

Research on Disciplines in China's Local Universities from the Perspective of Special Zones

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Abstract: China's local colleges and universities are the main force of China's higher education. Due to the limited construction funds, weak discipline foundation and other reasons, China's local colleges and universities generally face the embarrassment of weak discipline. How to break the constraints of the traditional management system, concentrate and efficiently allocate limited resources to achieve the overall improvement of the discipline construction level, the successful experience of China's special economic zones provides model reference and construction guidance for Chinese local universities. This study takes the subject special zones of local universities in China as the research object, chooses the theoretical system of economics and institutional theory as the logical starting point of the research, constructs the research framework of three dimensions of idea value, system design and action strategy, takes the reform of special economic zones as the institutional model and practice reference, and carries out the research from five dimensions of reform subject, logic, path, idea and strategy. Explore the effective development path of the rise of discipline construction.

Keywords: local colleges and universities; special economic zone; special subject zone

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Discipline is the most basic component of colleges and universities, discipline construction is the core of career development, and discipline level is the main embodiment of the level and comprehensive strength of colleges and universities (Xuan & Zhang, 2021). The five major construction tasks proposed by the "Double First-class" construction policy in China, such as building a first-class teaching team, cultivating top-notch innovative talents (Chun, 2022), improving the level of research, inheriting the culture of innovation, and focusing on promoting the transformation of achievements, are all based on disciplines and closely carried out around the above-mentioned evaluation standards (Qing et al., 2023; Liu, 2017; Zhong & Wang, 2020; LIN et al., 2021; Wang & Yang, 2019). According to the data published by the Ministry of Education, in 2020, there were about 2,738 colleges and universities in China, of which 2,620 (95%) are local colleges and universities. In a sense, local colleges and universities are the mainstay of Chinese higher education system (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2023). Therefore, the level of discipline construction in China's local universities has greatly affected the development of China's higher education. At present, although the "double first-class" construction has stimulated enthusiasm in local colleges and universities to promote high-level characteristic construction, local colleges and universities still face the embarrassment of weak disciplinary strength. Based on the theoretical research of special economic zone, based on the

construction practice of W University, this paper sorts out the existing construction and management mode of special economic zone, and puts forward effective suggestions and measures from five aspects: reform subject, reform logic, reform concept, reform strategy and reform path.

1. Challenges of discipline construction in local colleges and universities under the background of "double first-class"

In the current construction of the "double first-class", the national university almost beat the local universities. In the first round of "double first-class" list, among the 1,156 local undergraduate colleges and universities, only Zhengzhou University, Yunnan University and Xinjiang University became first-class university, and the remaining 39 were colleges and universities directly under ministries and commissions of the Chinese Government. As shown in Table 1, 44 local colleges and universities became first-class discipline universities, accounting for 3.80% of the total; among the 465 first-class disciplines, only 53 belong to local colleges and universities, accounting for 11.40% of the total number of first-class disciplines (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022).

As shown in Table 2, from the analysis of the results of the fourth round of national subject evaluation, class A disciplines, especially A+ grade disciplines, were mainly concentrated in colleges and universities, while disciplines of local colleges and universities were mostly in Class B, Class C- and

Table 1 Distribution of local universities and subordinate universities in the "Double First-class" construction of universities

University Classification	First-class university construction universities	First-class discipline construction universities	Number of first-class discipline construction universities	Language level
Local Universities	3	44	53	
Affiliated Colleges and Universities	39	54	412	
Total	42	98	465	

Source: Adapted from the official website of the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022).

below. On average, the number and rank of dominant disciplines of local colleges and universities lag behind those of the subordinate universities, and the

task of developing characteristic disciplines is arduous (China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Center, 2017).

Table 2 Performance of each type of university in the fourth round of subject evaluation

University Classification	Number of Universities	A+achieves	A type	B type	C type	Total
Local Universities	356	18	90	1064	1672	2826
Affiliated Colleges and Universities	107	198	629	1165	571	2365
Total	463	216	719	2229	2243	5191

Source: Adapted from the official website of the China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Center (China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Center, 2017).

