

MODERN HIGHER EDUCATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES: UZBEKISTAN – CHINA NATIONAL MODELS COMPARISON

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Abstract: *This study compares higher education management strategies in Uzbekistan and China through the lens of New Public Management (NPM). Using qualitative analysis, it explores governance, quality assurance, and innovation in both systems. While China's reforms focus on global competitiveness, Uzbekistan emphasizes digitalization and international standards. Despite differences in scale and maturity, both aim to balance state control with institutional autonomy. The findings highlight the importance of context-specific, adaptive strategies for successful higher education reform.*

Key words: *Higher education management, New Public Management (NPM), governance, institutional autonomy, quality assurance, internationalization, digital transformation, education reform, Uzbekistan, China, comparative education*

Introduction

In the 21st century, the management of higher education institutions has become a critical concern for governments seeking to enhance national competitiveness, foster innovation, and adapt to the demands of a global knowledge economy. Countries around the world are reforming their higher education systems to ensure greater efficiency, quality, and responsiveness. Among them, Uzbekistan and China stand out as two nations that have undergone profound transformations in their higher education management strategies over the past few decades.

While China has made strategic investments to elevate its universities to global prominence through initiatives such as "Project 985" and the "Double First-Class" plan, Uzbekistan is embarking on its reform journey, particularly since 2017, with a strong emphasis on internationalization, digital transformation, and quality assurance. These shifts reflect broader global trends shaped by governance reforms, New Public Management (NPM) principles, and the need to balance institutional autonomy with state accountability.

This paper aims to provide a comparative analysis of modern higher education management strategies in Uzbekistan and China, with a particular focus on governance structures, policy frameworks, quality assurance systems, and digital innovation.



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By examining the similarities and differences in the two countries' approaches, the study seeks to uncover lessons that can inform ongoing reforms and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of higher education governance in transitional and rapidly developing contexts.

Gaps in Comparative Research. Despite the substantial reforms in both Uzbekistan and China, the literature lacks comparative analyses of their higher education management strategies. Most existing research is either country-specific or focused on isolated institutional reforms. This gap underscores the need for studies that explore similarities, differences, and transferable lessons between countries undergoing parallel transitions toward modern, globally integrated higher education systems.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative analysis to examine higher education management strategies in Uzbekistan and China. Using the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD), the research focuses on countries with shared features—centralized governance, reform-oriented education systems—but differing institutional maturity and scope (Ngok 2008). Data were collected from policy documents, academic literature (Hood 1991; Bleiklie 2013), and international reports (World Bank 2014; UNESCO 2009). The analysis is structured around three dimensions: Governance & Autonomy, Quality Assurance & Accreditation, Innovation & Internationalization. This framework allows for a contextual and policy-oriented comparison of national strategies shaped by New Public Management (NPM) principles.

Literature Review

Introduction to Modern Higher Education Management. The governance of higher education has undergone considerable change in recent decades, influenced by global competition, the rise of knowledge economies, and an increasing emphasis on accountability and efficiency. Modern universities are no longer merely academic institutions; they are also expected to function as strategic organizations that respond to both market demands and public expectations (Hood 1991; Ferlie, Musselin, and Andresani 2008).

Theoretical Frameworks: New Public Management (NPM), Governance, and Autonomy. A key theoretical framework informing contemporary reforms is New Public Management (NPM), which emerged in the 1980s as a set of practices aimed at enhancing public sector efficiency by borrowing tools from the private sector (Christensen and Lægreid 2011). NPM emphasizes performance measurement, competition, decentralization, and customer service orientation—principles increasingly adopted by universities worldwide.

While NPM has promoted better resource allocation and transparency, it has also drawn criticism for fostering commercialization, reducing academic freedom, and privileging short-term, quantifiable outcomes over long-term intellectual development (Bleiklie 2013). In response, post-NPM models now emphasize hybrid governance structures, student-centered approaches, and renewed focus on sustainability and social responsibility (World Bank 2014).

Another vital concept is the balance between governance and autonomy. Effective higher education governance structures promote transparency,

accountability, and stakeholder participation, while institutional autonomy enables innovation, flexibility, and responsiveness to change (Ngok 2008).

Quality Assurance and Accreditation. Quality assurance (QA) and accreditation have become central tools for managing higher education systems globally. These mechanisms serve to evaluate the effectiveness of institutions and programs, ensuring compliance with national and international standards (UNESCO 2009). QA processes include both internal evaluations and external reviews that target continuous improvement in teaching, research, infrastructure, and graduate employability.

