

From Learning Theory to Academic Organisation: The Institutionalisation of Higher Education Teaching Assistant Position in China

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Abstract

This exploratory study critically investigates the teaching assistant regulations of higher education institutions of China. On the basis of content analysis of the teaching assistant regulations of five premier universities of China this study analyses the possible discrepancies that might compromise the principles of transparency, equal opportunity and encouraging excellence as stipulated in the vision, mission, and goal of the regulations.

Teacher assistants do make more than two third of the academic staff at the universities in China. Besides, China has a second largest higher education system in terms of scale in the world. Practices of sharing skills and imparting knowledge at these institutions have been intermediated by a semi-institutionalized position, called 'teacher assistants'. It's therefore, the informal submission of assignments without record at the PhD level questions the purpose of integrity and academic freedom of the higher education at the universities.

On the basis of an instrumentalised framework guided by the dimensions of decision making and learning organization theories this study using content analysis has formulated the recommendations for the institutions while selecting and training the students as teaching assistants. A critical but logical illustration of the teaching assistant regulations has also been detailed regarding academic integrity in this study.

Keywords: teaching assistant, academic integrity, academic freedom, China

1. Introduction

The philosophy of Thomism very distinctly distinguishes the soul from the being since on one hand soul being godly could not be wrong, post hoc ergo propter hoc, on other hand 'to err is human'. Scholars of international recognition and influence believe that Chinese students with the help of the Chinese agencies in foreign countries do spy on their colleagues and scholars of distinct accomplishments. They believe that this phenomenon could lead to the closure of internationalization of higher education in China which in turn would also affect the higher education systems all around the globe. Altbach (2018) has mentioned about this as:

"...A major controversy is taking place in Australia, where Chinese agencies are accused of trying to influence Australian researchers working on China and of engaging in other perceived interference, as well as putting pressure on Chinese students in that country, as well as elsewhere, to spy on fellow students and scholars..." (p.5).

Besides, very recently there was not a very good news trending about a teaching assistant's conduct of Tsinghua University who failed one of his students on the basis of his intuitive decision that the student might have completed one of his assignments through some unfair means. This study is not going into details of this incident, rather comprehending the goal of education as solely based on constructive cultivation of talents, albeit to see the teaching assistant post in the milieu of learning organisation theory (Lieberman 2005). This theory considers that the organisation not only relies on its creativity but also the environment as an open system to sustain its evolution, growth, and development.

The history of the teaching assistant post in China simply is one of the examples of the Americanization of Higher Education that has already taken shape across the globe. Teaching assistant as a profession came into existence during the middle of the 19th century in the US. It took almost a hundred years to pass it formally to China. In 1998,

the Ministry of Education (formerly known as the State Education Commission) implemented the teaching assistant regulation at the university level. Later in 2005, it was officially implemented, with remuneration, for graduate students who had been working as ‘assistants’ (Teaching, Management, and Research) at the universities. Today it is customary for a course so offered to have one teaching assistant at research universities in China. According to the statistics of the Government of China, during the year 2000 only, approximately more 0.21 million people have been working as a teaching assistant at the universities in this country (Guangdong Bureau of Statistics 2000). Since this is a huge number of undefined human resource that directly interacts with the graduate students of varied backgrounds, therefore, its system must be clearly stated, clearly defined, and above all must be honestly practised lest it should fall pray of ‘consensus gentium’ i.e. must be great since it is American. The students, especially those who are self-paid, dearly rely on the university education system of the host country. However, the history of teaching assistant recruitment is not very old in China. It would need both time and research-based practices to help it reach its maturity through modifications.

There is a paucity of research that could shed light on the teaching assistant system at the research universities in China. Due to the lack of a well-defined teaching assistant system in the local Chinese higher education context, this job profile fits well amidst the ‘Thomist’ belief of the soul and the being. This study focuses on the policy regulations of the teaching assistants of the five prominent universities in China.