Many local colleges and universities face difficulties such as weak discipline foundations, unreasonable combination of talent teams, and shortage of funds for discipline construction in the development of disciplines, while deviation of discipline construction concepts and imperfect management systems and mechanisms have also led to challenges such as inaccurate subject positioning, insignificant advantages and characteristics, and unbalanced discipline development (He, 2019; Yu & Liu, 2020; Li et al., 2021).

In the "Change: China's Higher Education Trend Development Report" released by CINGTA in 2021, which calculated budget funds of 93 subordinate universities and 531 local universities, comparisons found that the average annual budget of the affiliated universities was 6.037 billion yuan, of which Tsinghua University had the highest annual budget of 31.728 billion yuan. The average annual budget of local colleges and universities was 828 million yuan, 1/7 less than that of the subordinate universities, and the average annual budget of some colleges and universities was only about 127 million yuan (CINGTA, 2021). At the same time, the annual budget of local colleges and universities was generally lower than that of subordinate universities.

There are many factors restricting the discipline

development of local universities, such as limited construction funds, weak discipline foundation, weak innovation consciousness of discipline construction, unreasonable layout and imperfect management system (Wang et al., 2024). In the opinion of Du Yubo, president of the Chinese Association of Higher Education, the number of disciplines is not comprehensive, but highlights the characteristics. The key is to build a discipline group that matches its own orientation and characteristics, and highlight the "peak" disciplines (Liu & Gao, 2022).

The limited investment of discipline resources and the specificity of discipline development determine that local colleges and universities should uphold the principle of "doing something and not doing something" and take the road of discipline construction of selective and centralized development (Shen, 2017). This requires local colleges and universities to break the shackles of the traditional discipline construction concept and mode, reform the system and mechanism of discipline construction, establish the discipline "special zone", and promote the overall level of schools (Mei et al., 2016).

2. Special discipline zones are an effective choice for local colleges and universities to achieve breakthroughs in discipline construction

In 1999, based on the school's discipline

construction concept that "the high level of a university does not lie in its scale, but in its strength in disciplines and talents; it does not lie in its abundance and comprehensiveness, but its quality and strength", Nanjing University took the lead in launching the special area system for disciplines in China. Subsequently, many domestic colleges and universities seized the historical opportunity of the country's advocacy of the construction of superior disciplines, and practiced the construction of special disciplines one after another. These include the Institute for Advanced Studies of Tsinghua University and the Innovation Institute of Huazhong

University of Science and Technology (table 3). Practice has proved that choosing traditional superior disciplines or emerging interdisciplinary disciplines as a breakthrough point, using special disciplines as a platform and starting point, through reforming discipline management mechanisms and innovating discipline construction models, we can focus on building a number of first-class disciplines in a targeted manner. It provides an effective choice and development path for the breakthrough and rise of discipline construction in local universities in my country.

Table 3 Construction of special disciplines in various colleges and universities in China

University Name	Subject Area	University Name	Subject Area
Tsinghua University	Institute for Advanced Study	Zhejiang University	Institute of Life Sciences
Nanjing University	Institute of Model Animals	Huazhong University of Science and Technology	Innovation Institute
Xi'an Jiaotong University	Frontier Science and Technology Research Institute	Shanghai Jiaotong University	Academy of Natural Sciences
South China Normal University	Guanghua Electronics Research Institute	University of Science and Technology of China	Institute of Advanced Technology
Shan Dong University	Advanced Institute of Radium	Beijing Institute of Technology	Institute of Radar Technology
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Source: CINGTA Higher education cloud database (<http://hebeta.cingta.com/>)

The Special Discipline Special Area system aims to revolutionize discipline construction by selecting breakthroughs in international science and technology fields. These selections consider factors such as their influence on overall discipline development, international academic status, and sustainability. The system seeks to create a new management mechanism, adopting unconventional development approaches and special operation methods. Its goal is to rapidly develop influential disciplines within a relatively short period (Liang & Zeng, 2009).