In Uzbekistan, the establishment of the State Inspectorate for Quality Control in Education reflects a commitment to improving educational outcomes and aligning with international benchmarks. In China, institutions are assessed through ranking systems and performance metrics tied to funding under initiatives like the "Double First-Class" plan (World Bank 2014).

Higher Education Reforms in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan has undertaken extensive reforms since gaining independence in 1991, especially accelerating since 2017. These include adoption of the Bologna Process, implementation of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), and support for internationalization through joint degree programs and foreign university branches (Zhao 2021).

Digital transformation has been a key theme, as evidenced by initiatives under the "Digital Uzbekistan-2030" strategy, which promotes the use of online platforms, smart campuses, and digital student services (Decree of the President of Uzbekistan 2020). However, challenges remain, including faculty shortages, outdated infrastructure, and funding limitations.

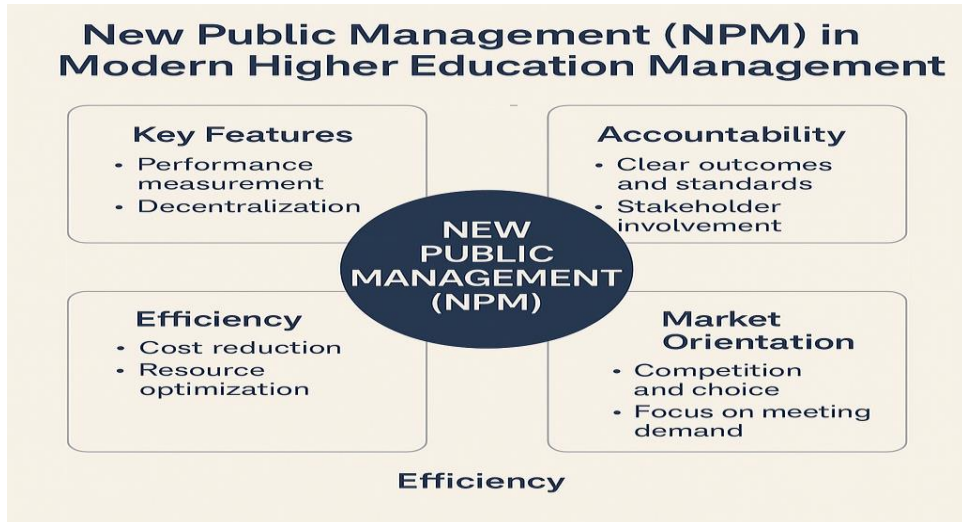
Higher Education Reforms in China. China's reforms have been more ambitious in scope, aiming to create globally competitive universities. Programs like Project 985, Project 211, and the Double First-Class Initiative channel government investment into elite institutions with the goal of boosting research capacity and global rankings (Ngok 2008).

China has also prioritized internationalization, supporting joint ventures like NYU Shanghai and Duke Kunshan University. In addition, digital learning platforms such as XuetangX and iCourse have positioned China as a leader in educational technology. Despite these advances, concerns persist regarding regional inequality, academic pressure, and political oversight in university governance (World Bank 2014; UNESCO 2009).

New Public Management (NPM) in Modern Higher Education Management

New Public Management (NPM) is a management philosophy used by governments since the 1980s to modernize the public sector. It focuses on making public organizations operate more like private businesses emphasizing efficiency, accountability, competition, and performance measurement. This approach emphasizes efficiency, accountability, and performance-based outcomes in public institutions, including universities. NPM has influenced higher education systems worldwide, encouraging the adoption of corporate-style management practices, such as strategic planning, performance indicators, and competitive funding mechanisms.

Application of NPM in Modern Higher Education Management. In recent decades, many universities and higher education institutions (HEIs) have adopted NPM principles in response to reduced government funding, globalization, and increased demand for accountability.



Key Features of NPM in Higher Education:

NPM Principle	Application in Higher Education
Performance Measurement	Use of KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) like research output, graduate employment rates, student satisfaction surveys.
Managerialism	Appointment of professional managers rather than academics for leadership roles.
Market Orientation	Universities compete for students, research grants, and partnerships like businesses.
Accountability & Transparency	Increased reporting to stakeholders, governments, and accrediting bodies.
Decentralization	Faculties and departments given autonomy in budgeting and management.
Customer Orientation	Students seen as "clients" with expectations for quality service.

