

# Behavioral Motivations and Effectiveness Implications of University Name Changes in China

Xu,Ming

Department of Education, Jungwon University, Goesan-gun, Chungbuk, 28024, Korea

**Abstract:** Chinese higher education institutions have experienced unprecedented waves of name change and mergers in the past decades. This trend not only reflects the importance that educational institutions attach to brand rebranding, but also reflects the common concept of "school by name", that is, an attractive school name can significantly enhance the attractiveness of school enrollment, administrative level and access to education funds. Therefore, changing the school name has become one of the strategies for many universities to rapidly improve their status.

**Keywords:** Universities; School name change; Education management; Education administration

DOI: 10.62639/sspjieess03.20240104

## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of name change in Chinese universities has reached an unprecedented climax, showing a strong persistence. With the continuous development of higher education, the "renaming tide of Chinese universities" is coming, and all universities hope to achieve "class leap" through name change. For more than 30 years, the history of Chinese universities is a history of merger and name change, and almost every institution has the experience of name change. In the current social environment, the attractiveness of a school name has a significant impact on enrollment, while the upgrading of a school name means increased administrative levels and education funding. Thus, the university renaming was seen as a rapid approach to these goals. In 2023, the Ministry of Education will restart the establishment of undergraduate universities and the renaming of universities. According to the latest list of universities released by the Ministry of Education, a total of 15 undergraduate universities have successfully changed their names this year. The trend of college name change was once prevalent, and it was also restricted. In general, what are the changes in their preferences for name change? Does the name change really improve the quantity and quality of enrollment?

## 2. The Motivation for the College Name Change

Improving the school image: the name change is often accompanied by the improvement of the school image. By changing the school name, the school can get rid of the limitations or negative impressions that the original name may bring, and present it to the public with a brand new look. A more attractive school name can enhance the popularity and reputation of the school, and attract more excellent students and social attention.

Expand the scope of enrollment: after the name change, schools can often expand the scope of enrollment to attract more candidates to register. Especially when the name is changed from "college" to "university", this change often brings significant enrollment dividends. In addition, the name change may also be accompanied by the

---

(Manuscript NO.: JIESS-24-4-80004)

### About the Author

Xu,Ming (1994-), Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Education, Jungwon University (Korea), Research Field: Educational Management, Educational Administration.

improvement of discipline setting, teaching staff, teaching and research and other aspects, to further enhance the comprehensive strength and competitiveness of the university.

**Access to more resources:** After a successful name change, schools often have more educational resources and policy support. For example, the promotion of administrative level means the increase of education funding, which is crucial for the development and construction of schools. At the same time, the name change may also give the university more autonomy and flexibility in the subject setting and the application of scientific research projects.

**Adapt to the development of The Times:** With the change of The Times and the deepening of educational reform, colleges and universities need to constantly adjust their own development strategy and school-running direction. Renaming is a way for schools to adapt to the development of The Times and meet the needs of the society. By changing its name, the school can better reflect its educational characteristics and advantages, and promote the development of disciplines and majors

**Pursue higher goals:** Many universities regard name changes as an important way to achieve higher goals. For example, the promotion from "college" to "university" is not only the promotion of the university's administrative level, but also a reflection of the comprehensive strength and influence of the university. This upgrade is often accompanied by the overall improvement of the school in hardware facilities, school scale, disciplines, teachers, teaching and research and other aspects

### 3. The Specific Method of University Renaming

In terms of college naming, there is a trend from "college", "vocational college" or "vocational college" to "college", and then to "university". At the same time, the core logo has also changed significantly. Influenced by famous universities such as University of Science and Technology of China, Beijing Institute of Technology and Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, the trend of using words "technology", "science and technology" and "finance and economics" as school names has been becoming increasingly popular. The development trend of higher education shows that many universities enhance their brand influence by expanding their scale, merging and changing their names.<sup>[1]</sup> In this change, the name change has become a remarkable phenomenon. For example, higher colleges tend to change their name to colleges, while business schools prefer to change to universities or business universities. In addition, the School of Foreign Languages usually chooses to be renamed as the University of Foreign Languages. Similarly, names such as UESTC, University of Science and Technology, University of Science and Technology, and Jiaotong University have become extremely common. These changes are not just name changes, they also reflect the efforts of universities to attract students and improve their status. Currently, most universities have foreign language and computer science departments, which gives them the potential to become comprehensive universities. In contrast, colleges that still retain professional names such as the School of Heavy Machinery or the School of Geology may be seen as missing the trend of the 21st century. As a result, many universities choose to change their name to demonstrate their comprehensiveness and academic breadth. This transformation not only enhances the academic status of the university, but also promotes the optimization and upgrading of the discipline structure.

