

美国教授续聘必须通过严格审核

U.S. College Faculty Reappointment Must Go Through Rigorous Evaluation (Translation)

Recently, non-renewal of Peking University School of Economics Associate Professor Xia Yeliang's contract has attracted a lot of attention. More than 100 faculty members at Wellesley College (USA), without any foundation supported by facts, wrote an open letter accusing Peking University violating Professor Xia's academic freedom and threatening to reconsider Wellesley's partnership with PKU.

PKU School of Economics Faculty Evaluation and Reappointment Committee issued the following explanation: Professor Xia joined PKU School of Economics in July 2002 under term contract at the rank of associate professor. In recent years Xia's teaching evaluation has been ranked dead last among all faculty at School of Economics. Since 2006, the School has received more than 340 complaints from students regarding Xia's teaching pedagogy, lecture content and work attitude. Based on "PKU Code of Term Appointments", the Committee on Faculty Evaluation and Reappointment voted not to renew Xia's contract.

U.S. colleges and universities also have faculty evaluation and appointment system. I wrote an article about this (People's Daily Overseas Edition, 1/4/1999). At Wellesley College where I teach, the No.1 factor is teaching evaluation. If a professor receives that many student complaints, reappointment decision would certainly be negative.

Faculty at U.S. colleges and universities value academic freedom dearly. There is nothing wrong with that. Majority of my 100 colleagues never visited China, let alone have any knowledge about PKU School of Economics. Why did they point their fingers to the internal affairs of an institution from the other side of the globe and speak so loudly?

My opinion is the cultural difference between China and U.S. For Chinese, it is vital to talk to each other, not to embarrass the other side. The open letter kind of challenging type is a big no-no. Americans are used to act freely. Academic freedom is such a noble thing that professors sign their names in a hurry without much thought. This just shows that it is important to hear from all sides. Otherwise even professors, intellectuals from a top U.S. college like Wellesley could make such basic mistake when they only listen to one side story.

It is worth mentioning that U.S. main stream media is uniformly on Xia's side to accuse PKU. I am afraid that this is due to cold war mentality of ideology. U.S. media always takes great care of Chinese dissidents. Fairness in China reporting does not exist anymore. Tibet and Olympics are examples. That is why U.S. media like the NY Times has such terrible reputation among educated Chinese especial young people.

Back to the topics of freedom of expression: even professors in the U.S. can't say whatever they want. Harvard University President Lawrence Summers lost his job because he said something like men seem more successful than women in mathematics.

Wellesley and China have long history. In 1906, Chinese women came to Wellesley to study. Bingxin and Mayling Soong are distinguished Wellesley alumnae. In summer 2013, a group of Wellesley students and faculty engaged successful academic exchanges with PKU students and faculty. The theme was Women Leadership in the World. Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (Wellesley alumna) said in Beijing that Sino-US relation is the most important bilateral relation in the 21st century. We hope that Wellesley's partnership with PKU would continue since it benefits young people from both China and U.S.

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