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The Structure of Chinese Higher Education Corruption: A Case Statistical Analysis

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Corruption in Chinese Higher Educational Sector



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ABSTRACT

Corruption in the Chinese higher educational sector is an increasing concern but it has not been systematically studied. This paper distinguishes three major intermingled structural typologies of corruption in the Chinese higher education sector: academic specific, non-academic specific and a combination of the two. Data supporting this conceptualization come from a case statistical analysis of a non-randomized sample of 215 court decisions on corruption cases detected in Chinese universities during 1994-2009, complemented with a perception-based survey in different Chinese universities. The result postulates taxonomy of the distribution of corruption among the three typologies. This study finds non-academic specific corruption cases take up a disproportionately high portion of corruption compared to that of academic specific corruption in the Chinese higher education sector. None of the scholarly academic corruption cases was detected from the case statistical analysis though there is obvious reflection of scholarly academic corruption in the perception-based data. What has been neglected is the lack of sector-specific Chinese central government anti-corruption initiatives, especially those that are scholarly academic related even though the consequences could be more detrimental than corruption in the non-academic field.

INTRODUCTION

Corruption became an issue in China and appeared to flourish since 1978 as the country embarked on a market-driven economic reform. It is so pervasive that it extended to every corner of the society in China. The higher education sector is not immune. In general, a corruption climate in a country affects higher education. The society civic educational system is corrupted as the corruption of values in the wider society becomes apparent and the profession of teaching itself becomes an undervalued occupation in a given society. In contrast to corruption behavior in other sectors, higher education sector corruption is even more hideous and more difficult to be detected.

Evidence indicates that corruption in higher education in China is widespread and has become an important and increasingly recognized problem. The number of corruption cases investigated in the higher education sector has been increasing. Not enough attention had been paid to this issue. Little systematic empirical evidence is available, especially in the scholarly academic corruption sphere. To address the problem more effectively, the structure of corruption in the higher educational sector is the prioritized issue that needs to be explored. In order to better target the problem and define the issues effectively, we need to find out from the empirical analysis the types of corruption that exist in the Chinese higher education sector, which areas and what positions are the most vulnerable to corruption in this sector. We have to know who are corrupted as well as the specific corrupted areas in order to design effective policy to curb this problem in the higher education sector.

This article typologies the structure of Chinese higher education corruption from the aspects of who are corrupted, what the specific corrupted areas are, and customizes the definitions of each term in the Chinese context. It explores the manifestations of corruption in the Chinese higher educational sector, mainly universities, in contrast to that of the non-educational sector corruption in China, by looking at the similarity of the forms and the differences in nature, the dynamic interrelationships between education related corruption and non-education related corruption in the higher educational sector. Finally, this study provides policy implications for anti-corruption measures in this field. This research will address the following two major questions: What is the structure of higher education corruption in China? Which forms of corruption in higher education sector are given most attention, which are underrepresented, and why?

METHOD

Due to the limits of the data available, currently, this study can only focus more on the detail structure of the corruption in academia or higher education administrative corruption though it will also cover the discussion of academic corruption. That is, as mentioned previously, the legal approach of the administrative corruption structure analysis is based on empirical analysis of the 215 higher education corruption cases. Since large-scale data on the academic corruption phenomena and on their causes are unavailable, we rely on the social approach of perception-based data, on what little formalized research exists, on newspaper accounts, and on anecdotes to explain it.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our data show very few divisions in Chinese higher educational sector are immune to corruption though there are variations in the degree of corruption vulnerability. In the academic field, misconduct therefore, becomes penetrative and pervasive, embedded and normalized in a series of interdependent processes. When corruption becomes normalized, it is more or less taken for granted and perpetuated. The generalized mutually reinforcing processes underlying normalization are institutionalization, rationalization, and socialization. What is lacking is the process of criminalization of the deviant behavior in Chinese higher education sectors, especially, the academic corruption. As mentioned above, there is no alleged academic corruption case in our sample analysis. The higher education corruption cases court sentencing document analysis also reveals none of non-monetary forms such as research falsification, plagiarism, sexual favors, though these forms raise issues regarding norms of academic profession as well as formal and informal codes of conduct and professional misconduct.