In many academic fields, such as "mining", "geology", "meteorology", "agriculture and forestry", "petroleum", "coal", "iron and steel", "textile" and "normal school", there is an obvious lack of attention. These majors not only encounter difficulties in the recruitment process, but also face challenges in graduate employment and faculty recruitment. Therefore, reforming the nomenclature of these specialties is necessary. For example, the "electronic industry" was renamed "electronic technology", and the specific cases included "Hangzhou University of Electronic Technology" to "Hangzhou University of Electronic Technology" and "Guilin Institute of Electronic Technology" to "Guilin University of Electronic Technology". In addition, "Telecommunications Engineering" was also renamed as "Electronic

Technology", such as "Northwest Institute of Telecommunications Engineering" changed to "Xidian University" and "Chengdu Institute of Telecommunications Engineering" changed to "University of Electronic Science and Technology". In the field of "mining", it is suggested to change the name to "industry, science and technology, science and technology" and other directions. For example, "Xi an University of Mining and Technology" was renamed twice, first changed to "Xi an University of Science and Technology", and then renamed to "Xian University of Science and Technology". Similarly, "engineering", "industrial" and "engineering" advice renamed "technology" or "technology", such as "east China institute of technology" renamed "Nanjing university of science and technology", "Shenyang industrial institute" renamed "to" Shenyang university of technology "; "Huainan industrial institute" renamed "Anhui university of technology "; and " Jiaozuo institute of technology "renamed" Henan university of technology ".

In the pursuit of brand effect, many universities try to enhance their status by imitating the names of famous universities, but they are not fully aware of the possible negative effects of this practice. For example, although Southwest Union University enjoys a high reputation, educational institutions that later adopted the name "United University", such as Beijing Union University, Sichuan Union University and Hebei Union University, did not achieve the same success. In fact, these schools eventually chose to change the name again. In recent years, with the rise of economics and the relative cooling of geology, Hebei University of Geology has decided to rebrand its name and change its name to Shijiazhuang University of Economics. The move marks the schools transition from geology to economics, although the crossover poses certain challenges. As the renamed college failed to attract high-quality students and lost its original characteristics, the school had to rethink its brand strategy. In order to enhance its academic status and achieve the goal of being upgraded to a university, Hebei Institute of Geosciences finally chose to restore its original name- Hebei University of Geosciences.

The same situation also happened in Wuhan Textile Institute of Technology, which was renamed Wuhan University of Science and Technology, and could not be directly upgraded to a university due to the existence of Wuhan University of Science and Technology. Therefore, Wuhan Textile Technology Institute chose to readopt its textile title and changed its name to Wuhan Textile University, thus realizing the upgrading goal of the university. These cases reflect the complex decisions faced by higher education institutions in name changes. On the one hand, they pursue more attractive and widely recognized disciplines, and on the other hand, they must maintain their own characteristics and traditional advantages. In the process of name change, a core principle is: not the best, but the maximum, that is, to ensure the quality of education, and strive to expand the influence and awareness.

#### **4. The Implementation Effect of the University Renaming**

In the current educational environment, many schools are experiencing the transformation from technical secondary school to junior college and higher vocational college, and then to undergraduate degree and even university. Along with this process, the naming of the school has become particularly important, which not only reflects the development orientation of the school, but also involves the adjustment of the subject structure and regional layout. However, in the process of name change, some schools have blindly followed the trend, pursue scale expansion or adopt illogical naming strategies, leading to many problems.<sup>[2]</sup> These problems include more and more school names imitate the famous schools, which reduces the recognition of the school name, the weakening of the regional characteristics, and the school name cannot accurately reflect the subject characteristics of the school, which reduces the information value of the school name. When naming educational institutions, prioritizing national names has significant advantages. For example, China Metrology Institute is more authoritative and professional than East China Metrology Institute. Similarly, China Petroleum and University of Petroleum is more powerful and comprehensive than the single "University of Petroleum". In addition, from the perspective of enrollment publicity, the "Ocean University of China" can highlight its nationwide influence and attraction more than the "Qingdao Ocean

University".