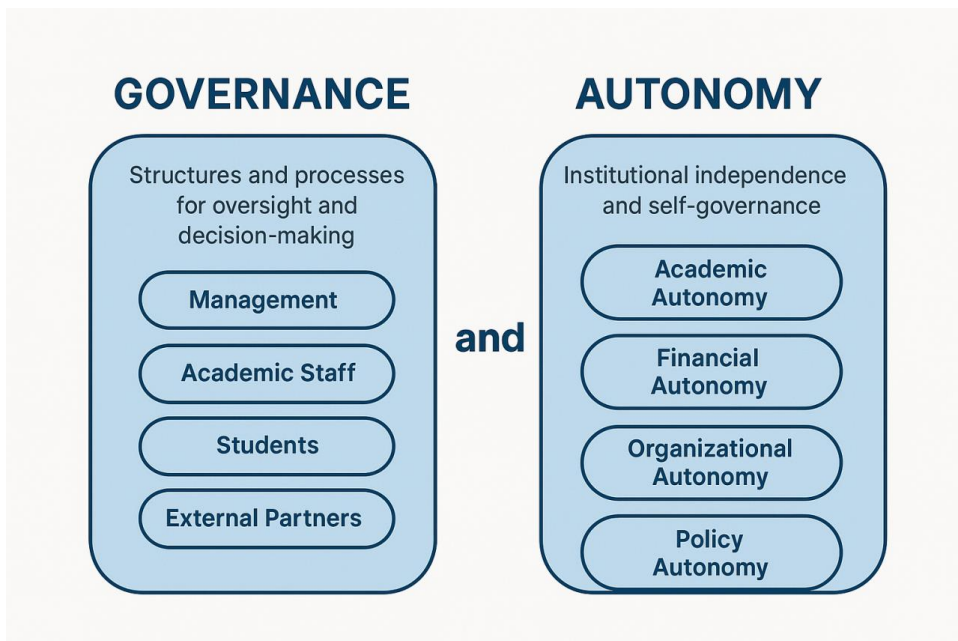
Impacts of NPM on Higher Education

Positive Impacts: Improved efficiency in resource management, Increased accountability and transparency, Focus on measurable results (research, employability), Better responsiveness to students' needs, Decentralization of decision-making, Enhanced competition and innovation.

Negative Impacts: Commercialization of education, Reduced academic freedom and autonomy, Pressure on staff to meet performance targets, Inequality between profitable and non-profitable disciplines, Work intensification and stress among academic staff, Focus on short-term outcomes over long-term educational goals.

Governance and Autonomy in higher education management

The balance between institutional autonomy and state control is a central theme in higher education management. While autonomy allows universities to innovate and respond to market demands, state oversight ensures alignment with national priorities and accountability.



Aspect Governance Autonomy

Definition Structures, rules, and processes for managing and controlling higher education institutions The right of institutions to make independent decisions in academic, financial, and organizational matters

Focus Accountability, transparency, stakeholder participation Freedom, flexibility, innovation, institutional independence

Key Elements Government regulations, governing boards, leadership structure, reporting requirements Academic freedom, financial control, self-management, policy-making rights

Main Stakeholders Government, university management, academic staff, students, external bodies University leadership, academic departments, staff and faculty

Benefits Ensures accountability, fairness, and public trust Encourages innovation, faster decision-making, quality improvement

Challenges Bureaucracy, possible government over-control Risk of mismanagement, inequality, lack of oversight

Quality Assurance and Accreditation in higher education management

Element	Quality Assurance (QA)	Accreditation
Definition	Ongoing internal and external evaluation processes to improve quality	Official recognition by an external body that an institution meets required standards
Focus	Continuous improvement of processes and outcomes	Compliance with minimum quality standards
Who Conducts It?	Internal QA units + External review teams	National or international accreditation agencies
Scope	Institutional performance, teaching, research, services	Institution as a whole or specific academic programs
Outcome	Recommendations for improvement	Accredited status (valid for a certain period)
Benefits	Enhances quality culture, stakeholder confidence, institutional growth	Legitimacy, global recognition, student and employer trust

Higher Education Reforms and Management Strategies in Uzbekistan

Since gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has undertaken significant reforms to modernize its higher education system. The literature highlights several key developments:

Structural Reforms: The government has restructured the higher education system to align with international standards, including the adoption of the Bologna Process principles, such as the three-cycle degree system (bachelor's, master's, and PhD) and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

Quality Assurance Mechanisms: Uzbekistan has established national accreditation agencies and quality assurance frameworks to ensure the relevance and quality of higher education programs. These efforts aim to enhance institutional accountability and improve graduate employability.