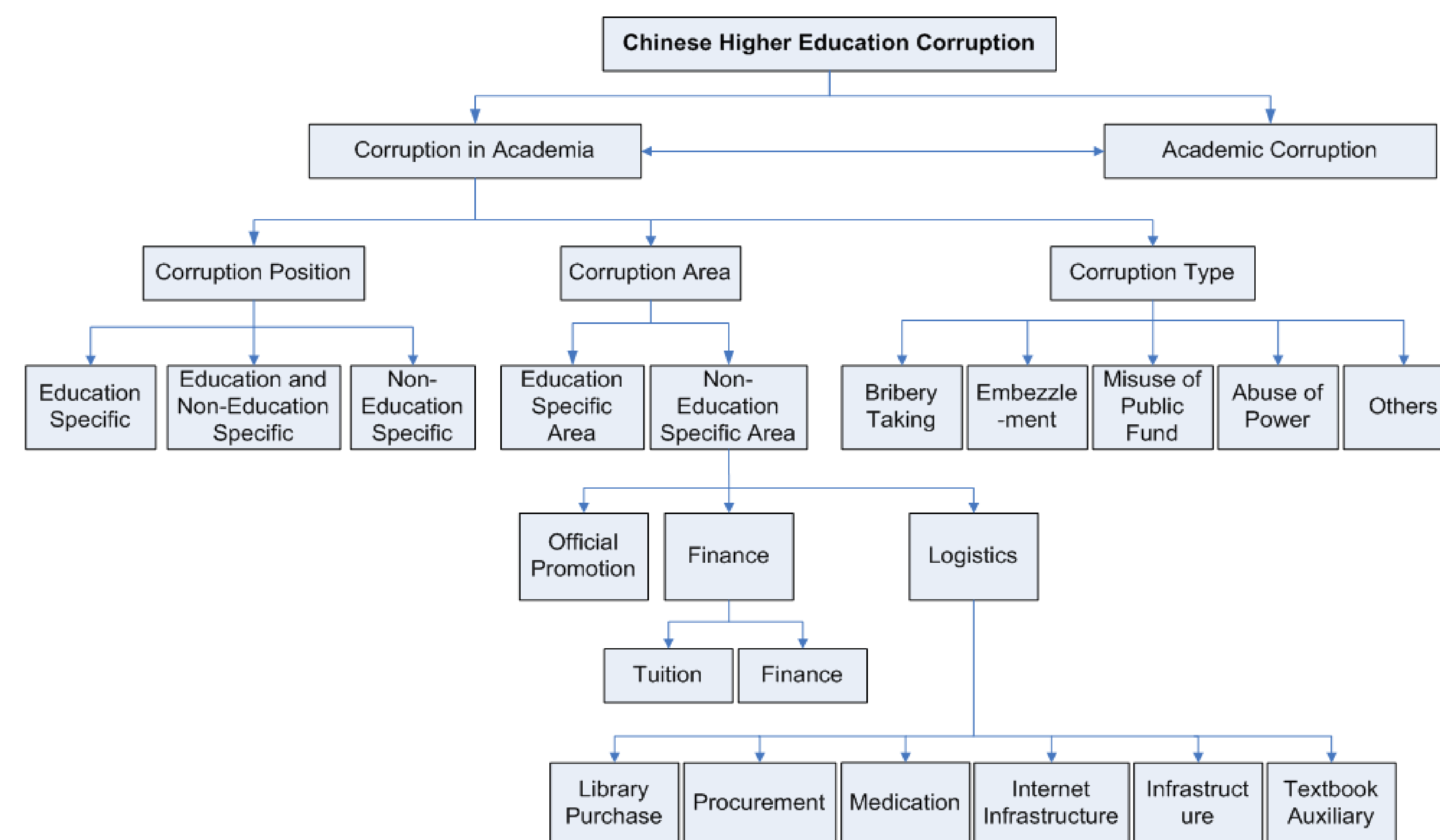
When the heads of an agency clout their authority to enact unethical actions, their consequential unethical behavior becomes institutionalized or embedded in organizational cultures and structures since these leaders are supposed serve as role models. The top-level officials in Chinese universities set up a model for their subordinates in this sense. Corruption is a rationalization process. Administrative officials need publications to keep them in position (gift-authorship), professors need more money to make them comfortable with the environment they are living in (misuse of research funding). They are competing with the non-academic administrative benefits. The frustration led by bureaucratic conformity and the imbalance in role expectation and reward systems between teaching and research create a strain among the faculty that leads to an escalated form of corruption, academic corruption.

Moreover, individuals, especially the head of an agency, may minimize the unethical nature of deviant actions by rationalizing them as being in the public interest of their organization: when the purpose of the act is to get benefit for the entire entity, this provides the impetus of "legal corruption". Sometimes, it is hard to differentiate the "public motivation" from "the individual motivation" of rent seeking. Most of the time, these two motivations are mixed. The university encourages more publication. With a lack of academic standards, quantity becomes more important than quality. The perception of corruption normalization makes this deviant behavior a norm.

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Corruption Arrests of PRC University Officials by Province