To achieve this, the system proposes breaking through existing disciplinary organizational structures,

following international practices. This involves creating a new management mechanism and adopting unconventional development approaches. Through policy support, independent management, and adherence to international standards, the system aims to strengthen selected disciplines.

The implementation strategy involves focusing on a few key disciplines and implementing reform pilots. This targeted approach aims to strengthen these disciplines through policy support, independent management, and adherence to international standards. By concentrating resources and efforts, the system aims to drive overall subject improvement in

universities.

In selecting disciplines for development, universities consider their own orientation, development plans, and needs. They prioritize emerging or interdisciplinary fields, as well as those crucial for national development or strategic priorities. This ensures that the chosen disciplines align with the university's overall goals and priorities.

Given the challenges faced by local universities in discipline construction, adopting the Special Discipline Special Area system offers a promising path for breakthrough development. By aligning with the goals of "double first-class" construction initiatives, this system provides a framework for universities to enhance their disciplinary impact and overall academic excellence.

3. Practical reference for the reform of special economic zones from the perspective of institutional change theory

3.1 Special Economic zones: Reform Features of Institutional Change and Transformation

Institutional change refers to the dynamic evolution process in which new institutions replace or change old new institutions. Institutional change theory is one of the theoretical analysis tools of new institutionalism. Its representative, Douglas North, analyzes the internal mechanism of social institutional change from the aspects of the subject, motivation, model, and path of institutional change, and reveals the rationality and insufficiency of institutional arrangements, predicting the future development direction of the system (Bao, 2019).

China's reform and opening up is the evolution and optimization of a typical "gradual reform" after the localization of China's land. Because the path and mode of institutional change in the reform have strong Chinese distinguishing features, it is called "gradual reform" with Chinese features. Relying on the construction of special economic zones, the reform and opening up has achieved world-

renowned achievements. In the process of successfully implementing the institutional transformation from the traditional planned economic system to the socialist market economic system, it has driven the sustained and rapid growth of China's economy. Taking Shenzhen as an example, over the past 40 years of reform and opening up, the GDP of the region has increased from 270 million yuan in 1980 to 2.7 trillion yuan in 2019, with an average annual growth rate of 20.7%, realizing the transformation from a small border town to a city with global influence, becoming the historic leap of the international metropolis (Sun & Zhang, 2021).

As an important part of China's road, "gradual reform" with Chinese features has continuously considered and explored the path of China's social system change in its own successful practice, and has further developed and enriched the theory of system change. Tao Yitao, an expert on special economic zones, analyzed the characteristics of "gradual reform" with Chinese features from the perspective of institutional economics and institutional change theory: From the perspective of the evolution of institutional change, although the "gradual reform" with Chinese features follows the typical "gradual reform" implementation steps and path from partial to overall, it shows unique characteristics in the process of reform, and along with the deepening of the reform, the internal logical relationship determined by the choice of the reform path is the interdependence and mutual promotion of institutional supply and institutional demand; from the perspective of the implementation path of reform, although the basic path of institutional change in Chinese society is the typical "gradual reform", the logic of its reform basically conforms to many characteristics of induced institutional change, but fundamentally speaking, it is still a mandatory institutional change deployed and promoted from top to bottom. induced institutional change or the result of forced institutional change,

or as a force to promote institutional changes, it is implemented and performed through formal institutional arrangements after approval by the central government (Tao, 2020).