In recent years, the phenomenon of university name change has attracted wide attention, which not only involves the brand building of the university itself, but also is related to the allocation of educational resources and public cognition. For example, Xuzhou Normal University changed its name to Jiangsu Normal University, which may be mistaken by those who do not know its history, current situation and strength for surpassing the centennial Nanjing Normal University. In addition, the plan of Mudanjiang Normal University to rename Heilongjiang Normal University and the eventual change of Luzhou Medical College to Southwest Medical University reflect the controversies and challenges faced in the pursuit of a more attractive name. On the one hand, behind the renaming of the university is to enhance the attractiveness of the university, in order to obtain more resources and support in various aspects and promote the development of the university, it also reflects the mentality of some colleges and universities in the process of running the school. This mindset may lead schools to ignore the essential requirements of educational quality and academic research during their development.

The public's perception of the name of universities is also an important factor affecting the name change of universities. Generally speaking, Chinese people generally believe that "universities" are superior to "colleges", which is also reflected in relevant national policies. For example, the number of people applying for universities is usually higher than that of colleges. At the same time, universities named after the provincial level are usually considered to have more advantages than those named after the prefectural and county levels. These factors together affect the decision-making process of university name change.

In order to strengthen the supervision of higher education institutions, the Ministry of Education promulgated the Interim Provisions on the Establishment of Ordinary Undergraduate Schools and other documents on March 1, 2007. According to the regulations, newly established universities should not use names containing the words "China" and "country", and should not name them after individual names or use place names other than the provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities and cities where they are located. However, despite these regulations, there are still adaptations in the actual implementation, and many local universities have names beyond the geographical scope of their cities.<sup>[3]</sup>

From the above provisions and requirements of the Ministry of Education, it is not difficult to see that the special requirements for the naming of colleges and universities are consistent with the real name, against greed, and emphasize that the name of the school is intangible assets, to maintain the stability of the name. From the perspective of colleges and universities, strive to change the name from "college" to "university", in order to improve the level of school, to obtain more space for running schools, can apply for masters degree, doctors degree, such a starting point itself is no problem. However, the pursuit of promotion in colleges and universities must be based on laying a solid foundation, especially to really improve the level of teaching and scientific research. In terms of examination and approval, education departments must guard against some universities and local governments completely feel that the name of "college" is not as advanced as "university", but just take the name change as the goal of education, but the quality of the school after the name change does not reach the level of the university, which is no different from the name change of people.

## 5. Countermeasures Analysis of University Naming Specification

Based on the discussion of the situation, reasons and effectiveness of the name change of universities, scholars also put forward the countermeasures of the naming specification of universities, mainly focusing on the following five aspects.

Optimize the university evaluation system and reform the management system of universities. Studies believe that the existing university evaluation system is more favorable for high-level universities, resulting in universities

to change their names in order to obtain more educational resources. Some scholars have proposed that scientific and reasonable standards should be formulated to guide colleges and universities of all types and levels to create a school-running environment advocating connotation development and quality improvement, so as to obtain more resources by running school strength and reputation.<sup>[4]</sup> Some scholars also proposed that to standardize the name change of colleges and universities, we should actively promote the professional evaluation of higher education, change the practice of allocating educational resources according to school levels and types, pay attention to the equal competition of all kinds of schools, guide colleges and universities to define their own positioning, and devote their energy to connotation development.

