

Comparison of German and American Higher Education Accreditation Systems and Implications for Quality Management of Higher Education in China

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At the present stage, China's higher education has experienced continuous reform and enhancement, the scale of education has jumped to the forefront, and the quality of education has been continuously improved, which has made gratifying achievements. The development of China's higher education has entered the critical node of improving quality and efficiency, and the importance of quality management as the central link in improving the quality of higher education is self-evident. Accreditation as an effective means of quality assurance, in Germany and the United States has formed a mature and perfect system and procedures. Therefore, analysing and learning from the quality management system of higher education in Germany and the United States has an important reference value for promoting the further development of quality management of higher education in China.

Keywords: accreditation systems, quality management in higher education, Germany, USA

1. Introduction

The development of higher education in the world is one of the important symbols of the progress of human civilization and an important way for countries to enhance their international competitiveness and influence. Against the background of knowledge globalization, world higher education is facing new challenges and opportunities such as diversification, quality, internationalization and informatization, and needs to be reformed and innovated continuously to meet the changing needs of society and economy. The development of higher education in China has gone through a historical process from closed to open and from single to diversified and has made remarkable achievements. The scale of higher education has jumped to the forefront of the world, the quality of higher education has been continuously improved, the international exchanges and cooperation of higher education has become more and more in-depth, and the number of international students coming to China has shown a rising trend. As an important part of international exchanges and cooperation, international student education is highly valued by the Chinese government. As an important mode of international education exchange, Sino-foreign cooperative education has played a positive role in improving the level of China's higher education and international influence.

In recent years, the development of China's higher education has entered the key point of improving quality and efficiency, and the importance of quality management as the central link in improving the quality of higher education is self-evident. China is also exploring a higher education quality management system that suits its own national conditions. The development of higher education in Germany and the United States has always been in the leading position in the world and is the object of study and reference for the reform of higher education in various countries. The establishment of Germany's higher education accreditation system stems from the launch of the Bologna Process in 1998, which laid down the structural standards for German bachelor's and master's degree programs. Therefore, the study of the quality management system of higher education in Germany and the United States has an important reference value for promoting the further development of quality management of higher education in China.

2. History of the Development of the German and American Higher Education Accreditation Systems

2.1 History of the Development of the German Higher Education Accreditation System

As a result of the Bologna Process, the legal framework for higher education in Germany was amended to introduce a new degree system allowing the introduction of Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes in Germany, and in July 1998 the Plenary Session of the Federation of German Higher Education Institutions (FHEI) declared that, in order to enable the recognition and acceptance of new degree programmes, the accreditation of new degree programmes introduced by German higher education institutions should be introduced on a pilot basis. In December 1998 the Joint Conference of the Ministers of Culture and Education of the L änder decided to introduce accreditation of bachelor's and master's Degrees and in March 1999 the structural norms for the introduction of bachelor's and master's Degrees were finalized. Considering the differences in the capacities and responsibilities of regional governments and universities in establishing degree programs, it was decided to establish a functional separation between the licensing of degree programs and the accreditation of degree programs in state higher education institutions. In other words, the accreditation procedure will become a new form of quality management independent of administrative licensing.

At the beginning of 1998, the Ministers of Education and Culture of the L änder, in consultation with the Conference of Ministers of Education and Culture of the L änder and the Federation of German Higher Education Institutions, decided to set up an inter-regional national "Accreditation Committee" (Akkreditierungsrat), which will be responsible for the auditing and supervision of the accreditation agencies (Akkreditierungsagenturen) of the other institutions that carry out accreditation of higher education in particular. It is responsible for auditing and supervising other accreditation agencies (Akkreditierungsagenturen) that carry out accreditation of higher education. The establishment of the Central Accreditation Committee marked the organizational foundation of the German degree programme accreditation system. After an initial three-year pilot phase, the accreditation of degree programmes in German higher education institutions (Studieng änge) was finalized by the Standing Conference of the Ministries of Education and Culture of the States.

The German higher education accreditation system has initially formed an accreditation system consisting of three subjects, two forms and two types. The three main bodies are: the Accreditation Commission, accreditation agencies and universities. The two forms of accreditation are accreditation of accrediting agencies

by the Accrediting Commission and accreditation of colleges and universities by accrediting agencies. The two types are System Accreditation and Programme Accreditation. Program accreditation is the earliest form of higher education accreditation in Germany, after the implementation of a very wide range of impact in Germany, with the rapid and extensive implementation, there are some problems. Program accreditation of the voice of doubt mainly from two aspects, one is to question the content of accreditation, the second is to question the results of accreditation. From the content of accreditation, professional accreditation as a form of external quality assurance of universities, the lack of linkage with the internal quality assurance of universities; at the same time, program accreditation of the certification of each program, not the university as a whole to look at. In terms of accreditation results, whether the accreditation agency has the ability to deal with the accreditation of a large number of degree programs in a short period of time, the accreditation results of different accreditation agencies, and the accreditation results of the same accreditation agency for different universities have a large degree of inconsistency. In this context, the German higher education accreditation began to look for a new approach to accreditation, system accreditation has emerged. The core of system accreditation is to certify the internal teaching quality assurance system of colleges and universities. System accreditation requires colleges and universities to establish an effective internal teaching quality assurance system to ensure that each program meets the minimum requirements of higher education quality.

After decades of development, Germany has established a non-governmental, decentralized accreditation system with highly standardized accreditation agencies and procedures, diversified forms of accreditation, and complete and detailed accreditation standards. The German higher education accreditation system has formed a set of student-centered, learning outcome-oriented, and continuous improvement as the goal of a perfect system.