3.2 Special Discipline zones: Feasibility of special economic zones for practical reference

The main body of China's reform and opening up is the central government, but special economic zones are very important and key in the framework of "gradual reform" with Chinese features, shouldering the mission of pioneers and practitioners of institutional changes and "policy-based economic growth poles" with identity. Based on the analysis from the perspective of institutional change theory, the successful reform of special economic zones is attributed to effectively breaking through the shackles of traditional management concepts and systems, realizing the centralized and efficient allocation of limited resources, and reducing the cost and risk of reform. The reforms in these fields are not only the original driving force for the construction of special zones for academic disciplines in universities, but also the key issues they face in the course of their operation. The concept of "special area" is the same. Although they are in different fields, academic special zones and special economic zones have similar development thinking and construction essence. First of all, China's reform and opening up regards special economic zones as the main carrier to break the rigidity of the traditional system and ideological dogma, realize the transformation from the traditional planned economy to the socialist market economy, and drive sustained and rapid economic growth. Discipline Special zones are also the main practice platforms for colleges and universities to actively implement the reform of the traditional discipline system and actively explore the innovation of discipline construction models; Secondly, as "special zones", both are endowed with important missions and policy privileges of "first trial" and "first demonstration". The special economic

area, which was entrusted by the central government to take the lead in experimentation and reform, firmly grasps the "advantage gap" in the system and policy, and forms a "resource gathering depression" through the effective use and allocation of limited resources in the new system, and concentrates on the use of high-quality resources. And scarce resources to complete rapid breakthrough development. What the disciplinary special area seeks is to rely on the special area to concentrate and efficiently allocate limited disciplinary resources to build key disciplines, realize the "clenched fist" of discipline construction and create a "peak", and then it produces the effect of driving, radiating and influencing other disciplines to support each other, to cross-integrate, and coordinate development; moreover, the special economic area and the discipline are both taking the reform path from local to overall, and coordinated development driven by unbalanced development. Special economic zones are classic successful cases of completing social transformation and system change at the cost of relatively small reform risks, while special academic zones are also trying to control risks and costs within a safe range through partial reforms. In addition, in terms of learning from foreign advanced experience and integrating with international cooperation, the special discipline area and the special economic area also have development common ground. Therefore, some scholars also pointed out that "special discipline area" is a conceptual innovation and an important practice of transplanting the experience of "special economic area" construction to the scope of discipline construction and talent development (Zhu, 2017).

At the beginning of the implementation of the special economic area reform in local colleges and universities, the special economic area is a suitable and important learning object. The top-level design of the system, the construction of the reform framework, and the actual deployment and implementation are all the keys to the success of the construction of

the special area. In the process of implementing the reform of the discipline construction system, local colleges and universities are learning from the mature experience of China's reform and opening up and the mature model of the special economic area, to absorb the concepts and practices that can be used for reference, and gradually combine the actual factors and characteristics of the colleges and universities in the reform process. Improvement, optimization, integration, perfecting the special area management mechanism, innovating and optimizing the discipline construction model, and gradually improving the fit between the new institutional form and objective reality conditions will undoubtedly play an important role in guiding and promoting the construction of special area disciplines in local universities effect.

4. Exploration of the construction of special disciplines in local universities: subject, logic, philosophy, strategy and path

The discipline structure and mainstay and advantageous disciplines of colleges and universities, especially local universities, directly determine the type and level positioning of colleges and universities, which is also a structural and fundamental bottleneck problem restricting the transformation of local colleges and universities and the realization of connotative development. In the early stage of reform and opening up, in the face of scarce resources in the planned economy era and unable to rationally allocate and efficiently utilize, China vigorously promoted "gradual reform" with Chinese features by relying on the construction of special economic zones (Liu, 2018). From the perspective of reform and development, the current situation of running local colleges and universities is similar to the situation in the early stage of China's reform and opening up, and the same "family foundation is not solid" and resource allocation and management system are also in urgent need of reform and optimization. This paper attempts to draw on the institutional and reform models of

special economic zones as a reference, and from the perspective of institutional change theory, the five dimensions of reform, namely subject, logic, path, concept and strategy, local colleges and universities rely on special zones as an implementation carrier to create a balanced development model of centralized allocation of high-quality and scarce resources to achieve rapid development and breakthrough, so as to achieve the goal of "breakthrough" in discipline construction and impact on the "double first-class" construction.

