

Text Analysis of the System of Changing Majors in Chinese Universities

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Abstract: *The major, as the most basic unit for cultivating talents, has always been a subject of public concern. The choice of major affects the effectiveness of talent cultivation, and the correct choice of major is one of the key factors affecting the level of study commitment and state, as well as the student's college experience and the quality of undergraduate education. It is crucial to pay close attention to the adjustment and conversion of majors for students who are dissatisfied with their majors after entering a university. This paper lists the theoretical basis for major transfer, describes the development of relevant major regulations in China, and analyzes the implementation regulations of five randomly selected universities, it raises issues and provides relevant suggestions.*

Keywords: Transfer to major, System analysis, College major transfer system.

1. Theoretical Basis and Historical Evolution of the System of Transferring Majors in Chinese Universities

1.1 Theoretical Basis

1.1.1 Study of Freedom Theory

The theory of "learning freedom" originates from the concept of "academic freedom" in Western education, which is a fundamental principle of academic freedom in medieval universities. Scholar Zhang Baokun wrote in his article that "Fichte, the president of the University of Berlin, believed that students have the freedom to explore, doubt, disagree, and criticize authorities in their professional studies, as well as the right to choose teachers and what to learn. This right of students is only limited by one condition—the educational goals of their major, the correct conclusions drawn from scientific methods and facts, and the truths that have been verified; this is called the freedom to learn [1]." John Brubaker clearly defined the connotation of learning freedom for the first time in his book, stating that learning freedom includes "the freedom to choose learning content, the freedom to decide learning time, and the freedom to choose learning methods [2]." Based on these discussions, it is concluded that learning freedom refers to the conscious and autonomous learning rights of students during the learning process, provided they comply with school rules and regulations, including freedom of thought and freedom of choice, among others.

"Learning freedom" has long become an important teaching principle in Western universities, and their educational management ideas have strongly impacted the reform of teaching management in our country's higher education, continuously enhancing the concept of independent learning among Chinese students. Article 21 of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China's "Regulations on Student Management in Ordinary Higher Education Institutions" states that students who have interests and expertise in other majors during their studies can apply to change their major. Other legal provisions also stipulate the people's right to learning freedom, such as Article 47 of the Constitution, which states, "Citizens of the People's Republic

of China have the freedom to engage in scientific research, literary and artistic creation, and other cultural activities." Based on lexical logic analysis, the key terms in such statements are "academic activities" and "freedom." As long as it falls within the scope of academic activities, freedom will be guaranteed, regardless of whether the academic activities are conducted by members of the university or by other social members or citizens [3]. Precisely due to the transformation of educational management thought under the influence of the theory of freedom of learning, the system of major change in our country began to emerge and was gradually perfected, ensuring the right of students to study independently.

1.1.2 Student-Centered Theory

The "Theory of Learning Freedom" analyzes from the perspective of students, while the "Student-Centered Theory" analyzes from the perspective of educational management development. "Student-centered" is an important viewpoint of humanistic theory, proposed by psychologist Carl Rogers, who believes that learning is a natural human trait. He advocates that learning that occurs naturally is the most aligned with human nature and is the best and most valuable form of learning. When students actively seek to understand and master knowledge, the learning outcomes they achieve are the most valuable. Furthermore, he believes that "meaningful learning" is true learning, which refers to a way of learning in which students are fully engaged. This approach is not about students being fed knowledge or learning unwillingly. Meaningful learning not only increases knowledge but also brings about personal change, holding value for individual existence and development. Therefore, students' learning should not be forced, indoctrinated, or meaningless. To ensure that students' learning outcomes are meaningful, they should be given the power to choose their learning content and methods, allowing them to develop interest and engage in learning spontaneously and actively. The purpose and task of school education is for students to learn how to learn. It aims to shift from a "teaching-centered" approach to a "learning-centered" approach, from "teachers imparting knowledge to students" to "allowing students to discover and create knowledge on their own," and from a "transmission model" to a "learning model [4]." In this process, students should be given the opportunity to make active choices. The behavior of changing majors can

maximize students' enthusiasm for learning. Driven by their own initiative, students can choose majors that interest them, thereby maximizing their learning motivation. The implementation of the major-changing system in higher education not only guarantees students' freedom to learn but also serves as a model for schools to manage teaching with a student-centered approach.