2. Literature Review

A library search of related academic papers conducted on Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index with title and keyword ‘teaching assistant system’ in Chinese 《助教制度》 yielded 4 and 3 pieces of articles respectively. Among these, two articles authored by He & Li (2016), and Wu (2011) were related to the teaching assistant system in the USA. The rest of the two articles authored by Xu & Zhang (2009), and Wang (2003) were related to the teaching assistant system in China. The most prevalent problems related to teaching assistants were attributed to non-assisting nature of the teaching assistants in the universities (Wang 2003). In another article authored by Xu & Zhang (2009) the main problems related to teaching assistant have been illustrated as faculties misusing the teaching assistant system, lack of training, evaluation, management; and lack of fund for teaching assistants. Furthermore, the graduate students have been reported as not feeling very much motivated for the teaching assistant job. The untrained, unmotivated, and forcefully or preferentially recruited graduate students by the faculty, department, or even by the graduate student management and administrative board of the university are plagued with those students who are still in their early (academic) survival stage. These students, for retaining their tenure for next terms, mainly focus on their control over the class and their popularity among the students so that they could get the best possible appraisal as a whole from the class. Due to the lack of any standard means of selection, their recruitment is not designed, but are made mostly by choice. Is there any designed assessment to select the teaching assistants at the graduate level in Chinese universities? Is there any designed way where the didactic capacity of teaching assistants is assessed through a fair test? Would selecting a minority of students from the same level and authorizing them with some academic power on to the fellow classmates not bring some psychological implications on the rest of the students of the class? Would selecting students as teaching assistant before the graduate level not compromise the quality of academic contributions of the teaching assistants themselves? Would selecting students at the survival stage of their academic cultivation not encourage them to compromise with the academic integrity? The answer to all these question is not fairly in support of the academic effectiveness, excellences, and integrity. In these circumstances, a newbie who is allowed to teach and control the class would acutely hamper the learning outcome of the students, especially of the students who come from diverse backgrounds; including that of the international students.

According to the pieces of literature mentioned above a teaching assistant in China is mainly expected to do supporting job for the university faculties including material preparation, assignment evaluation, and providing tuition to the students. The teaching assistant job has also been appraised as a multifold win-win situation for those recruited as teaching assistants, faculties, students enrolled in the class, and the institutions themselves. It is presumed in those studies that the teaching assistants are benefited with the experience, connectedness, and reimbursements. Moreover, the ideas of the students of the class is accumulated for free from their assignments. It has been claimed by the authors that teaching assistants have also been considered to improve learning of the students in the class and they help reduce the burden of the main faculties. It is also noted that due to the increased number of national and international students’ enrolment, and the burgeoning competition with the highly competitive universities in the world, the universities in China, in principle, through a huge number of recruited teaching assistants get the teaching cost reduced because recruiting a faculty is far more expensive than that of recruiting a teaching assistant (Wang 2003; Xu Zhang 2009).

There is a growing obsession and policy-based requirements for data literacy in China these days. There seems to be an acute mania to learn how to predict the future through algebraic equations among the graduate students. Nevertheless, the numbers in any case, are limited to their values and to an extent are some kinds of metaphors; for they are equally segregated from the obsolete realities of the real world. The data-driven decisions based on the gaps of understanding by the actors compounded with the complicated population characteristics that are represented in numerical values have done more harm to the unpredicted real world rather, than benefit. Some studies have reported that the culture of obedience and family pride seemingly have also affected the critical thinking and creativity of the Chinese students largely at the higher education institutions in China and abroad (Jian 2012; Postiglione et al. 2017). The blind persuasion of reporting research based on numerical values have muted the metacognition of the students at the higher education institutions; especially about what data fail to tell us, and why. Their understanding of academic and in-depth conceptual meanings and constructs are shallow. In order to disguise this at times, they seem to pin their faith on numbers overwhelmingly. There are instances when students show importunate demands to seek views, listen to ideas, seek notes of credibly academic but unpublished papers, and even unknowingly plagiarize to reproduce and report what they perceive could be better illustrated numerically (Jian 2012; Jordan and Gray 2013; Ma, McCabe, and Liu 2013; Postiglione et al. 2017).

In the light of the above mentioned problems and the arguments, it could be inferred that the yardstick of the teaching assistant job in China should be increased and must be institutionalised in order to avoid arbitrary use of discretion by the faculties in recruiting the teaching assistants for them. It is further emphasised in the studies above that a dedicated management organisation should be introduced for training and credentialing the students as teaching assistants (Wu Zhenli 2011; Wang Lijin 2003; Xu Ping and Zhang Jufang 2009). The university should share the cost of the teaching assistant recruitment and reimbursement with the department and the teaching faculties who do involve in hiring the teaching assistant for their courses. Lastly, the recommendation that appeared most distinctly among these all studies was to design the teaching assistant recruitment and deployment system from a systematic and systemic talent cultivation perspective. Furthermore, these studies have also recommended to recruit more teaching faculties and encourage the assistant professors and professors to devote more time to skill enrichment of the students (Wang Lijin 2003; Xu Ping and Zhang Jufang 2009).