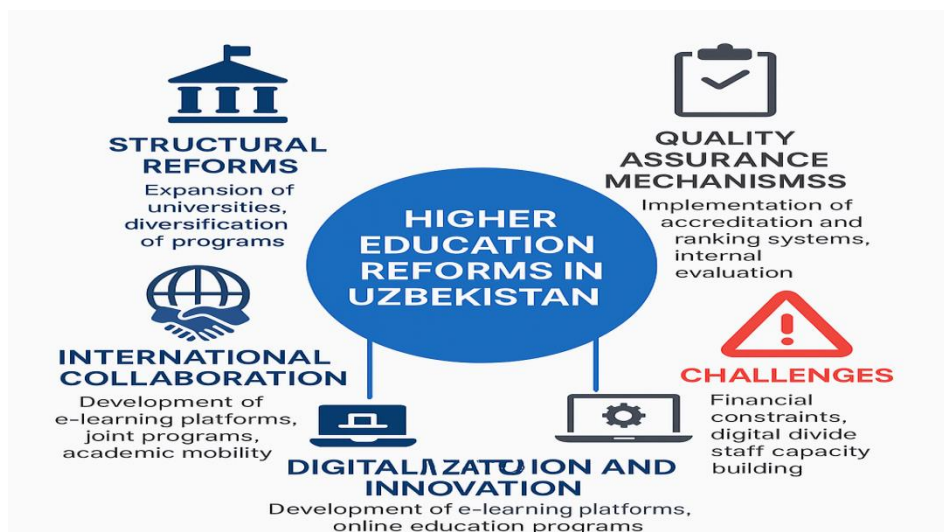
International Collaboration: The government has actively promoted partnerships with foreign universities and international organizations to facilitate knowledge transfer, faculty development, and student exchange programs. Initiatives such as the "Erasmus+" program have played a significant role in this regard.

Digitalization and Innovation: Recent reforms have emphasized the integration of digital technologies into higher education, including the development of e-

learning platforms, online courses, and digital libraries. These efforts aim to improve access to education and enhance the learning experience.

Challenges: Despite these advancements, Uzbekistan faces several challenges, including limited funding, outdated infrastructure, and a lack of qualified faculty. Additionally, the transition from a centralized Soviet-style system to a more autonomous and market-oriented model has been complex and uneven .

In recent years, Uzbekistan has implemented extensive reforms in the higher education sector to modernize its system, improve quality, and align with international standards. The key focus is to create a more flexible, innovative, and globally competitive education system.



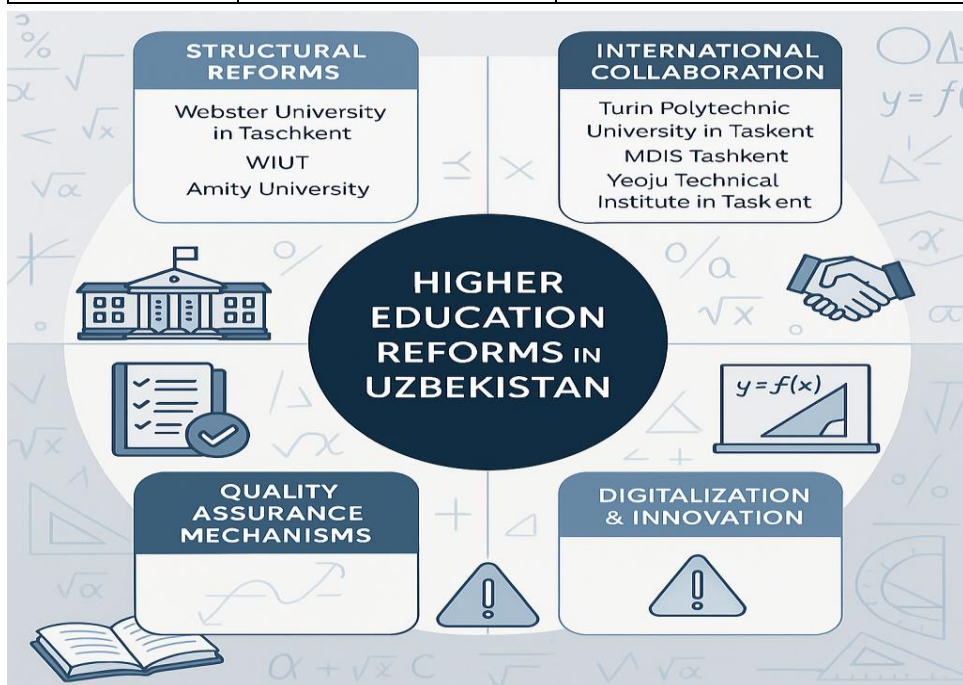
Higher Education Reforms and Management Strategies in Uzbekistan with Examples