1.2 The Historical Evolution and Characteristics of the System of Changing Majors in Chinese Universities

In 1952, China's colleges and universities adopted the Soviet model to adjust their departments and realize the differentiation of majors. The colleges and universities set up majors according to the departments and trained talents based on majors. During this period, the majors in our country were established according to the production needs of various industry sectors in the planned economy, without considering the inherent development logic of the disciplines, and the power to set majors was concentrated in the central government. Under the limited educational resources, the behavior of undergraduate students switching majors could lead to difficulties in resource allocation and even waste [5]. Therefore, the major-switching system initially exhibited strict restrictions.

In May 1953, the Ministry of Higher Education issued a notice titled "Several Regulations on the Handling of Students' School Status in East China's Colleges and Universities," which clearly stated that "students who request to change their major should be firmly educated and persuaded, and changing majors is not allowed [6]." However, students who have health issues or those whom the school believes have no future prospects in their original major are allowed to change majors. In February 1958, the Ministry of Higher Education tried out the "Regulations on Dealing with the problems of transferring majors, transferring schools, suspending schools, resuming schools and dropping out of colleges and Universities (Draft)," which stipulated that students who were physically unfit to study in the original major or could play a greater potential in other majors could change majors [6]. In 1960, the "Regulations on Dealing with the problems of transferring majors, transferring schools, suspending schools, resuming schools and dropping out of colleges and Universities" was officially published, and compared with the draft, a information note was added that "students must change study areas due to special difficulties of their own or their families [6]." At this stage, our country lacks the concept of freedom, students' consciousness of autonomy is weak, the policy is to regulate the management behavior of colleges and universities, colleges and universities have no autonomy, and the system of transferring majors is formulated by the state, without considering the interests of students and other factors.

In 1978, the Ministry of Education tried out the Interim "Regulations on the Management of Students' Student Status in Colleges and Universities," which for the first time explained the grade of students changing majors, and students in the third grade were not allowed to apply [6]. In 1983, the "Management Measures for Student Status in Full-time Regular Higher Education Institutions" was officially published, relaxing the restrictions on changing majors and

allowing students who had completed one semester of study to apply based on their special talents [6]. In 1990, the National Education Commission of the People's Republic of China issued the "Regulations on Student Management in Regular Higher Education Institutions," which allowed students to apply for a change of major in response to reforms in the graduate allocation system and the evolving demand for talent in society. During this period, the conditions for students to change majors were relaxed, but the autonomy of higher education institutions was still limited, making it a challenging process to change majors.

In 2005, the People's Republic of China issued new "Regulations on Student Management in Ordinary Higher Education Institutions," and schools formulated rules for students to change majors based on the demand for talent in society [6]. In 2017, the Ministry of Education released a new version of the "Regulations on Student Management in Ordinary Higher Education Institutions," which clearly stated that students could apply to change majors based on their interests and hobbies. Since the new century, the conditions for changing majors have been gradually relaxed, colleges and universities have obtained the right to management, rules and regulations can be independently set according to the characteristics of the school, the difficulty of changing majors is reduced, and students' interests and hobbies are considered. The current policy is more in line with the development needs of schools and students.

2. Text Analysis of the System of Changing Majors in Chinese Universities

This article randomly selects five universities as case studies: Guangxi Normal University (GXNU), Central China Normal University (CCNU), Fudan University (FUDAN), Jinan University (JNU), and China Agricultural University (CAU). It includes normal universities, comprehensive universities, and also China Agricultural University, which has a particularly relaxed system of major transfer, for comparison. Study the system issued by five schools (excluding the specific requirements of each school), and interpret the content of the system into six aspects: applicants and time for major change, conditions for major change, assessment methods, number ratio setting, operation time for major change, and work decision-making and organization department.