The idea behind recruiting teaching assistants in China is acutely not systemic (Cohen 1995) as it engages more faculties and administrative departments but not more students. The politics of paradigms in the universities compounded with the new tenure-track policies implemented by the central government have made the teaching assistant recruitment system a matter of pride, and politics among the faculties whereas learning detrimental and full of fallacies for the enrolled students in the class. Students make the most important fabric of the university system.

Table 1.

Entry	Title	Key	Article
助教制度 TA System	1	1	美国研究型大学研究生助教制度的制度化进程——基于组织新制度主义的分析 <i>Analysis of TA culture at the US research universities: Neo-Institutionalism Perspective</i>
	2	2	高校研究生助教制度的现状、问题与对策 (徐萍 张菊芳 2009) <i>Graduate Student TA System in Higher Education, Situation Problem and Remedy</i>
	3	3	规范助教制度建设 促进教学质量提高 (王季金 2003) <i>Standardizing TA system to Promote Education Quality</i>
	4		美国研究生助教制度与大学教师职前教学发展 (吴振利, 2011) <i>Preservice teaching and Graduate Student TA system in the US</i>

Source: Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index, Visited on 10th of January 17, 2018

Due to the lack of any assessment specified for the teaching assistants' selections at the universities the recruitments are mainly based on language, data, and assessment literacies of the students rather than their knowledge and understanding in that field. Besides, the idea behind the systemic educational policy implementation is to increase the student achievement substantially which would consequence into major shifts in a large number of educational policies in the rapidly changing trend of education system across the universities in China. The term 'systemic' in educational policy conceptual framework is mainly directed to improve the achievement of the learners (Nutt and Wilson 2010).

In China, Tsinghua University first implemented the teaching assistant pilot project in 1989 which later was fully

instigated in 1990. The teaching assistant recruitment procedure was made more flexible in an updated regulation implemented in 1993. This regulation led to more arbitrary, preferential, and decretionary recruitment of the teaching assistants. According to the themes generated from the regulations of the universities in context, these regulations most of the time overlooked the need for the students enrolled in the course. As learning organisations of academic worth, these universities should revisit the teaching assistant regulations in coming years due to the overall change in the learning environment and trend based on the statistically and qualitatively analysed needs of the enrolled students in each course. The teaching assistant should not only be recruited to fulfil the need of the faculties involved as course advisor or course instructor, but also those students who mend to accomplish learning as expected from the course. In principle, anyone who accepts a task for teaching should accomplish it without any excuse, else do not accept it at all.

This article, on the basis of a content analysis, examines the problems of academic integrity underling the recruitments of the teaching assistants in the given context of the current teaching assistant regulations of five higher education institutions in China.

3. Organisation Theory in Action

As an organization, all higher education institutions are large and complex. Organisational learning is important for their continued success. Higher education institutions are necessarily, if not fully then partially, learning organisations because they innately promote a culture of learning (Cook and Yanow 1993). This at times tends to be less mindful in perspectives, and neutral with respect to the value of learning hampered and shaped through systems thinking, mental models, personal mastery, shared vision, and team learning (Scharmer and Arthur 2002).

Basic principles that guide research in organisational learning have been mentioned as empiricism (reporting) and rationalism (knowledge). These principles are considered to be at the core of the organisational learning in guiding the decision process of structural and imperative dimensions for the system of the higher education (Davenport and Prusak 1998; Garvin 1993; Scharmer and Arthur 2002). Reporting is an empirical aspect of information transfer but the knowledge is recognised to be broader, deeper, and richer than the data or the information itself because it is contained from an amalgamation of experiences, personal values, personal characteristics, and interactions with others (Pfeffer, 1981; 2011). Nevertheless, knowledge which is the information combined with experience and judgment could not always be packaged, transferred, codified, or even communicated and hence could not be analysed through statistical means because some of them are deeply rooted in experiences of the people.

Knowledge involves knowing (fixated on immediate and short-term solution) and presencing (paying close attention to the inner process of thought). Presencing is simply, most of the time informal, at times tacit, and a few times emotionally involved with the situation undertaken for the decision making. It most of the times remains suppressed (Argyris, 1991).