2.2 History of the Development of the U.S. Higher Education Accreditation System

The concept of accreditation of colleges and professions in the United States is based first and foremost on the fact that, since the founding of the United States, the federal government has played a subordinate role in establishing and maintaining the higher education system and in serving as a guarantor of teaching assurances and quality standards of learning. To date, there has been no centralized agency or ministry at the federal level with a mandate to develop appropriate educational policies. According to the 1791 amendment to the United States Constitution, all powers not provided for by this Constitution and not prohibited by the States, shall be vested in the people of the States. The U.S. Constitution does not provide for the vesting of the right to administer education, so the federal government does not have the right to determine the national education system, which determines the U.S. education management system decentralized, the federal government does not have the right to direct management or control of higher education affairs. Over the past 200 years, almost all initiatives at the federal level, such as the establishment of their own universities or the creation of a uniform structure of higher education throughout the country, have failed because of the resistance of the federal states. For a long time, the Federal Provinces also saw their main task as being only to establish a general legal and financial framework for the development of higher education (only when it came to public facilities). In other respects, higher education was nearly free from state influence (Trow, 1994). The federal government can only influence higher education by means of bursaries or research grants to schools and students.

Thus, over the past two centuries, a three-tiered system of higher education, currently comprising more than 3,200 institutions of higher education, colleges and universities, has come into being, through conscious, autonomous decision-making, with a high degree of diversity in terms of teaching and research activities, performance requirements and selection criteria, size and reputation. From the outset, there have been significant differences between different groups of institutions of higher education and within those institutions in terms of the academic accomplishments to be achieved and the knowledge and skills to be acquired by their respective graduates who have earned the formal equivalent of a diploma. It was not until 1847 that the American Medical Association (AMA) first recognized this as a problem of educational quality and standards assurance, which they intended to address by establishing universally accepted educational standards for all medical degree specialties for the “protection of the consumer (the patient)”.

Accreditation was initiated in the late 19th century with the voluntary regional association of educational institutions and the establishment of university-sponsored regional accrediting bodies: the Association of New England Colleges and Universities (1885), the Association of Midland Colleges and Universities (1887), the Association of North Central and South Central Colleges and Universities (1895), the Association of North-western Colleges and Universities (1917), and the Western Association of Colleges and Universities (1924), and previously defined and exact quality standards had to be recognized. These six regional accrediting bodies have since started to accredit higher education institutions as a whole (institutional accreditation), without accrediting specialties or parts of specialties. Many trade associations, federations and scientific societies have further established bodies in order to ensure standards for their respective professions. Currently, there are 11 national agencies in the United States that conduct institutional accreditation or program accreditation, and approximately 50 agencies that specialize in program accreditation; not all fields of study have agencies that can conduct program accreditation. These agencies use a range of discipline-specific standards to assess the quality of academic education and the qualifications required for post-graduation work (industry accreditation) according to the interests of their respective occupational fields. In addition, as a third category, there are 13 national accreditation bodies that accredit vocational training courses and teacher training and nursing education courses.

Before the 1940s, regional and discipline-specific accrediting bodies existed independently, without a common parent body. While colleges and universities had collaborative authority with regional accrediting bodies, they had little influence over specialty accrediting bodies. As a result, the National Commission on Accreditation (NCA) and the National Council of Regional Accrediting Agencies (NCRA) were established in 1949 with the special support of a few of the nation’s leading universities. They were to serve as a non-governmental organization to ensure that all accrediting agencies adhered to minimum standards. The two merged in 1975 to form the Council for the Accreditation of Postsecondary Education (COPA), which was transformed into the Council for Higher Education Accreditation in America (CHEA) in 1996. The Commission is responsible, among other things, for organizing the accreditation of accrediting agencies, and during the 1998-1999 accreditation process, 53 regional, national, and specialty-specific accrediting agencies were accredited by CHEA (CHEA 1999).

The interest of the U.S. government and federal states in the development of higher education grew steadily after World War II, when many veterans pursued higher education, and with the expansion of

education in the 1960s and 1970s. Since the so-called Montgomery G.I.-Bill of 1994, for example, the federal government has funded significant amounts of money for the education of veterans. In addition, since the 1970 amendments to the Higher Education Act (HEA), passed in 1965, the federal government has provided significant funding in a variety of financial aid programs, especially for socially disadvantaged students (the so-called Title IV Student Assistance Program). This has also had an impact on the financial budgets of the colleges and universities that students choose to attend. Although the government itself does not determine quality standards or directly influence programs, accreditation has played a role in these areas from the beginning (Callan, 1994; Trow, 1994; Glidden, 1997). With the 1992 amendments to the Higher Education Act, the Department of Education was given the authority to regulate the work of accrediting agencies through its own accreditation process and to establish the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) in a supporting and advisory role. On the recommendation of NACIQI, accrediting agencies recognized by the Department of Education are periodically published on a list known as the Federal Register (Callan, 1994; Glidden, 1997).

Based on the background of continuously improving the quality of higher education, to this point, the U.S. higher education quality accreditation system has been quite mature and complete.

3. Composition and Functions of the German Higher Education Accreditation System

3.1 Composition

The German accreditation system for higher education is divided into two levels. The first level consists of the German Accreditation Council as the parent body. Under the direction of the Commission, the Accreditation Agency operates at the second level.