Uzbekistan's higher education sector has been rapidly transforming since 2017 under the government's strategic reforms. These reforms aim to modernize education, integrate international standards, and increase access to higher education.

Key Areas of Reforms with Examples

Reform Area	Strategies Implemented	Examples from Uzbekistan
Structural Reforms	Expanding number of universities, creating international branches, private HEIs	Webster University in Tashkent, Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT), Turin Polytechnic University in Tashkent, Amity University in Tashkent

Reform Area	Strategies Implemented	Examples from Uzbekistan
Quality Assurance Mechanisms	Accreditation systems, internal and external evaluation, ranking systems	State Inspectorate for Quality Control in Education established, introduction of QS Ranking participation by HEIs
International Collaboration	Joint programs, academic mobility, research partnerships	MDIS Tashkent, Yeoju Technical Institute in Tashkent, joint degrees with Russian, European, and Korean universities
Digitalization & Innovation	E-learning platforms, smart campus, digital student services	National Online Education Platform, Learning Management Systems (LMS) in Tashkent State University of Economics and other leading universities
Challenges	Financial limitations, staff training, balancing access with quality	Efforts by Ministry of Higher Education to train faculty abroad and support digital infrastructure in regional HEIs



Higher Education Reforms and Management Strategies in China

China's higher education system has undergone rapid transformation over the past few decades, driven by the government's ambition to create world-class universities and enhance global competitiveness. Key developments include:

Massification and Expansion: Since the late 1990s, China has significantly expanded access to higher education, increasing enrollment rates and establishing new universities. This massification has been accompanied by efforts to improve quality and diversity.

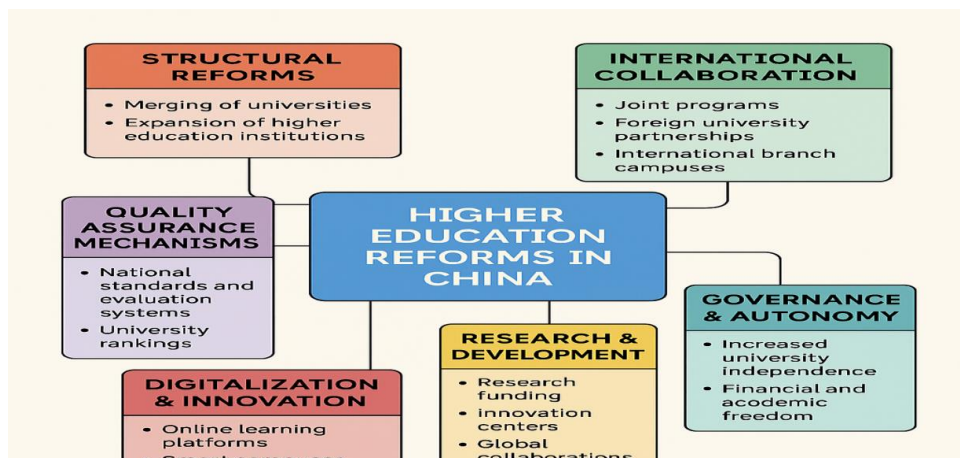
"Double First-Class" Initiative: Launched in 2015, this initiative aims to develop world-class universities and disciplines by providing targeted funding and support to selected institutions. The program reflects China's commitment to enhancing research output and global rankings.

Internationalization: China has actively promoted international collaboration through initiatives such as the "Belt and Road" Educational Action Plan, which fosters partnerships with universities in participating countries. Additionally, the establishment of branch campuses and joint degree programs has enhanced China's global presence in higher education ..

Governance and Autonomy: Reforms in governance have sought to balance state control with institutional autonomy, allowing universities greater flexibility in decision-making while ensuring alignment with national priorities.