The purpose and intensity of the justice are lost with the due course of time. The victims would seldom dare or even find a proper reason to stand for the injustice done unto them. Higher education institutions are highly organised and therefore vice or virtue both could be disseminated on the scales and intensity of the organised crime provided the conscience is retained and not simply swayed due to the selective drives of neo-liberal trends in the institutions.

A many academic literatures have noted that academic organisations are often resistant to major changes. This is not only because the changes often alter the change in the dynamics of power, politics, structure, system, and culture but also because embracing all changes as an open system would increase the negative entropy of the organisation which is never in good health of the repute, progress, and prosperity of the institutions (Argyris, 1991; Garvin 1993). Would assigning teaching assistants in accordance with the current teaching assistant regulations of the universities in China improve the learning outcome of the students? How should the regulation so implemented be approached?

The key elements across learning organisations are mainly noted as linking organisational learning to the institutional mission, and approaching the elements of learning for resolving the problem in an scholastic manner (Argyris, 1991; Bensimon, 2005; Pfeffer, 2011) so that it could be explored academically in order to thoroughly investigate the problem as a research question, but not as an expert, thus reaching it through evidences so collected from within or without the institution(s) itself (Garvin 1993; Huber 1991). Linking organisational learning to the institutional mission is mainly based on the civic engagement, assessment, best pedagogical and best student advising practices, diversity, and internationalization. Noticeably, the universities are having pressing need in attaining diverse classrooms because a diverse classroom yields educational accomplishments and promotes cross-racial understanding. Nevertheless, those who appreciate students for bringing diversity to the campus would themselves experience unequal educational outcomes (Bensimon 2005; Argyris 1991; Pfeffer 2011).

In order to address a pertinent problem a learning organisation could involve in the *diversity cognitive*, *deficit cognitive*, and *equity cognitive* based frames on the dimensions of *orientation*, *discourse*, and *strategy*. Cognitive frames are reflections of how do individuals think, how do they represent the cognitive rules of reasoning to design, implement, and practice their actions (Kahneman, Lovallo, and Sibony 2011; Pfeffer 1981; Pfeffer 2011). Yet in another illustration Bensimon (2005) has explained that the individuals or institutions with *diversity cognitive frame* are fixated on representational structure of the diversity in the system. Those with *deficit cognitive frame* would focus on the culture of disadvantage and poverty. It is considered by many prominent authors that they would blame students for their backgrounds including their socio-economic status in order to seek remedies for the guiding question underlining the problems that they have to solve. Those with the *equity cognitive frame* would mainly focus on institutional practices and would ensure institutionalised responsibility in order to manifest racial, preferential, and privileged practices (Diamond 1974; Spink 2010).

4. Conceptualising the Model of Analysis

Decisions are made to best achieve the organisational goal. One of the most crucial factors that define decision making is power. The power mostly is exercised to overcome some kinds of resistance, opposition, and anything that can threaten the privilege of the actors of power (Stava, 1976; Pfeffer, 2011). Power could be used informally whereas the authority, conceptually a legitimate use of power is mostly practiced through formal and justifiable means. The teaching assistant regulations of the five premier institutions of China including Beijing Normal University (BNU), Peking University (PKU), Shanghai Jiaotong University (SJU), Tsinghua University (THU), and Xiamen University (XMU) would be visited under the dimensions of power, authority, and decision making. The regulation related to the East China Normal University was not well detailed and therefore was out-listed from this study. The low-grade universities though have enacted the regulation but due to the lack of well-defined regulations have been facing more problems related to academic integrity, malpractices (Ma, Yuchao, Donald, and Ruizhi 2013), over-administration, corruption, plagiarism, and spying on intellectual wealth within and without the country. In most of the cases it becomes uglier when decisions are made arbitrarily. It is believed that those in a powerful position, by definition, through politics would calibrate budgetary process over the allocation of scarce resources exercised on the basis of preferences and selectivism (if not transparently and critically assessed) for some intended accomplishments defined by the actors of power. Pfeffer (1981) accurately defines it as:

“Organisational politics involves those activities taken within organisations to acquire, develop, and use power and other resources to obtain one’s preferred outcomes in a situation in which there is uncertainty or dissensus about choices. (p.7)”

The decision making procedure evolves on the basis of critical assessments, and therefore, the teaching assistant regulations of these universities would be contextualised in terms of politics and authority considering the students’ need in the class as the core of teaching, research, and management assistants’ regulations. The decision making theories consider policy as the outcome of a choice of the decision makers to satisfy the need of the decision makers (Nutt and Wilson 2010). Decision making as a process is unpredictable and hence its preferences could not be readily availed for analysis. A model of analysis, for the teaching assistant regulations of the five premier universities of China, has been developed mapping the organisational decision-making models on that of the organisational learning cognitive frames, as shown in figure 1 below.