The Accreditation Council consists of 17 members, including four representatives of higher education institutions (professors), four representatives of the Federal State Ministries of Education and Research, four representatives from several occupational fields (e.g. trade unions, large companies, governmental units), two student representatives, two international experts (advisory role) and one representative of the Accreditation Agent. They are appointed under the responsibility of the Joint Conference of German Ministers of Culture and Education and the Federation of University Rectors for a period of four years (Akkreditierungsrat, 2013), the Accreditation Board is responsible for the accreditation of accreditation agents, the supervision of accreditation agents and their periodic re-accreditation as well as the development of accreditation standards, procedures and guidelines. The German Accreditation Board is a member of international quality assurance networks, namely INQAHE (International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) and ENQA (formerly: European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, later renamed: European Consortium for Quality Assurance in Higher Education). In this context, accreditation commissions enter into cooperation agreements with foreign accreditation agencies in order to achieve mutual recognition of accreditation decisions and accreditation of degree programs (Schade, 2005).

Accreditation agencies constitute the second level of the German higher education accreditation system. Degree programs can only be accredited by proxies that have been accredited by the Accreditation Council. However, HEIs can also additionally accredit individual degree programs through international accreditation agents, which are promoted as additional quality features. There are six accreditation agents in Germany, which

either accredit degree programs in all majors in their respective regions or only certain majors or categories of majors at the national level: AQAS (Agency for Professional Accreditation and Quality Assurance): primarily responsible for accreditation in the regions of North Rhine-Westphalia and Rhineland-Palatinate; ASIIN (Engineering Sciences, Information Sciences, ASIIN (Accreditation Agency for Engineering Sciences, Information Sciences, Natural Sciences and Mathematics): accreditation for specific professions; AHPGS (Accreditation Agency for Special Education, Nursing, Health and Social Work): accreditation for specific professions; ACQUIN (Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance): accreditation for Bavaria, Thuringia and Saxony; FIBAA (Foundation for International Business and Higher Education Accreditation): accreditation for Germany and Austria; and FIBAA (Foundation for International Business Administration Higher Education): accreditation for finance programs in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Sweden; ZEvA (Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency Hannover): accreditation primarily for the states of Lower Saxony and Hesse.

The legal status of the above-mentioned agencies varies, and most of them are non-profit organizations. The composition of the decision-making panels of the agencies is similar to that of the Accreditation Council, but there are no representatives of the Länder, i.e. only representatives of the universities, student representatives and representatives of trade and industry associations. In some of the agencies, representatives of trade unions play an advisory role or act as observers, and in another part of the agencies, representatives of the relevant ministries of the Länder. Accreditation follows some of the same basic rules and formal, specific criteria in all agents and programs. Accreditation is based on the following four premises: guaranteeing quality; demonstrating that degree programs can be completed within the planned standard duration of credit hours; achieving diversity; and achieving transparency.

3.2 Accreditation Procedures

The German higher education accreditation system is divided into two types depending on the target: accreditation of accreditation agencies and accreditation of degree programs and systems for universities.

3.2.1 Accreditation of accreditation agencies

The main part of accreditation for accreditation agencies is the Accreditation Council. In order to obtain the license to engage in college accreditation, the accreditation agency itself needs to be accredited by the Accreditation Commission first. Accreditation of accreditation agencies is valid for five years. After the expiration of the validity period, the accreditation agency will be re-accredited by the Accreditation Commission. Through regular accreditation and re-accreditation of accreditation agents, the Accreditation Council ensures that they accredit the profession and its internal quality assurance system based on reliable, consistent, transparent and internationally recognized standards.

Accreditation of accreditation agencies in the following procedures: (1) accreditation agency to the Accreditation Committee to apply for accreditation; (2) The Accreditation Committee first pre-examination, to see whether the certification body meets the prerequisites for accreditation. After passing the pre-screening, the certification committee to apply for certification agencies to explain the content of the certification, procedures, standards and fees, and let the certification agency to submit detailed application information in accordance with the requirements; (3) After receiving the application information of the certification body, the

Accreditation Board is responsible for the formation of an assessment team, the composition of which should be able to ensure that all aspects of the applicant organization to make a professional evaluation. Typically, the evaluation team consists of five evaluators, one of whom is from the Accreditation Committee, and the other members are from academia, students and the professional field, and two of the five should be from abroad. In order to ensure fairness, the Accreditation Commission is obligated to ensure the neutrality of the evaluators, and the institution to be accredited has the right to appeal the selection of evaluators but does not have the right to make recommendations or vetoes; (4) The Accreditation Committee helps the assessment team to prepare for the start of accreditation by explaining the relevant procedures and requirements to the assessors; (5) The assessment team carries out the assessment in accordance with the standards of the Code for Accreditation of Accreditation Agencies established by the Accreditation Committee; (6) If the assessment team finds during the audit process that the audited certification agent has no hope of successfully passing the accreditation, it may recommend to the Accreditation Committee that the accreditation process be discontinued and state the reasons. The Accreditation Committee makes a final decision based on the statement of the accredited agent; (7) After the assessment team completes the assessment and accreditation report, the Accreditation Committee may listen to the views of the accreditation agent and make in-depth inquiries on issues that are unclear before making a final decision; (8) Before the final decision is made, the Accreditation Committee will deliver the assessment report of the assessment team (excluding the recommendation on whether to grant accreditation) to the organization to be accredited and ask it to express its views on it; (9) Accreditation Committee based on the assessment team's appraisal report and to be accredited to make the final decision on the accreditation report, specifically: through the accreditation, accreditation with qualifications, not through the accreditation, or suspension of the accreditation process; (10) The Accreditation Committee publishes its final accreditation decision, the accreditation agency's application for accreditation, the evaluation report and the accreditation body to be accredited to the statement and will be entered into the "directory of accredited accreditation agencies".