4.1 Reform Subject

The practice of more than 40 years of reform and opening up has proved that the "dual-subject structure" of reform established by the central government and the special economic zones authorized to "pilot first" and the model of interaction and efficient cooperation formed during the reform process are the guarantee. An important factor for the successful implementation of "gradual reform" with Chinese features, which provides local colleges and universities with a template for institutional reform that can be used for reference or even imitated.

To promote discipline construction and system reform, local colleges and universities need to identify breakthrough points, make precise efforts, point the specific zones, focus on one or several key development disciplines of schools, use innovative discipline development mechanisms and models, and strive to create discipline peaks, so as to drive the school's overall discipline construction's level up. Among them, learning the role and function of special economic zones in China's reform and opening up, and building academic special zones into regional pilots for all-round reform of schools can not only realize the centralized and efficient allocation of limited resources, but also control the changes brought about by system reforms. It can also control the risks and costs brought about by system reform and changes. Local colleges and universities should

establish a "dual-subject structure" suitable for their own reform, clarify the reform roles and positioning of the school and the special area, and establish an effective linkage and cooperation model in the reform process through close cooperation and benign interaction. As the subject of reform, schools must have rational reform thinking, scientific decision-making, and effective implementation of reform measures. This is an important guarantee to ensure that the institutional changes triggered by the reform will move forward along the correct and deepening path. As a reform pilot of "pioneering first", the disciplinary special area vigorously implements the school's reform deployment, and at the same time, it can continue to explore and summarize reform experience with the role of the reform subject at the practical level.

Institutional reform is the core of special zones construction. The key task is to clarify the similarities and differences under different institutional frameworks, to define and guarantee the obligations and benefits of innovators from a policy perspective, and use institutional differences to stimulate the vitality of reform and innovation. The school should do a good job in the top-level design of the system based on the actual situation, implement proactive institutional reforms, establish an institutional framework to clarify and ensure the effectiveness of the reform, to balance the development of traditional organizations and special zones, such as promulgating the management and operation measures of academic special zones, clarifying the objects, directions, principles, and methods of special zones construction, formulating operating mechanisms and management models, etc. Discipline special zones should make full use of the priority and autonomy endowed by the school in terms of policies and resources, effectively release the spillover advantages and effects of the special area's "pioneering first" and promote the development of disciplines in a short period of time.

4.2 Reform Logic

The "gradual reform" with Chinese features, represented by special economic zones, has continuously considered and explored the path of China's social system change in its own successful practice, and has further developed and enriched the theory of system change. Around this theory, Yifu Lin pointed out in his definition of mandatory institutional change and induced institutional change that the initiator of mandatory institutional change is the government, and the institutional change is carried out by the government's mandatory orders and laws, while induced institutional change It is an institutional arrangement that individuals or groups (referring to the micro-subjects of the market) spontaneously advocate, organize and implement spontaneously in response to the potential large profits brought about by the replacement of the old system by the new system (Lin, 2020).

The reform is essentially a systematic project, in which various factors restrict and promote each other. Analyzing the construction of China's special economic zones from the perspective of institutional change theory, the central government is the top designer of the reform and opening up, and the dominant and top-down mandatory institutional changes promoted by the central government are related to the enjoyment of special policies and the practice of reform deployment in special economic zones. The bottom-up induced institutional changes generated in the system interact and interact with each other, and jointly promote the reform process. What this reflects is an interactive relationship between institutional supply and institutional demand. In the process of local colleges and universities exploring the construction of disciplinary special zones, schools have adopted measures such as formulating special zones construction goals, development plans, and promulgating special zones management measures to promote mandatory institutional changes and