5. Instrumentalising the Model of Analysis

A closer look at the teaching assistant regulation on the basis of the illustrated framework, yields following particular dimensions for the model of analysis i.e. goal, ideology, preference, orientation, discourse, and strategy. These main concepts in this study bear the same generic meaning in the milieu of decision making theories as stated after them: *The goal* is an idea of collectively desirable accomplishments set by the decision makers. *The Ideology* is a statement of the imagined existence of the goals and the related ideas with that of the collectively acceptable real conditions of existence. *The Preference* is an implied attitude of the decision makers, perceived apparently from the text of the regulation in context, towards the goal so set by the decision makers. *The Orientation* is a function of the preferences in terms of time, space, and person.

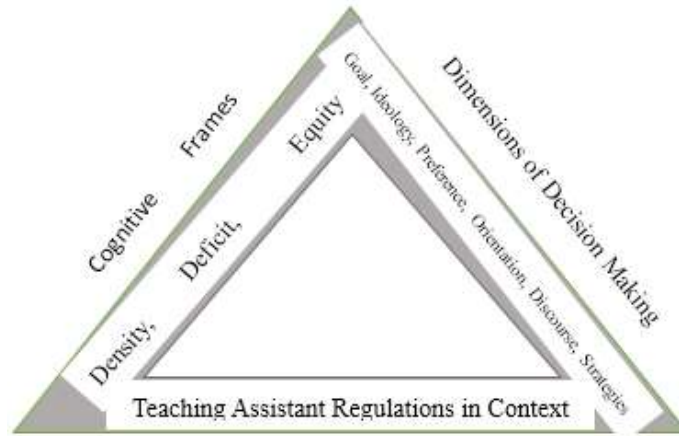


Figure 1. Model of Analysis

Source: (By Author) Constructed on the basis of Dimensions of Organisational Decision Making Models and Imperative Framework of Cognitive Frame.

The Discourse is the way how orientation, preferences and goals are communicated through ideological constructs. The strategy is a set of activities that would be taken through mobilizing the resource and allocating the funding in order to achieve the goal in a given span of time. This study would map the teaching assistance regulations of the universities in these frames and dimensions matrix, and analyse it critically to come up with the best possible recommendations to improve the regulation for further benefits of those for who the regulations have been formulated to serve.

Table 2. Dimensions for analytical framework

Dimension	Particulars
Goal	Improve the quality of graduate students, and their financial aid system
Ideology	Transparency, Equity, Impartiality
Preference	NA (Preference is the implied attitude which is only disclosed among the decision makers internally.)
Orientation	Lack of gender and focus on minority consciousness
Discourse	Financial benefit, lack of experience, skill improvement, training and motivation, institutionalised racism, colour consciousness, white privilege, and consequences
Strategy	Training, Self-study, Group discussion, Workshop, Survey and Evaluations

Source: (By Author) Dimensions of analysis corresponding to the themes of regulation

6. Content Analysis of the Regulations

The regulations were compared with each other. The themes that seemed related were collected on the basis of the following criteria that: defines the meaning of TA, states if the selection of the TA is designed by the rule and not by choice, states the duration of the TA post, states the allowances or payment the TA would receive for the term, states the qualification for applying for the post of TA, states the responsibility they are entrusted with, states about the training they receive for the post of TA, and the authorities responsible for hiring to firing of the TA. The coding language were further cleansed and divided into smaller themes on the basis of the concepts of the learning organization theory (Shafritz, Ott and Yang 2011) and the dimensions of decision making derived from the framework.