3.2.1 Program accreditation and system accreditation

Program accreditation process is carried out in three steps. In the first step, the university initiates an application for accreditation with the accreditation agent. In some federal states, the application is checked for compliance with the respective state plan. The accreditation agent checks the completeness of the application for accreditation and whether the degree program to be accredited meets the procedural conditions for accreditation. After this, the accreditation agency estimates the costs required and agrees on an accreditation schedule with the university. The second step of the accreditation process begins as soon as the university indicates that it can afford the accreditation fees. After this, the application for accreditation is examined in detail, an evaluation panel is set up by the responsible accreditation committee, and experts are appointed. The accreditation body may also nominate the experts. The assessment takes place during a site visit. As a rule, the panel also includes representatives of the respective occupational field, employers of graduates of the respective specialty and a representative of the relevant state department. A debriefing is conducted by an employee of the certification agency. During the site visit, the panel of experts meets separately with the dean of the university, the degree program director, faculty, and student representatives. The site visit generates a report based on the application for accreditation and the findings of the visit, and a recommendation for

accreditation is made at the end of the report. In the third step of the accreditation process, an evaluation of the accreditation with final conclusions is submitted to the institution's appropriate accreditation committee. The committee makes the final decision on whether the accreditation is approved or not, or proposes additional qualifying conditions for approval, and will check for compliance with these conditions at the time of re-accreditation. Program accreditation is generally valid for five to seven years, and often degree programs with additional accreditation conditions must be reaccredited in a shorter period than the regular five years.

The initial application for accreditation of a degree programme consists of two parts, the first of which provides all the background information on the programme, such as the number of students, the number of degree programmes, the number of teachers, the number of graduates per year, the location of the teaching place and other information on the teaching infrastructure. The second part requires a detailed description of the degree program to be accredited, which generally includes the content and modules of the program, the target group for which the program is appropriate, the qualifications of the teaching staff involved, an analysis of the careers likely to be pursued by graduates of the degree program, and a description of the core competencies taught in the degree program. The accreditation agent reviews the program criteria, while the assessment team evaluates the content and quality of the degree program.

One of the assessments is also divided into two parts. First, an initial assessment of the application for accreditation is conducted. During this time the evaluator takes notes on open questions and identifies topics for site visit colloquia. The second part is the site visit, which consists of multiple steps (Reuke, 2005):

First, there is a conversation with the dean, sometimes with representatives of the university leadership; next, there is a conversation with the degree holder and, in addition, with the faculty of the degree program; interviews are conducted with student representatives of different years in the degree program; and finally, there is another conversation with the degree holder and the dean, and possibly some initial verbal feedback.

The process of reaccreditation is somewhat simpler in comparison, again initiated by an application for accreditation, and may be conducted by an organization accredited by the evaluating agency or accrediting agent. The application for reaccreditation must contain the following information (Reuke, 2005): a description of the current degree program and of the changes that have occurred from the initial accreditation; a list of the faculty members of the degree program and their short biographies; evidence that the additional conditions for accreditation imposed by the initial accreditation have been met; a summary of the results of the assessment of the academic outcomes of students in the degree program, including their results in the world of work; the results of the examinations, thesis (statistical data) as well as examples of good and pass theses; answers to additional questions posed by the assessor; the current examination regulations and an overview table of the course modules.

Compared with the accreditation of degree programs, the procedure of system accreditation is generally similar, but the target is no longer the university's majors, but the entire university's internal quality management system, which aims to examine whether the university's internal quality management system related to teaching can ensure that the bachelor's and master's degree majors offered by the university can meet the established quality standards. Once a university's quality assurance system has been accredited, all programs that have been audited by the university's quality assurance system will automatically receive a six-year accreditation period, eliminating the need for individual program accreditation. The process is as

follows: (1) The university applies for accreditation to the organization. In this application, the university describes itself and its internal management system and quality assurance system; (2) certification agency in the receipt of the application for accreditation of colleges and universities, the first pre-screening to see whether the college or university has the prerequisites to apply; (3) If the university is qualified to submit an application, it is required to submit a more detailed justification, describing the university's internal management and decision-making structure, development vision, school characteristics, catalogue of specialties, defined quality objectives, as well as the university's procedures and mode of operation for quality assurance and quality development, and measures used to address quality deficiencies; (4) Upon receipt of the statement of case from the university, the accreditation agency is responsible for forming an evaluation team of at least five persons, including: three representatives of the faculty with experience in university management and internal quality management; one representative of the student body with experience in university self-governance (e.g., student union) and accreditation; and one evaluator from the professional field, at least one of whom must be an evaluator from the vocational field. At least one of the five evaluators must be from abroad; (5) The evaluation team assesses and validates the quality assurance system of the university. The evaluation team is required to conduct two site visits. The first site visit is aimed at understanding the university and its management system. At the same time, the assessment team decides to analyse a sample of 2-3 representative majors. The second site visit is aimed at critically analysing the material submitted by the university and selecting three specific aspects (e.g. training objectives, academic organization, credit transfer, modularization of courses, student load, staffing structure, examination system or academic counselling, etc.) for an in-depth comparative analysis of the entire range of Bachelor's and Master's degree programs in terms of their conformity with the standards set by the Joint Conference of Ministers of Education and Culture of Germany and the Accreditation Committee as well as the state-specific standards. The evaluation team conducts an in-depth comparative analysis of all bachelor's and master's programs to see if they meet the standards set by the Joint Conference of German Ministers of Education and Culture and the Accreditation Council, as well as state-specific regulations. During the site visit, the evaluation team interviews the university's directors, administrators, representatives of the faculty and students, the head of quality assurance, the special commissioner for gender equality, and others; (6) The evaluation panel will write an accreditation report after completing the site visit and decide on whether or not to adopt the accreditation; (7) The university receives a copy of the evaluation panel's appraisal report (excluding a recommendation on whether to grant accreditation) and expresses its position on it before the final decision is made; (8) The decision-making committee of the accreditation body makes a final decision on accreditation based on the accreditation report and the statement of the university, which may include accreditation, qualified accreditation, non-accreditation, or suspension of the accreditation process; (9) The accreditation agency publishes its final decision on accreditation, the accreditation report, and the list of evaluation panels, and enters them in the Database of Accredited Programs. If the decision is negative, the accreditation body shall justify and inform the Accreditation Committee. If the final decision is to certify with additional conditions, the certification body is responsible for checking that the additional conditions are fulfilled on a regular basis. The accreditation of the system is valid for 6 years, after which the university must reapply for accreditation. After re-accreditation, the validity of the accreditation is extended to 8 years.