2.1 Applicant and Application Time

Applicants are generally enrolled students, and they are required to be non-committed students, and individual schools will restrict disciplined students, the specific situation is as follows:

Table 1: Applicants and schedule

University	applicant	Application time
GXNU	Freshmen to juniors students	First to third academic year spring semester
CCNU	Freshmen and sophomores students	First to second academic year fall semester
FUDAN	Freshman to sophomore students who have not changed their major	First to second academic year spring semester
JNU	Freshman to sophomore students who have not changed their major	First to second academic year spring semester

CAU	Freshman to senior students	Per semester (unlimited number of times)
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The applicants for these five schools all require non-special enrollment. Guangxi Normal University has relaxed its restrictions on applicants to include third-year students, providing students with a more flexible time to choose suitable majors. Central China Normal University, Fudan University, and Jinan University limit applicants to students below the second year. Fudan University and Jinan University also explicitly require that students can only change their major once, imposing restrictions on those who wish to switch majors again, thus forcing students to clarify their academic interests and future development before applying to avoid irreversible situations. However, the two normal universities did not specify whether multiple major changes are allowed. China Agricultural University has a lenient policy on changing majors, offering students multiple opportunities to experience the learning environment of different majors.

2.2 Conditions for Changing Majors

These five colleges and universities put forward different requirements for students in the implementation measures of changing majors, which can be regarded as either application conditions or restrictions on students changing majors. The specific situation is as follows:

Table 2: Restrictions on switching majors

University	Application conditions
GXNU	1.The top 20% of grade majors can apply for transfer to normal majors; 2.The GPA of general studies courses is above 2.0; 3.Each person can apply for only one major
CCNU	1.Good grades; 2.Each person can apply for only one major
FUDAN	1.There is no requirement for the school's GPA (subordinate colleges have GPA requirements); 2.Each person can apply for only one major
JNU	1.If the GPA is in the top 30% of the grade majors, you can apply for majors in different campuses; 2.Students with a GPA ranking of 30%-50% in their grade majors can only apply for majors in the school district; 3.Students with substandard GPA can only apply for the major of this campus if there are special reasons
CAU	1.There is no threshold, and each person can apply for a maximum of two majors in one faculty

The policies of Guangxi Normal University and Jinan University belong to local restrictive policies, which are artificially set "filters" to narrow the scope of subjects for major change to some specific individuals or groups with similar characteristics, while excluding the rest of the group. Both universities have made requirements on students' academic performance, turning the restriction of major change into the right of excellent students. It makes it more difficult for students to change majors. Although Central China Normal University requires students to have good grades, there is no clear grade point requirement, so students have the opportunity to apply for a change of major as long as they study hard and meet the talent training program. Fudan University does not specify grade requirements at the university level. China Agricultural University does not set an application threshold for changing majors, does not limit the number of times to change majors, as long as students are willing to apply.

2.3 Assessment Methods

After studying the rules of major transfer in the five universities, it is found that Guangxi Normal University, Fudan University, Jinan University and China Agricultural University do not have a unified assessment method for students applying for major transfer, and their subordinate colleges develop reasonable assessment courses and methods. Among them, China Agricultural University only sets interview round, and the comprehensive score is determined by the interview score and GPA. The unified assessment subject of Central China Normal University is college English. Students who transfer to science, economics and management majors need to take the higher mathematics examination, and the rest assessment methods are formulated by the subordinate colleges.