implement the construction of disciplinary special zones in the form of system supply. As the demand side of the system, the disciplinary special area operates within the prescribed system space as the implementer and practitioner of the subject system reform in accordance with the school's strategic deployment. However, in the process of actual operation, because of the reform power of "first try" and the inductive institutional changes inspired by special policies, the disciplinary special zones will continue to summarize and create new institutional needs in the development, feedback and influencing schools to adjust and optimizations in system supply. It can be seen from this that in the process of construction of special zones for disciplines in local colleges and universities, the system reform and change are the interweaving and interaction of top-down mandatory system change and bottom-up induced system change. Among them, maintaining a benign and positive interactive relationship, that is, ensuring the natural occurrence of induced institutional changes dominated by mandatory institutional changes in the process of reform and opening up, is the key. If the school makes correct decisions, manages scientifically the situation, and guarantees are in place during the reform, it can effectively control and reduce the cost and risk of system change and improve the system benefits. Therefore, when formulating the top-level design and promulgating a series of system norms, the school strives to be precise and scientific and implement them in place, so as to effectively provide and guarantee the system strategy; while in-depth implementation of the school's strategic deployment and management formulation, the discipline special area combines the problems, challenges, experiences and lessons in actual operation in real time, and feeds back in the form of system demand, assists the school to adjust and optimize the construction measures of the discipline special area in a timely manner, and improve the system supply.

4.3 Reform Concept

The evolution of China's economic system has chosen a gradual approach, that is, starting from the zones with the least resistance to reform, and then gradually creating conditions to continue moving forward. The "gradual reform" with Chinese features chooses to rely on special economic zones to implement reform steps and paths from partial to overall, which has achieved high economic growth since China's reform and opening up.

None of the world's top universities can cover all disciplines, it is even less likely to achieve first-class level in all subjects; at the same time as the "old brand comprehensive colleges and universities", they will impact the overall first-class construction and local colleges and universities currently do not have the corresponding competitive strength; to build first-class universities and first-class disciplines, the "double first-class" construction project establishes the "double standards" of overall development and partial improvement. Therefore, the only effective way for local colleges and universities to enter the stage of "Double First-Class" construction is to adhere to the principle of "supporting the excellent, supporting the strong, and supporting the special", select the right breakthrough point, and concentrating on creating one or several distinctive and advantageous disciplines. Just as China's reform and opening up strategically chooses special economic zones as a breakthrough point to promote gradual reforms, local colleges and universities can also achieve a "partial breakthrough" in the construction of "double first-class" by implementing the reform of discipline special zones: Focus on superior disciplines or characteristic interdisciplinary emerging disciplines, rely on the advantages of discipline special zones to concentrate policy resources to build discipline peaks, achieve partial improvement of first-class disciplines, and then promote the formation of discipline plateaus through the promotion of successful reform

models and discipline peaks to improve the overall discipline level of the school. The goal of the special area construction of disciplines is to use the special area as the carrier and starting point, accelerate the introduction of leading talents in disciplines, produce major original scientific research results, achieve a significant improvement in the level of key disciplines in a short period of time, and serve the "double first-class" construction of high-level schools. To achieve this goal, the first is to improve the management mechanism of the special area and promote the rapid growth of disciplines. Drawing on the successful experience in China and abroad, and following the principle of "pioneering first, advancing steadily, integrating resources, and striving for practical results", formulate the management system and operating methods of the discipline area, ensure that in the institutional space of "first try first", special policy support and resource allocation can be implemented in place, the autonomy and management rights of disciplines and platform construction in the special zones are guaranteed in place, promote the specialization and vitality of the special area of science and technology; the second is to strengthen the introduction and cultivation of high-end talents and optimize the structure of the talent team. A high-level talent team and a high-quality team structure are important supports for the construction of special academic zones. It is necessary to establish and implement the concept of talent introduction and education that combines the two-way combination of nesting and attracting phoenixes to build a nest. Give full play to the "spillover" effect of special zones, disciplines, and talents, and truly attract talents, retain them and make good use of them; the third is to strengthen the service support of the special area and create a good scientific research environment. In the process of promoting the construction of discipline special zones, it is necessary to further rationalize the relationship between relevant functional departments

of the school, establish a working mechanism of linkage and cooperation, and actively build a relatively independent operation mode of discipline special zones, which can also be closely linked and smoothly coordinated with other relevant units of the school. It is necessary to simplify the work process, improve management efficiency, and effectively provide all-round support and guarantee for the development of the special area for special subjects.

