imprisoned in the dark and cold "iron cage" of reason, etc. The uniqueness and freedom of individuals are ignored in the operation of rational machines, and faced with the tragic fate of being dissolved and alienated [19].

Weber believes that rationalism is the core of the spirit of modern capitalism, and the thought of rationalization runs through every field of modern western society. First of all, it is reflected in the economic rationalization of the modern capitalist society. Secondly, it is reflected in the rationalization of modern capitalist social politics. Finally, it is reflected in the rationalization of modern capitalist social culture. Weber pointed out that with the deepening of the rationalization of modern society, the development of modern society is constantly in a tense and contradictory state. From the perspective of the core question of whether it is conducive to the survival and development of people, on the one hand, the rationalization and instrumentalization of social organizations will improve the efficiency of social labor, and give people more freedom to control nature; on the other hand, the instrumental rationality has expanded to its opposite side, and the rise of utilitarianism, consumerism and relativism, the survival and development of people fall into the dilemma of nothingness with no substantial value and significance. Through the study of the internal affinity between Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism and the comparative analysis of the western world and the economic society of the eastern world, Weber elaborated that rationalization is the core tendency in the social modernization construction of the present and the future. It can be said that Weber's analysis of the rationalization of modern society and the hidden worries about the future world have important enlightening significance both from the method and connotation of scientific research [20].

## **5. The enlightenment of Max Weber's sociological thought to Chinese educational research**

The university is a place to explore the truth, to ensure the academic purity, is the natural mission of the university, and is also one of the conditions for the progress of social material civilization and spiritual civilization. In order to ensure the purity of the academic university must get their rights, whether in the outside world, or in the internal management,

need to maintain their independence, but not to say that the university should be closed "ivory tower", the development of the university needs the government and society to provide policy support and financial support, and the government and society also need to cultivate university human resources and research out of advanced technology and theory. The relationship between universities and the government and society is a kind of cooperation, rather than the relationship between the dominance and the dominance of the superior and the subordinate. The idea of academic freedom originated in Germany, from the current world, especially in the western world, academic freedom idea has become an academic tradition, the university reached a consensus, academic practitioners are not national bureaucracy, school management is the university own business, national politics cannot intervene in school academic freedom, there is no administrative level difference between university teachers.

The development time of modern universities in China is relatively short, and there is no long history and long-term tradition of western universities. In addition, as all fields of Chinese society are greatly affected by national policies, there are also certain administrative levels among the managers of universities in China, and individuals receive different treatment according to different administrative levels. Take position level in university administrators, this within a certain range can produce incentive effect to managers, but according to the level of different, the benefits is different, this makes part of the people abandoned the academic pursuit, discarded the academic spirit, become the pursuit of position and fame "businessman", in the university of management chasing high position, in order to get more benefits.

Promoting the deadadministration of universities, ensuring the academic freedom of universities and enhancing the humanism of universities have become the major problems faced by Chinese universities now. Although the administrative management is conducive to the unified management of the university and the convenient solution to the problems of capital and technology, the excessive administration and the traditional free spirit advocated by the university are often far away. On the one hand, the university teachers must reduce the degree of dependence on management institutions, improve the status of university teachers, ensure their lives, as far as possible to apply for academic research funds complicated procedures, and arouse the enthusiasm of university teachers engaged in research work, ensure the academic research work smoothly, eliminate their trouble back at home. On the other hand to avoid administrative bad interference for university internal affairs, such as the personnel of teachers, academic research, teaching evaluation, title evaluation, the students of admission, awards, prevent the number of university administrators in the pursuit of academic research, leading to abandon academic research quality, more can't let some unfair human factors in the promotion and the cultivation of students control role [21].

In terms of value neutrality, we should make the principle of value neutrality become the primary principle of social science research, make the study of sociology as close to the objective reality as possible, and maintain value neutrality. In the academic face of politics, we should adhere to the political neutral attitude, try to eliminate the subjective value factors, pay attention to from the practical and operational aspects of research. As we all know, since 1957, due to ideological disputes, the older generation of Chinese people suffered more than a lot. Now, we must advocate the "indifference" of

ideology. Although for various reasons, the social science research from ancient times to China is inseparable from politics, with a very strong "political tendency", which is the inevitable of The Times. As contemporary scholars, we should not repeat the same mistakes, but should adhere to the research attitude of "political neutrality". Only in this way can the research of social science workers be closer to the reality of China, be the science in the real sense, and promote the prosperity and development of social science in China. This is also the meaning and value of Weber's "value neutrality" theory [17]. And university as the essence of the pursuit of truth, requires university teachers both in teaching and research work, to pursue a kind of rational honesty, the principle of "value neutrality" as their teaching and research of self-discipline, get the objectivity and authenticity of knowledge, ensure knowledge is not disturbed by personal values [8].

Can say, Max Weber's rational thought helps to enrich our understanding of modernization [22], make us in the process of modernization today, further realize that today's modernization is not only the economic development of China, urbanization and education related research, social structure is the increasingly differentiation and integration, the process of modernization, is the way of life modernization and rational process [23].

## 6. Conclusion

Weber's theory is not an absolutely universal history applicable to everything, but it must be through individualized efforts to construct the universality of history. So, in a sense, Weber cannot replace us, nor our feelings, nor all our problems, and not the emotions and values that we rely on in life and academia. Weber certainly gave us great inspiration, but the future road still needs us to find. Carrying forward the spirit of academic freedom and improving the modern university system are the core value pursuit and fundamental system guarantee for the improvement of higher education quality, but also the inevitable choice to break through the bottleneck of cultivating world outstanding talents in China [10].

This study by exploring Max Weber related sociological thought, such as academic freedom, value neutrality, idealized core concepts, learning which can be used for reference, hope through rich and expand our related research about Max Weber sociological thought, for the development of modern university in our country provides a new idea and new material.

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