Program accreditation is a better choice for colleges and universities with a small number of majors, because the personnel, time and financial investment are within the affordable range, but for those comprehensive universities with a large number of majors, the cost of professional accreditation as well as the investment of time and energy of university personnel will increase the financial burden of the university, and the systematic accreditation is a more appropriate accreditation method.

4. Composition and Functions of the U.S. Higher Education Accreditation System

4.1 Composition

Similar to Germany, the U.S. higher education accreditation system is divided into two levels. The first level consists of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) as the parent organization. Under the direction of the Council, accreditation agencies operate at the second level.

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is a U.S. nonprofit higher education organization dedicated to preserving the independence and value of accreditation. Its mission is to serve its members, students, and society by advocating for the value and independence of accreditation, recognizing accrediting agencies, and being committed to the quality of higher education. CHEA's primary responsibilities include: upholding the independence and value of accreditation: ensuring that accrediting agencies have independence in evaluating institutions of higher education and programs in order to maintain their credibility and validity; recognizing accrediting agencies: recognizing and supporting the various regional Recognition of Accrediting Agencies: recognizing and supporting regional accrediting agencies, which are responsible for evaluating the quality of higher education institutions; and Focus on Quality in Higher Education: working for the quality of higher education to ensure that students receive a valuable degree and education.

Currently, the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and the National Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) recognize 8 institutional accrediting commissions under 6 regional associations of colleges and universities and eight national accrediting commissions of colleges and universities, as well as nearly 60 disciplines and more than 70 professional evaluating agencies. six regional associations of colleges and universities are: the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSACS) and the National Association for Higher Education Accreditation (NAA). Association of Colleges and Schools, Northwest Association of Colleges and Schools (Northwest Association of Colleges and Schools) North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (North Central Association of Colleges and Schools). Colleges and Schools), New England Association of Colleges and Schools, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Western Association of Colleges and Schools (Western Association of Colleges and Schools). 6 regional associations of colleges and universities under the establishment of a total of 8 institutional accreditation commissions, respectively responsible for the assessment of colleges and universities in the region, these institutional accreditation commissions in the United States of America's college and university evaluation system occupies an important position. There are also eight national institutions for the evaluation of higher education, which are: the Association for the Accreditation of Bible Colleges (AABC), the Association of Advanced Rabbinical and Talmudic Synagogues (AARTS), the Accrediting Service for Colleges of Health Education (ASHES), the Accrediting Commission for Career Colleges and Technical Colleges (ACCSCT), the Accrediting Council for Private Colleges and Universities (ACICS), the Association of Theological Schools of

the United States and Canada (ATS), Council on Occupational Education (COE), Distance Education and Training Council (DETC).

4.2 Accreditation

4.2.1 Recognition of accrediting agencies

The U.S. Department of Education's official recognition of accrediting agencies began in 1952. With the rapid expansion of higher education, the federal government's investment in higher education is increasing, how to make inputs and outputs reasonably matched, on the one hand, to ensure that government funding for colleges and universities and student loans can be used appropriately, to obtain the appropriate quality of higher education; on the other hand, to ensure that the institutions or professions to provide educational services are trustworthy, in line with the federal government's quality standards. The accreditation function of higher education highlights these characteristics, and the growing sophistication of the accreditation system has been adopted by the government, with accreditation information becoming increasingly important to the ability of colleges and universities to receive federal funding for their programs.

Accreditation of accrediting agencies by U.S. trade associations is undertaken primarily by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). The organization is a national non-profit organization, is a community of universities and colleges, and accredited by the organization of accrediting agencies as members, using the "Council" approach to governance. Its purpose is to serve educational stakeholders, including institutions of higher education, students, and employers, and its goals are to "improve the academic quality of institutions", "understand the performance of accreditation" and "encourage colleges and universities to engage in systematic reform and development".

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) has 5 criteria for accrediting agencies: (1) The accrediting agency's work must ensure that the institution has clear requirements and standards for educational quality and a process for evaluating them; (2) The work of the accrediting agency must ensure that there are clear standards to guide and hold the institution accountable for its work and to provide the community with an accurate picture of the quality of the institution's teaching and learning; (3) Accrediting organizations must ensure that their work leads to continuous improvement; (4) The accrediting body must ensure that it has sound management procedures and codes of conduct; (5) The work of the certification body must ensure that it completes its own assessment.