2.4 Population Ratio Setting

The process of changing majors involves two types of personnel movement: the number of students transferring in and the number of students transferring out. In order to allocate resources effectively, each school will establish reasonable personnel movement standards based on its own development. For specific details, please refer to the table below:

Table 3: Population ratio setting

University	Transfer in number control	Transfer out number control
GXNU	Not more than 20% of the grade in the major	
CCNU	Each major provides a target number of 10% of the current year's enrollment, and the specific number is determined by the school working group	no
FUDAN	Subordinate colleges set the number of students according to the number of first-year students of each major	no
JNU	Control 10% to 35% of the freshman enrollment in the major that year	no
CAU	Determine the maximum admission plan according to the actual capacity of each major and the number of existing students	no

These five colleges and universities all control the number of transferred students suitable for the reasonable development of the professional resources, so as to ensure the learning guarantee for the students of the original major and the transferred students. The scope of the formulation will not exist the situation that the college does not let go of the students and avoid the imbalance of the proportion of students in each department. Guangxi Normal University limits the proportion of transferred students to no more than 20% of the total number of students in the grade of the major, and if the school meets the application conditions, it will lose the qualification of transferring majors due to the limit of the number of transferred majors. However, the school did not explain how to conduct reasonable qualification examination on applicants when the number of transferred majors exceeds the control number. To ensure that the system is fair and equitable for every student.

2.5 The Duration of Professional Operation

The operation duration discussed in this article refers to the time from when the school announces the transfer major notification to the time when students report to the new major. For specific details, please see the table below:

Table 4: Duration Statistics of Major Changes at Each School

University	Duration
GXNU	The application is made at the beginning of the spring semester, and the change of major is completed in the new semester, which lasts about 5 months
CCNU	The application is made at the end of the autumn semester, and the change of major is completed in the new semester, which lasts about 3 months
FUDAN	The application is made at the beginning of the spring semester, and the change of major is completed in the new semester, which lasts about 5 months
JNU	The application is made at the beginning of the spring semester, and the change of major is completed in the new semester, which lasts about 5 months
CAU	The application is made at the end of each semester, and the change of major is completed in the new semester, which lasts about 1-2 months

The notification for changing majors is usually issued at the beginning or end of the semester. It goes through the review of the academic affairs office and assessments by various colleges before students report to their new major. This process can take an entire semester or a winter/summer break, which is quite lengthy. During this time, students must continue to complete their studies in their original major while preparing for the transfer assessments, which poses a significant challenge for them. China Agricultural University has a simple assessment process for students wishing to change majors, requiring only an interview, and the transfer work can be completed during the break, making the entire process relatively short.

2.6 The Decision-making Organization Department for Major Transfer Work

Table 5: Leadership Departments for Major Transfer Work at Each School

University	Specific work responsible for the department
GXNU	1. The work plan of the affiliated college to change majors shall be reviewed and filed by the Academic Affairs Office; 2. The Academic Affairs Office is responsible for reviewing student information and sending relevant notices; 3. The Academic Affairs Office will review the students who intend to change their major
CCNU	1. The number of recipients shall be determined by the school's professional change working group; 2. The Academic Affairs Office shall prequalify the students
FUDAN	1. The Academic Affairs Office announces the number of receiving plans for each major; 2. The Academic Affairs Office will review the list of students and transfer the list and related materials to the subordinate colleges
JNU	1. The subordinate colleges are responsible for qualification review and assessment, and the Academic Affairs Office is responsible for guidance and review; 2. The Academic Affairs Office intends to receive the list of students and materials for review and submit to the school for approval
CAU	1. The undergraduate school shall be responsible for the overall arrangement, and the subordinate schools shall organize the implementation; 2. The Undergraduate School is responsible for reviewing student information and filing it with its subordinate school

In the daily teaching management work of higher education institutions, the academic affairs office or the undergraduate school represents the university in specifically carrying out teaching management functions. The power of teaching management is concentrated at the university level, while departments and faculties are at the bottom of the teaching management hierarchy. They are only granted the execution rights during the teaching implementation process, and the

degree of autonomy and responsibility they possess is quite limited, resulting in a serious lack of initiative and vitality.