Improve the standard naming procedures, and improve the supporting management system. First of all, governments at all levels and education departments should clarify the procedures and approval authority of the name change of colleges and universities, implement two-level management of the name change of colleges and universities, and strictly implement the audit and filing system. Secondly, we should give full play to the role of universities in setting up evaluation committees, examine and approve the name change of schools on the basis of expert evaluation, establish the hearing procedures of relevant universities, and implement the law in combination with the administrative licensing law. Thirdly, the standards and forms of the naming of colleges and universities should be strictly regulated, and the structure and words should be regulated, such as determining the structural norms of the names, expanding the restricted scope of regional names, and prohibiting the use of significant signs of other university names.<sup>[5]</sup> Finally, maintain the continuity and gradual of the name change policy. The Ministry of Education and the National Evaluation Committee for the Establishment of Universities should adhere to the principle of stability and guide universities to realize that there is no direct connection between the name change and the improvement of the quality and reputation of running schools. Second, to improve the supporting management system of university naming. On the one hand, strengthen the institutionalized management of university naming. On the basis of sorting out and analyzing the relevant policies and regulations on the name change of colleges and universities in China, the education authorities should introduce relevant rules and regulations, formulate norms for the name change of colleges and universities, and realize the institutionalized management of the name change of colleges and universities. On the other hand, improve the system construction of university name protection. Some researchers called for the establishment of a legal system for trademark protection applicable to colleges and universities, and took active and effective measures to protect the name right of colleges and universities from infringement.

First, the government and the education authorities should strictly control the name change of colleges and universities, and strictly examine and regulate the name change of colleges and universities. The competent education department may organize experts to visit the site and pay attention to the characteristics and cultural deposits of colleges and universities, and demonstrate whether the orientation and goals of the school are consistent with the name of the changed school. The second is to advocate the rational autonomy of colleges and universities, change their name carefully, and pay attention to brand construction.<sup>[6]</sup> The name of a university is the precious intangible asset and brand symbol of the university. The random name of a university means the loss of the original brand, which not only hurts the feelings of teachers, students and almates, but also affects the space of the school. Therefore, the name of a university must be cautious.<sup>[7]</sup>

Avoid the tendency of high homogeneity and strengthen the dislocation of differences to avoid the tendency of naming and renaming of colleges and universities. The renaming of universities should have long-term planning, consistent with name and reality, highlight characteristics, not divorced from reality and perfection; the renaming of universities should be based on reality, pragmatic, respect the law of education, and make scientific and reasonable choice on whether to change name. We should follow the principle of efficiency and adopt differentiated support to guide the differentiated development of colleges and universities.<sup>[8]</sup> Some researchers propose that universities should pay attention to two aspects after the name change: they usually expand the subject category and coverage,

follow the principle of efficiency, and provide long-term and continuous key support and guarantee to the dominant disciplines in terms of policy, talent and investment; and the second, the schools should adopt the strategy of dislocation development in the development of disciplines and disciplines.<sup>[9]</sup>

Establish a typical successful model and promote the connotation construction of colleges and universities. First, establish a typical model to provide successful cases for the connotation construction of other renamed universities. Second, pay attention to the quality construction of universities matching with the name change, and investigate the long-term development results.<sup>[10]</sup> The successful renaming of universities does not mean that the social reputation is the means of development rather than the ultimate goal; To seek new development, universities must strengthen the construction of teachers and improve the level of teaching and research.

## References

- [1] An empirical study on the reasons for renaming of colleges and universities under the perspective of resource dependence theory[J]. Nan Xiaopeng. China Higher Education Research,2021(02).
- [2] A Review of Research on the Phenomenon of College Name Change in China[J]. Nan Xiaopeng. Modern Education Science,2021(02).
- [3] The core elements of China's higher education governance modernization and its optimization[J]. Zhang Jiming. Modern Education Management,2020(06).
- [4] On the Connotative Development of Higher Education[J].Bie Dunrong. China Higher Education Research,2018(06).
- [5] Reflections on the phenomenon of renaming general undergraduate schools in China since 1999[J].Yang Xinchun;Tan Ming. Heilongjiang Higher Education Research,2018(01).
- [6] Analysis of the current problem of college promotion and renaming in China[J]. Yi Jiguan;Chen Yuguang;Cai Axiang. Education Modernization,2017(22).
- [7] Academic drift in higher education institutions:connotation interpretation, theoretical foundation and research progress[J]. Tang Xiaoling;Xu Hui. Exploration of Higher Education,2016(09).
- [9] Study on the phenomenon of large-scale renaming of colleges and universities in China since massification--Based on the perspective of dual-track system[J].YANG Linyu;JIA Yongtang;XIAO Jiajie. Research on Higher Engineering Education,2016(03).
- [10] College name change and enrollment expansion[J].Lv Jian. Education and Economy,2016(03).