CHEA accreditation process for certification bodies is held regularly every 10 years, the certification body must submit a transition report every 5 years and bears the resulting costs. The procedure is similar in form to the internal and external teaching quality assessment procedures familiar in Europe: the institution first submits the relevant applicable information to CHEA on the basis of documents developed by CHEA (e.g. documents such as accreditation criteria). If necessary, the Accreditation Committee makes an eligibility recommendation to the Board of Trustees, which discusses it and, if appropriate, involves the institution in a Board hearing. The institution then refines its self-assessment report (if necessary) and submits it to CHEA, which in turn forwards it to the experts and the Accreditation Committee. At the same time, the experts (who may or may not be the experts and committee members reviewing the report) conduct a field study of the organization. The results of the report review and fieldwork are summarized in a report that CHEA sends to the institution for comment. All

reports and agency and expert comments are then forwarded to the Commission through CHEA. After the Committee conducts a public hearing on the agency and makes a recommendation for accreditation to the Board of Directors, the Board of Directors will respond to the Committee's commission of review or take other steps by making a decision of concurrence, denial, or other action, if necessary, after conducting a hearing on the recommendation to the agency. The Board's decision will be published by CHEA. Accreditation of accrediting agencies is limited to specific areas of accreditation activity (e.g., undergraduate studies, graduate studies, majors or groups of majors, types of colleges and universities, etc.), and may be withdrawn in the event of proven noncompliance with standards. There have been instances where institutions accredited by the U.S. Department of Education have not been accredited by CHEA, and vice versa. Institutions can object to such cases (CHEA 1998).

4.2.2 Program accreditation and institutional accreditation

The United States currently has 11 national accreditation commissions, 6 regional accreditation commissions and 66 professional accreditation commissions, with nearly 60 disciplines and more than 70 program accreditation agencies. Accreditation is the evaluation of the quality of an institution of higher education or professional education conducted by an accrediting agency. The accreditation of institutions of higher education by higher education accrediting agencies consists of two parts: "institutional accreditation" and "program accreditation". Through the accreditation of the National Accrediting Commission, regional accrediting commissions and program accreditation by professional boards of accrediting agencies, institutions can realize the mutual transfer of credits, issued by the degree certificate or diploma can be widely recognized by the community, which promotes the development of higher education in the United States to play a role in guaranteeing and monitoring.

Institutional accreditation is carried out by the National Accrediting Commission and regional accrediting commissions. First, colleges and universities apply for accreditation to the accrediting agency. Upon receipt of the application, the accrediting agency sends its staff to make preparatory visits to the colleges and universities. Second, colleges and universities conduct self-assessment and form a written self-assessment report according to the accrediting agency's standards, and the institutions designated by the accrediting agency form a peer opinion based on the reference to the college or university's self-assessment report. At the same time, the Accreditation Committee and the external experts, on the basis of checking the self-assessment report and related materials of the university, form a delegation to conduct a site visit and make a visit report, which is sent back to the university, and the president of the university puts forward his/her comments on the visit report. After that, the Accreditation Committee reviews the self-assessment report of the university, the inspection report of the inspection team, and the statement of the president of the university, and puts forward corrective opinions based on these opinions. The university then makes corrections based on the accrediting agency's comments. After the rectification, the accreditation body re-examines the situation and makes a decision on the accreditation only after the indicators meet the standards.

Program accreditation is carried out by the National Board of Accreditation and the Commission on Accreditation of Programs, and the process is similar to institutional accreditation. Program accreditation cycles are typically 5-10 years. Because of the diversity of higher education in the United States and the complexity of its state higher education systems, program accreditation varies. Program accreditation is the responsibility of

the Higher Education Coordinating Board of the State Department of Education, and there are two types of program accreditation: one type is to be approved by the Coordinating Board of professional changes, including the establishment of new majors, the reorganization of professional programs, and the preparation of major program plans, etc., which need to be submitted to the formal application for professional changes; the other type of changes do not require any approval by the Coordinating Board of Professional Changes, and only need to be reported in writing, and can be submitted to the Coordinating Board. One type of professional change does not require any approval from the coordinating committee, but only needs to be reported in writing, including the change of the name of the major, the expansion of the content of the major curriculum, and the withdrawal of the major. Approval of program accreditation mainly involves the following aspects: the framework and specific content of the program, faculty status, resources related to education and teaching, and sources of funding for the development of the discipline and specialty.

5. Comparison of Higher Education Accreditation Systems in Two Countries

After decades of development in Germany, the United States of America's higher education accreditation system has been developed more mature. The next part will compare the accreditation systems of the two countries and analyse the similarities and differences in order to better understand the accreditation systems of the two countries, which also has important theoretical and practical significance for the quality assurance of higher education in China.

5.1 Similarities:

First, the classification of accreditation types is similar:

The main body of accreditation in both countries is divided into two types: program accreditation and system/institutional accreditation. Program accreditation focus: Professional accreditation focuses on the curriculum, teaching methods, faculty, practice sessions, and student evaluation of specific programs. Its goal is to ensure that students receive high-quality education and training in a specific field. System/institution accreditation focuses on the quality management system of the entire college system or individual institutions. Its goal is to ensure a quality management system for education throughout the school or system. The assessment usually includes the school's organizational structure, management processes, faculty, student support services, and financial management. In short, program accreditation and system/institution accreditation have their own focuses, but both play an important role in guaranteeing and improving the quality of higher education.