3. The Practical Difficulties of the Major Transfer System in Our Country's Higher Education Institutions

Even though universities have improved the shortcomings of the major transfer system, most still find it difficult to break free from the constraints of the old system. There are many concerns regarding undergraduate major transfers, leading to a neglect of the disconnect between the major transfer system and the times, resulting in various issues arising during its implementation.

3.1 The Underlying Logic of the Major Transfer System is Misaligned

The transfer of majors was originally an optimization system designed to help students who do not adapt well to their original majors, allowing them to choose a field where they can better utilize their strengths. However, with the increasing number of restrictions, it has turned into a competition for rights among the top students. Many universities impose academic requirements on applicants, meaning that only students with good grades are eligible to apply. Those who are not interested in their original majors and do not excel academically are left behind due to these systemic limitations. This flawed logic presents two issues: first, high-achieving students gain opportunities, leading to a certain loss for the original major due to the outflow of excellent students; second, students who are eager to change majors but do not have outstanding grades remain in their original majors, resulting in low motivation and innovation in their studies. Over time, this will lead to a decline in the quality of student training.

Under the operation of this opposing logical system, students' right to learn freely is suppressed, and the school's management fails to reflect a student-centered approach.

3.2 The Time for Changing Majors is too Concentrated and Lasts too Long

The timing for changing majors mainly occurs at the beginning or end of the semester, and there is only one opportunity to change majors per year. If a student changes majors at the beginning of the semester, they must simultaneously study the knowledge of their original major and the assessment courses of the new major. If they change majors at the end of the semester, they also have to prepare for the final exams of their original major while studying for the assessments of the new major, which leads to significant pressure on the students. Whether changing majors at the beginning or the end of the semester, the cumbersome and lengthy process requires students to continue completing the courses of their original major until the assessment results are released. The decision to change majors requires careful consideration and time; lower-grade students can thoughtfully weigh their new goals or continue with their original major studies. However, for upper-grade students, the waiting period for changing majors incurs a substantial time cost, and the significant differences in knowledge between the two majors increase the learning burden. The pressure of studying

can prolong the adaptation period for students, and there may be cases where students find it difficult to adapt to the new major and end up regretting their decision.

The centralized scheduling for changing majors lacks flexibility and adaptability, reflecting a management-centered mindset. In the pursuit of efficient school management, it overlooks the importance of service in higher education management, thereby deviating from the goal of the major change system to meet students' individual needs.

3.3 The Inflexibility of the Assessment Method of Changing Majors

Some schools only use a single assessment method—either written exams or interviews. Each of these single methods has its own advantages and disadvantages. A system that relies solely on written exams fails to fully showcase students' characteristics; students who prepare in advance and study diligently can achieve good results. On the other hand, a system that relies only on interviews has a high degree of subjectivity, as the determination of a student's qualification depends entirely on the examiner. The differences in dialogue between students and examiners, as well as the uncertainty in the direction of the conversation, make it difficult to assess whether a student is suitable for a new major.

The system of assessment combines written exams and interviews, which balances subjectivity and objectivity. However, the exam content is fixed and singular, making it difficult for students to showcase their strengths. Ultimately, the selection of students still relies on grades and rankings, which is undoubtedly an extension of the college entrance examination system and does not help students understand whether they are suited for a new major.

3.4 The Lack of Autonomy of the Department

Each major in colleges and universities is built on the basis of different discipline logic, and the difference between disciplines determines that the talent training modes adopted by each major in different environments are inevitably very different. The basic information of students who change majors and the number of students admitted to each major are reviewed and formulated by the Academic Affairs Office and the College of Undergraduate Studies. If the department is only given the executive power of the work, the number of students admitted to some majors is too large or too small, resulting in unreasonable allocation of teaching resources.