4.4 Reform Strategy

The success of China's special economic zones was largely attributed to the institutional advantages provided by the "national system." This system offered crucial political force and institutional support to tackle initial challenges, such as unbalanced social development and resource scarcity, during the reform and opening up period. By significantly reducing uncoordinated and friction costs, it facilitated efficient and rapid institutional change.

Similarly, local colleges and universities face the need to establish a corresponding "school system" to effectively build special discipline zones. Just as the construction of special economic zones required a process of continuous correction, exploration, adjustment, and optimization, the development of subject special areas follows a similar trajectory. Continuous policy and resource support, coupled with consensus and backing from the entire university community, are essential for deepening reform and ensuring the positive development of these zones.

To vigorously promote the construction of disciplinary special zones, local colleges and universities must first establish a coordinating force to concentrate limited resources on major tasks. This involves top-level design, clarifying support levels from school policies and funds, ensuring sufficient funds and talent treatment, and optimizing the research environment and international exchanges.

Effective collaboration and smooth government orders are essential for establishing low-cost

institutional reform channels. The construction of special subject zones is a systematic project that requires coordination across various aspects of the school's management. Special institutions or committees composed of related functional departments can lead the operation and management of discipline special areas, ensuring orderly and effective operations.

The foundation of constructing special areas lies in experimenting with reforms rather than providing special treatment to individuals. It's about exploring the feasibility of expanding reforms through firsthand experiments. The relationship between traditional organizations and special areas is not confrontational but complementary. It's crucial to guide teachers and students to understand the value and significance of discipline special areas, encouraging their active participation and forming a campus-wide atmosphere of promotion.

4.5 Reform Path

Special economic zones serve as a practical model of "gradual reform" with Chinese characteristics and a logical starting point for China's social system changes. They act as "policy growth poles" and "secondary action groups" in reform practices, playing a crucial role in institutional reform.

The modern discipline system in China originated from government-led mandatory changes, dating back to the early days of the People's Republic of China. Initially structured based on the Soviet Union's model due to national conditions and ideological considerations, this resulted in an over-institutionalization of discipline system construction (Zhao et al., 2008). Administrative power was overly emphasized, hindering the internal laws of discipline development and constraining progress.

In constructing special discipline zones in local colleges and universities, it's important to recognize the benefits of top-down mandatory changes while being cautious of rigid management risks. There's a need to unleash the potential of bottom-up induced institutional change within the discipline special area's institutional space.

For instance, scientific research platforms within special disciplines receive priority in resource allocation and enjoy autonomy in personnel management, talent introduction, and collaborative innovation. The Special Discipline Special Area operates under an independent platform system, supervisor responsibility system, and target assessment system. Each scientific research platform has relative independence in management and personnel decisions, with the person in charge responsible for formulating and implementing platform plans.

During the construction period, the school conducts target assessments, utilizing academic committees and peer reviews to clarify access and exit mechanisms. Unlike traditional annual assessments, dynamic assessment and process monitoring are emphasized over fixed evaluations.

In conclusion, exploring and implementing the special economic area's disciplinary system is an active, and important innovative attempt for local colleges and universities in achieving "partial breakthroughs" in discipline construction. Similarly, as a systematic reform project, the successful experience of special economic zones in theory and practice offers significant guidelines for the construction of discipline special zones in local universities, and colleges and universities need to fully learn from and apply them in the practice of the construction of special discipline zones.

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