Second, the accreditation standards are similar:

The number of indicators in the accreditation standards and the statements of higher education in Germany and the United States are different, but all of them are formulated around the four aspects of inputs, processes, outputs, and continuous improvement. Inputs include faculty, teaching equipment, institutions, funding for teaching and research, and other operating conditions; processes include the design of professional structures and curriculum systems; and outputs are "students" (Fang Zheng, 2014). Continuous improvement includes quality management, quality assurance methods. Inputs, processes, and outputs are evaluated and fed back in many ways for continuous improvement. At the center of these criteria are students and continuous improvement, with learning outputs learning outcomes as the starting point. Germany and the U.S. set

continuous improvement as an accreditation standard, reflecting the requirements of the continuous improvement mechanism.

Third, the program framework is the same:

The accreditation program frameworks of the two countries are also largely the same, with the following commonalities: (1). The experts of the accrediting agencies are mostly professionals from the education sector and industry; (2). Each university or program applies for accreditation on a voluntary basis, which is voluntary in nature; (3). They all involve: submission of application - consideration by the organization - evaluation + site visit - report formation - Accreditation decision making; (4). Accreditation organizations are established by third-party groups, with strong industry self-regulation; (5). Accreditation is a qualification granted to a program or institution that meets the accreditation standards, providing quality assurance to society and business and improving the quality of education.

5.2 Differences:

Firstly, the types of accreditation institutions are different: due to the different degree systems in Germany and the United States, the degree system in Germany is divided into three levels: Bachelor's degree, Master's degree and Doctor's degree, whereas in the United States there is also an Associate's degree before the Bachelor's degree. In addition, German programs are divided into "research-oriented" and "applied", and master's degree programs are divided into "continuous", "independent", "advanced", "independent" and "advanced". Master's programs are divided into three categories: "continuous", "independent" and "advanced". Therefore, the above reasons have led to a large difference in the types of accreditation organizations in the two countries. In Germany, there are mainly two types of program accreditation agencies, program accreditation agencies (such as ASIIN) and system accreditation agencies (ZeVA). In the United States, there are three main types of accrediting agencies: regional accrediting agencies, which are responsible for accrediting most of the nonprofit two- and four-year degree-granting institutions in the United States, as well as some self-sponsored (private, for-profit) institutions (NCACS North Central Association of Colleges and Schools); national accrediting agencies, which are responsible for accrediting most of the for-profit, non-degree-granting colleges and universities in the religious and vocational categories (NASM American Association of Schools of Music and Performing Arts); and professional accrediting agencies. Association of Schools of Music and Performing Arts (NASM); and program accreditation, which accredits specific programs, professions, and independent colleges and universities (CCNE Accrediting Commission of American Nursing Schools).

Second, the accrediting members are different: there are some differences in the distribution of roles of accrediting members between Germany and the United States. In the accreditation process, the German accreditation activities are led by the Accreditation Commission, which makes accreditation decisions. Compared to Germany, the U.S. certification process involves more stakeholders, and in addition to the certification committee, there is also a board of directors and a peer review committee involved in certification. Peer Review Committee is composed of peer experts, their opinions in the certification decision-making have a higher weight, their opinions are valued more highly.

Third, the degree of government involvement is different: the German Accreditation Commission is composed of the federal government and the state governments and appointed by the Joint Conference of

German Ministers of Education and Culture and the Federation of University Presidents; the U.S. Accreditation Council for Education is a non-profit non-governmental organization. This difference stems from the fact that the higher education systems of the two countries are influenced by their respective governments to different degrees. The German government has a high degree of influence and involvement in the German higher education system, with the federal and state governments jointly responsible for managing the German higher education system, with the state governments having the authority to regulate higher education. In the United States, on the other hand, there is no Department of Education or other centralized agency with overall responsibility for higher education nationwide, and the federal government plays only a limited role; like other government agencies in the United States, the United States higher education system as a whole is characterized by decentralization and devolution of power.

6. Implications for the Development of Internationalization of Higher Education in China

6.1 For Higher Education

First, China is a government-led higher education with a high degree of uniformity, and colleges and universities are lacking in the ability to stimulate their own vitality. Government functions should be appropriately diluted, tripartite assessment and diversified development should be realized. Through the study of the higher education accreditation system in Germany and the United States, it can be found that by reducing the absolute influence of the administrative power in the assessment and establishing a multi-party consultation mechanism, the qualified assessment can be truly accepted by colleges and universities and the society. For this reason, China's higher education assessment should first change the structure of the assessment system. In the conformity assessment of institutions of higher education, the government's action should be reduced, and such matters should be left to specialized accreditation agencies. There should also be a coordinating body similar to the Accreditation Commission between higher education institutions and administrative forces. Such a third-party body can be supervised and evaluated by the central or local administrative departments, and at the same time, it has a certain degree of independence. Because the accreditation and assessment agencies and the government and colleges and universities have maintained a relatively independent relationship, and its composition is quite broad, so that the impartiality and credibility of the accreditation has been enhanced, and all three parties can accept the results of the accreditation.

Finally, China's higher education started late, and actively learn from the experience of Germany and the United States, you can learn from the two countries of their accreditation standards system, the first to establish a kind of principled framework provisions, which from the perspective of uniformity to build quality degree program accreditation system. At the same time, it is also necessary to develop a diversified program accreditation system based on different specialties and colleges and universities, and to treat specific issues in a concrete manner. We should maintain Chinese characteristics in the implementation of international substantive equivalence program accreditation, actively promote the internationalization of higher education assessment and accreditation, align with international standards, achieve mutual recognition with the world's leading universities, promote the exchange of higher education talents, and strive to achieve the transformation from "following" to "leading". We are striving to realize the transformation from "following" to "leading" in order to secure a place in the world's higher education.