3.5 Students' Blind Choice of Major

Students' dissatisfaction with and dislike of the current major determines their determination to change majors, but they have not been exposed to the new major, do not understand the training mode and curriculum system of the new major, but in the rush to blindly decide the new major. Without correct self-analysis and understanding, it is naturally impossible to clarify their own learning interests, and it is impossible to choose the best match with their own professional. Students lack guidance on learning and choosing a new major, and can't get better development on their own.

4. The Path Choice of the New Era of Colleges and Universities to Change Major System

Changing majors was originally designed to help students who had difficulty choosing a major for the college entrance examination and could choose a major that they were more interested in. However, due to the constraints of academic performance and the number of students, the school has become a competition among the best students, and the school has ignored the student-centered management concept. Schools should relax the conditions, take into account the interest center of students, cancel the restriction of grades, accept as many students as possible under the reasonable allocation of professional resources, speed up the review and assessment progress, so that students can leave the original major as soon as possible.

4.1 Give Students More Choices

Most of the time for students to apply for changing majors is very concentrated, the number of times to change majors is only once or twice, and the number of volunteers to change majors is limited, which greatly reduces the success rate of students to change majors. In fact, it often takes a lot of time for most students to make a prudent decision from their intention to change major to their maturity. Too early will lead to students making decisions without clear consideration, resulting in wrong choice of changing major. Choosing the time too late will make students waste too much time in the original major. The unlimited number of major transfer system of China Agricultural University allows students to carefully consider and give students sufficient time. The school also allows students to apply for two majors at the same time, greatly improving the success rate of students switching majors.

4.2 Rationally Balance the Power of Management Organizations

Each department should strengthen the freedom to decide on the transfer of major. The transfer system is the direct contact between each major and students, and the person in charge of the department should have the right to review and inspect the students and decide on admission. Management organizations at the school level, such as the Educational Affairs Office, should do a good job in the role of "middleman" in information transmission and delegate power to colleges at all levels, so as to better improve the quality of professional teaching, carry out professional adjustment and optimization, better consolidate the direction of disciplinary construction of the school, and ensure the dynamic balance among disciplines and specialties of the whole school. The allocation of resources and the composition of personnel of a major should be decided by each major, which requires the department to have a certain autonomy in reviewing and accepting students. The Academic Affairs Office only plays a pivotal role in information transmission and coordination of teaching management in the process of major transfer.

4.3 Establish a Mechanism for transferring Professional Services

4.3.1 Set up pre-emptive courses

University College London has set up a special bridging course for freshmen [7], also known as the advance course for entering the university. This kind of course is designed to enable students to better smooth the transition between secondary education knowledge and higher education knowledge, and it is a kind of course training that enables students to adapt to the learning mode of higher education in a short time. Reduce the probability of students changing majors in the future due to lack of understanding of the course and inability to adapt. Therefore, in order to enable students to quickly transition from secondary school to higher education, schools should attach importance to the setting of pre-curriculum and eliminate the boundary between the two stages.

Many universities in China adopt a demotion process for students who change majors, that is, let the students change majors to study with the lower grade to ensure the integrity of the knowledge system, but this practice delays the graduation time of students. Therefore, another advance course is proposed for students who change majors, that is, before the assessment of changing majors, students learn the course content of the new major. The school can set up some short course content to provide students, so that students can quickly understand the course system of the new major, so that students can better consider whether they need to change majors.

4.3.2 Strengthen professional guidance for students

Students lack of self-knowledge, vague cognition of interests and abilities, and can not consider the selection of majors, so it is particularly important to actively explore professional guidance for students. The tutorial system in the UK provides academic guidance and non-academic help to students, career development planning guidance to college students, heart-to-heart talks with students, and timely solutions to existing problems [8]. Domestic schools can use the tutorial system to allow students to have in-depth conversations with their tutors, provide more personalized guidance and suggestions for students, so that students are not blind or hasty in the choice of changing majors, and ensure the teaching quality and long-term development of schools.

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