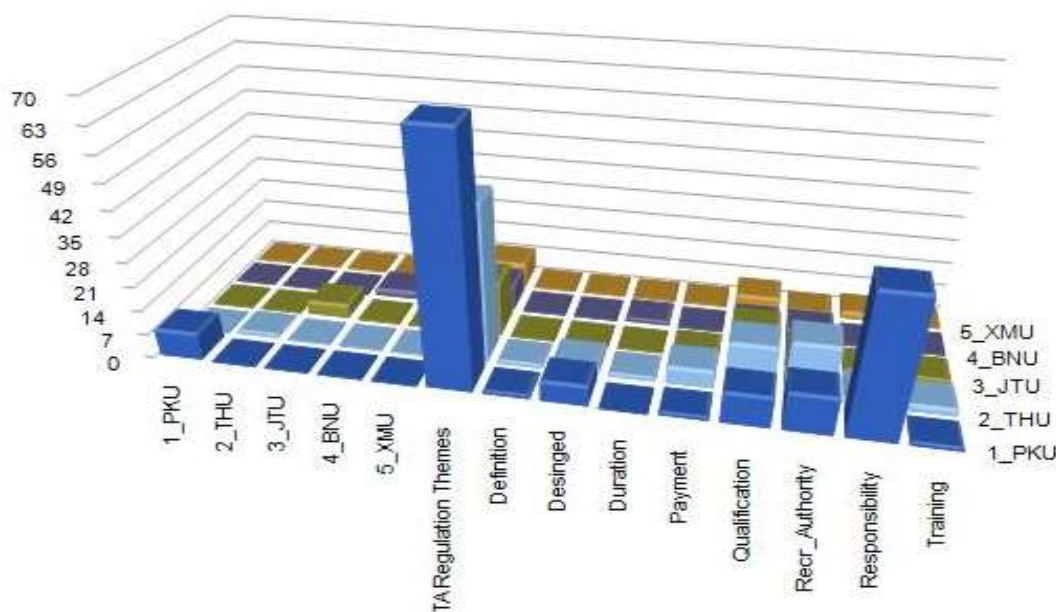


Figure 2.

Source: (By author) on the basis of the university TA regulations

The emergent codes finally cleansed as shown in figure 2 indicate that Peking University (PKU), followed by Tsinghua University (THU), has the most clearly illustrated teaching assistant regulations of all in China. Peking University controls the functioning of the teaching assistants through the well-stated responsibilities of the teaching assistants whereas Tsinghua University controls the functioning of the teaching assistants through a closer guidance by the authority of the university administrations on the teaching assistants (Peking University, 2017; Tsinghua University, 2017). Besides, the selection of the teaching assistants seem to be well designed in Peking University as compared to other universities of China. These themes has been detailed with their interpretation pertaining to the decision making dimensions and learning theory in the discussion section below.

The underlying idea (aim, mission, and vision) for recruiting teaching assistants is vested in adherence to the principles of knowledge of the relevant background, transparency in recruitment, equal opportunity for the competition, and preference on the basis of the merit as designed in the regulations. By definition, the work of graduate students as teaching assistants in undergraduate course is not only attributed to working as assistants of the teacher but also to work vigorously to improve the quality of teaching and the students' attainment comprehensively. Graduate teaching assistants are considered as the bridge between teachers and students in and out of the classroom. They are expected to have strong sense of responsibility and relevant knowledge skills to improve the congeniality and quality of education in the university.

As stipulated in the regulations, working as a teaching assistant is important for the newly recruited teachers. It is stated that they must serve as a teaching assistant for one course that at least lasts for 32 hours. In case a teacher is not able to attend a course due to some academic reasons then the new teacher must audit at least 1 or 2 courses. The duration of the attendance must not be less than 64 hours. The workload of the teaching assistants is generally defined between 12 to 16 hours per week. The teaching assistants are primarily recruited from PhD and Masters level students of the university. The regulations also state that the monthly allowance for a masters teaching assistant should not exceed 40 times the hourly allowance of a part-time recruit in the university. Whereas, the monthly allowance for a doctoral teaching assistant should not exceed more than 50 times the hourly allowance of a part time recruit in the university (Beijing Normal University, 2016; East China Normal University, 2016, 2017; Peking University, 2017; Shanghai JiaoTong University, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; Tsinghua University, 2017; Xiamen University, 2015).

In order to ensure the didactic knowledge of the students to be recruited as a teaching assistant, it is compulsory for them to undergo the trainings and assessments organized by the institutions from time to time (Fickenauer 2005). The proportion of the excellent performers must contain 15% of teaching assistants and 30% of the management

assistants. According to the stipulated regulation the students who are enrolled in a regular masters or doctoral course in a relevant subject with an excellent academic record, who are willing to work in pressure, have no criminal records, and have not failed in the teaching assistant course during the last semester, meet the other special requirements of working for the post of teaching assistant, with the consent of his or her supervisor could apply for the post of teaching assistant in China. There should only be one teaching assistant allotted for one course. Regulation in principle forbids first-year masters students from applying to teaching assistant position. Nevertheless, it is not strictly followed in the name of merit that compromises diversity and also opens the scope for the practices of nepotism.