6.2 For Colleges and Universities

In their accreditation activities, colleges and universities draw on the international advanced concept of “student-centered, outcome-oriented, and continuous improvement” (Li Yadong & Zhu Weiwen, 2019), but adhere to their own purposes and goals, and emphasize self-assertion in many ways. First of all, the quality responsibility and social commitment of universities are emphasized: universities should determine their own quality specifications, professional training objectives, learning outcomes, and choose their own quality management methods, and they should take the responsibility of quality assurance and incorporate it into their strategic planning to form a complete quality assurance system through internal and external coordination. Therefore, in the process of formulating training programs, the predetermination of training objectives, teaching process and learning outcomes must take into account the comprehensive factors affecting quality and the degree of expected achievement of the objectives, in order to realize the commitment of universities to society.

Secondly, collaborative governance of stakeholders is encouraged. The participation of higher education stakeholders in the process of developing and revising, guiding and implementing training programs is essential. Effective participation of stakeholders in the collaborative governance of the teaching and learning process will, to some extent, influence quality activities and thus contribute to the realization of the quality objectives of the colleges and universities. The decision-making process needs to consider the special interests affecting these groups and provide equitable opportunities and diversified measures. Stakeholders are encouraged to actively participate in the collaborative governance of universities, fulfil their corresponding functions, and provide opinions and suggestions for the decision-making of universities.

Third, focus on the logic and effectiveness of process evaluation. Talent cultivation in colleges and universities is usually divided into three stages: defining objectives, implementing process and checking results and subsequent development. Therefore, program accreditation emphasizes focusing on process evaluation, oriented to learning outcomes and concerned about the consistency of educational objectives with inputs and learning outcomes; it emphasizes focusing on the management of the teaching and learning process for internal quality assurance, and colleges and universities should not only prove the quality of the teaching and learning process (regarded as a part of the internal quality assurance system), but also describe and document it, and prove its effectiveness. Colleges and universities need to develop and improve their own assessment/quality management systems, with a combination of external and internal assessment covering not only the area of teaching and learning, but also all management functions and performance areas of colleges and universities.

Finally, international cooperation should be strengthened, quality management standards should be benchmarked with international standards, and active participation in international accreditation should be made, drawing on the quality management experience of advanced international universities and bringing the teaching, research and management standards of China’s universities in line with international standards. Actively participate in the assessment of international accreditation agencies to ensure that the quality of China’s colleges and universities is internationally recognized. Encourage colleges and universities to participate in international rankings to demonstrate the advantages and characteristics of China’s higher education. They should also promote academic exchanges and cultural integration by strengthening exchanges and co-operation with internationally renowned universities, establishing friendly and co-operative relationships, and promoting mutual visits of teachers and students, joint training programmes, etc. In this way,

the international influence of China's higher education can continue to improve and contribute to the cultivation of more talents with an international outlook and competitiveness.

Conclusion

China's higher education has experienced a long period of reform and enhancement, the quality of education has made a new leap and reached a new stage, in the new stage of quality management as the core link to improve the quality of education is particularly important, the accreditation system as an important mechanism to effectively guarantee the quality of education in Germany and the United States, after many years of development has been established and well developed.

Therefore, this paper begins with the historical background of the development system of higher education accreditation in Germany and the United States, and introduces in detail the composition and functions of the higher education system of the two countries. On this basis, a comparative analysis of the two can be concluded that the two countries are similar in the classification of types of accreditation, accreditation standards and procedural framework: Germany's higher education accreditation system is composed of three main bodies (accreditation commissions, accreditation agencies and colleges and universities), two forms of accreditation (accreditation of accreditation agencies and colleges and universities for certification), two types of accreditation (system accreditation and professional accreditation) composed of accreditation system, presenting a Non-governmental, decentralised characteristics. The composition and functions of the U.S. higher education accreditation system are similar to those of Germany, and the system is also divided into two levels (the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and the accreditation agency), and accreditation is also divided into two forms of accreditation agency recognition (Recognition) and accreditation of colleges and universities, and two types of accreditations for professional accreditation and institutional accreditation. Accreditation standards in both countries are formulated around the four aspects of input, process, output and continuous improvement, forming a set of student-centred, learning outcomes-oriented, continuous improvement as the goal of a perfect system. However, there are differences in the types of accreditation bodies, accreditation members and the degree of government involvement in the two countries' higher education accreditation systems because of the differences in the degree systems, the roles of accreditation members and the degree of influence of the higher education systems on the governments of the two countries. The German government has a high degree of influence and involvement in the German higher education system, with the federal and state governments jointly responsible for managing the German higher education system, with the state governments having the authority to regulate higher education. The US higher education system is characterised by decentralisation and devolution.

Through an in-depth comparison of the German and American accreditation systems, we can find the differences and commonalities in their structures, functions and effects, and these comparisons and analyses provide valuable experience and inspiration for the optimisation of the quality management of higher education in China, especially on how to balance government control and institutional autonomy, and how to ensure the relationship between quality improvement and internationalisation. For higher education, China should appropriately dilute the role of the government, introduce tripartite assessment, achieve diversified development, establish a principled framework to provide for the construction of a diversified quality

accreditation system for different professions and universities, and actively promote the internationalisation of higher education assessment and accreditation. For colleges and universities, the quality responsibility and social commitment of colleges and universities should be emphasised, synergistic governance by stakeholders should be encouraged, and the logic and effectiveness of process evaluation should be emphasised. Finally, international co-operation should be strengthened, quality management standards should be benchmarked with international standards, and active participation in international accreditation should be made clear. In this way, the upgrading and modernisation of China's higher education can be achieved under the trend of education globalisation.

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