The total number of recommended excellent teaching assistant should not exceed 2% of the total number of the teaching assistants. The recommendation for excellence should be sent from the department and the main teacher of the course. The extra allowance must not be more than 10% of the basic salary. The total number of excellent teaching assistant in the university should not be more than 1% of the entire teaching assistant in the university. The sum of all extra allowances to a teaching assistant should not exceed more than 50% of the basic allowance of the term s/he is working in.

The lesson preparation, observations, and the experience report should be reserved in the department and approved by the dean of student's office. The teaching assistants would mainly be working under the authority of the main teacher of the course, the department, and the institution. The higher authorities with the power of discretionary right on this regulation are the dean's office and the office of human resource and development of the university.

The teaching assistants should help the main teacher in preparing the curriculum, syllabus, course-design, teaching material, and technological requirement of the course. The teaching assistants should also involve in course counselling, answering questions, giving tuitions, correcting homework and papers to help guide teachers and students as a part of his or her internship. They are expected to assist in organizing internships and social surveys, collecting and preparing teaching materials, assisting teachers in compiling textbooks and electronic teaching plans, participating in teaching website construction, assessing assignments etc.

7. Analysis of 3-Assistants Regulation in Context

Ideally, a decision making process is a very straightforward and scientific procedure which involves a complex dynamics of intuitions, interests, stakes, and instincts (Pfeffer 2011; Spink 2010; Nutt and Wilson 2010). Keeping impartiality, equity, and transparency at the core of the decision-making process, the actors of decision making have to keep the decision making body so constructed, at equidistant from the objects of the decisions. Thus a supervisor might incline to foster informally his or her own students on the cost of those students who are supervised by other faculties. The texts of the teaching assistant regulations state that a student could be recruited a maximum of 6 times as a teaching assistant. Nevertheless, it does not specify whether the same faculty could recruit the same student for all the six terms. The regulation states that the teaching assistants would undergo training before they are entrusted with the job. However, due to the varied nature of the courses providing one-size-fits-all kind of training could not be relied on. The teaching assistants must be trained before each term that fulfils the need of the teaching assistant for the course they are recruited for (Wang Lijin 2003; Xu Ping and Zhang Jufang 2009). The regulations also vary in terms of the number of teaching assistants to be recruited for each class. The cases of non-standardised recruiting of the students and irregular distribution of the cost have been prevalent across the university. The norms on the recruitment of a teaching assistant by a supervisor for his or her own course is not well defined, and hence ambiguous, unclear and ill-constructed recruitments could be rationalised. Besides, the potential or exposed preferentialism would severely hamper the motivation and grit of learning for rest of the students in the class. In this case, those students who have paid for their studies would not only feel demotivated but also cheated.

The regulations are very sound in terms of the main goal that is vested in improving the quality of the graduate students and their financial aid-system. Their recruitment is based on the ideology of transparency, equity, and impartiality that preferably attract the regular PhD students, who are more than average in their academic performance. The main objective of the regulations also encourages the direct PhD students who have not passed the PhD eligibility test, and a few undergraduate students who have excellent academic records. The regulations are sound in terms of the factors of orientation especially *the time* which allows the teaching assistant to undergo training before they are entrusted with teaching assistant job. Nevertheless, these regulations are not consistent with their statements regarding the recruitment and tenure of the teaching assistants. For example, the regulation states that the university, department and the faculty are responsible for planning and providing training to the teaching assistants but it does not stipulate on which circumstances, who would provide, what kind of training to the teaching assistants, and why. The teaching assistant trainings should vary from one discipline to another.

The regulations are not well articulated in terms of authority for making recruitment decisions. Due to the lack of clarity in the regulation statements recruitments could not be conducted on the basis of the guidelines. These characteristics are indicating a system of organised anarchy in this regard (Kahneman, Lovallo, and Sibony 2011; Nutt and Wilson 2010). Decision making could not be left entirely on the instinct of the actors involved in decision making. In this context, the recruitment must be supported by some external evaluations or examinations. In nutshell when intuition combines with instinct that mostly lead to consequences which time to time surface as some kinds of awkward incidents on the faces of humanity (Spink 2010).

In the light of the above mentioned *orientations*, the guiding *ideological preferences* might lead to *discourses* on institutionalised racism, colour consciousness, white privileges, and socio-economic concessions among the students' body. This would neither give educationally a bright future to the students nor a sound prospect to the institutions because it is consigning too much power on premature students. The regulation does not cover the gender and minority based consciousness that defines the core of the diversity-based need of the institution. There are departments where internationalisation is still at its infancy. The international students are serving as an acute minority of the students' demography in these institutions. There are instances where international students are deprived of their academic right because they can't read the class assignments of Chinese students. Chinese universities are vigorously competing to stand as universities of excellence in the world. This at times also encourages the students to submit and resubmit the same assignments for different courses.

The preference, intuition, instinct, and interest heavily influence decision making only when the rules of the decision making are not stated clearly as text. In this case, the aforesaid abuses of power could not be blamed on the immediate actors of decision making only i.e. the faculty and the supervisors, centre for teaching research and training, and departments, but also the regulation-making body of the university. In terms of cognitive frames of decision making, it is very clear that most of the themes above do fall in the *deficit cognitive frame* whereas the regulation in terms of its goal is intended to be constructed in *equity cognitive frame*, and *diversity cognitive frame* as the basis of the decision making. The statements of organisational learning, therefore, could be stated as the following recommendations.

8. Conclusion

The highest decision-making body regarding teaching assistant recruitment and management is the school of graduate student award management committee. This committee should supervise the recruitment of the teaching assistant of each course through sudden scholarly inspections as a learner of the courses so offered in order to learn the need of the class on the basis of the students' profile and surveys conducted on them. In order to establish the iterative culture of evidence the formal tests should be conducted and those in need could be helped by the teaching assistants through formal remedial classes. The institutions, faculties and teachers who believe in collective responsibility should be recognised and awarded for their efforts only if they have a comprehensive result. Those faculties who have taken the responsibility for teaching a course must devote their time preferably for enriching the student skills lest they should delude the research and teaching programs to find an excuse for their incompetence in both fields.

The responsibilities of the teaching assistants are clearly stated in the regulation, however, the nature and characteristics of the responsibility still are not well defined. In some cases, they are defined but not standardized. It is rather advisable to make a pool of teaching assistant for each course who could help students solve their problems on a particular concept for a particular course. Active online discussion forums based on technology in this regard could serve the purpose effectively in terms of cost, resource, and time. The students could send their queries to the forum and get the answer. The teaching assistants could be paid for joining this forum. This would ease the pressure of the teaching assistants and also satisfy the need of the students enrolled in their course. Teaching assistants' body could also formally organise and institutionalise their association through electing a president, general secretary, joint secretaries, and secretaries for them. This would foster the senses of accountability in them.

Nevertheless, engaging undergraduate and graduate students as a formal teaching assistant in principle would need them to devote 12 to 16 hours a week. Considering the depth so needed for credits, assignments and academic accomplishments for a PhD degree the students would both be encouraged to involve in and overlook the compromising practices including plagiarism, malpractices and also tactics which are not considered very appropriate in academic sense. This necessarily would damage their skills of counting, concepts, creativity, and above all the values that are dearly required for accomplishing the doctoral course and the degree strictly. It is, therefore, advisable to engage the Post-doctoral students as teaching assistants in the university. In order to ensure the fundamental practices of integrity and academic freedom of the higher education, the universities must make a

data-base for all the submitted assignments at the universities. This would not only optimise the use of varied information but would also safeguard the ethics of higher education. Elsewise, the discourse of consciousness, preferences, privileges, and racism would be institutionalised under the very nose of the institutions which claim equity, impartiality, transparency, and justice as the fundamentals of their functioning and repute.

Last but not the least, the higher education students are inquisitive, and almost free in their thoughts. They are the scholars in making. It, therefore, would be a heinous crime to attribute the term spy to them. This would not only mitigate the spirit of intellectual inquiry and academic freedom but also hamper the means of knowledge making and skills optimization. This kind of idea would plague a sense of insecurity, distrust, and restriction among the intellectuals thus harming the trust of the intellectual networking across the academic world. The fearless investigation of a problem needs both ethic and deeper understanding of the problems. In any case, hurting students could not be considered a wise decision but instead taking critical stand on the policy decisions would help scholars and intellectuals to decide the right object of orientation. Certainly, this statement would need another policy investigation and analysis to be confirmed as 'true or false'. Let me leave you with a question: how many people (the established intellectuals) would blame a toddler (tell students spy) for whatever s/he chooses to eat (investigates)? What is the right way to stop them?

Note: *The teaching assistant regulations have been translated by the author himself.*

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