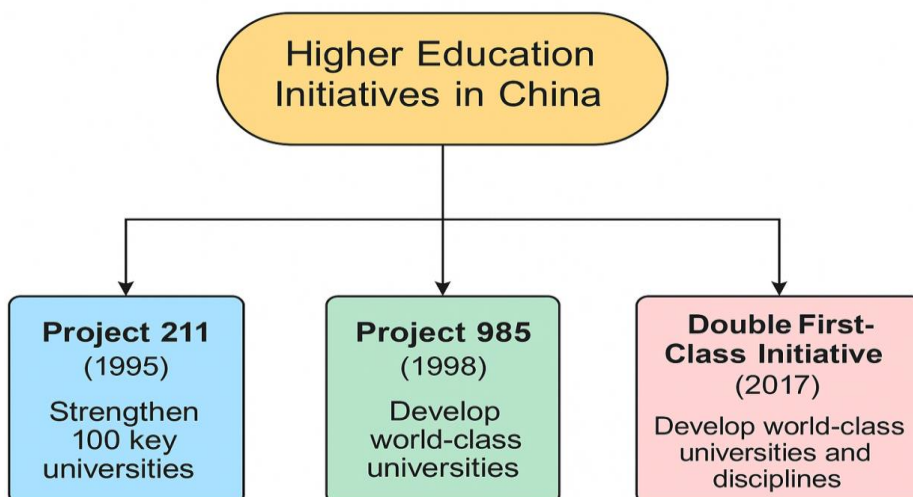
Innovation and Technology: China has invested heavily in research and development, with a focus on emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and renewable energy. Universities play a central role in driving innovation and supporting economic growth.

Challenges: Despite its achievements, China's higher education system faces challenges such as regional disparities, academic integrity issues, and the need to balance quantity with quality. Additionally, the emphasis on global rankings has raised concerns about the commodification of education.



Key Reform Areas and Strategies in China

Reform Area	Strategies Implemented	Examples from China
Structural Reforms	Merging universities, upgrading technical colleges, expanding HEIs	Project 211 and Project 985 to develop elite universities
Quality Assurance Mechanisms	National standards, evaluation systems, rankings	Double First-Class Initiative for top universities
International Collaboration	Joint programs, foreign partnerships, international campuses	Branch campuses like NYU Shanghai, Duke Kunshan University
Digitalization & Innovation	Smart campuses, online learning platforms, AI in education	MOOC platforms (iCourse, XuetangX), Smart Classroom projects
Governance & Autonomy	Granting HEIs financial and academic freedom within state frameworks	Reforms giving top universities more decision-making powers
Research & Development	Increasing research funding, innovation centers, global collaborations	National Innovation Demonstration Zones, R&D hubs



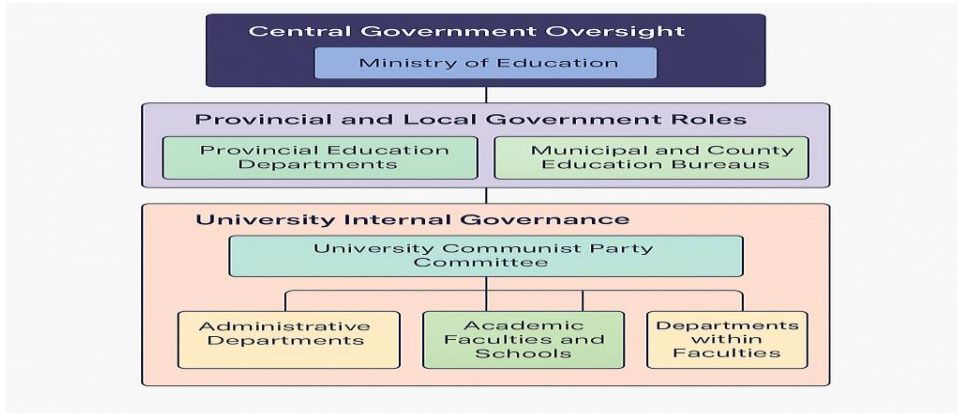
Examples of Famous Higher Education Initiatives in China

Project 211	Aim: To strengthen approximately 100 higher education institutions Focus: Improving research standards and institutional capacity
Project 985	Aim: To develop world-class universities Focus: Elite universities and innovation
Double First Class Initiative	Aim: To cultivate world-class universities and disciplines Focus: Comprehensive university excellence
Double Hundred Plan	Aim: To advance collaboration between Chinese and foreign universities Focus: International partnerships

Comparison of the university management structures in China and Uzbekistan

The structure of university management in China

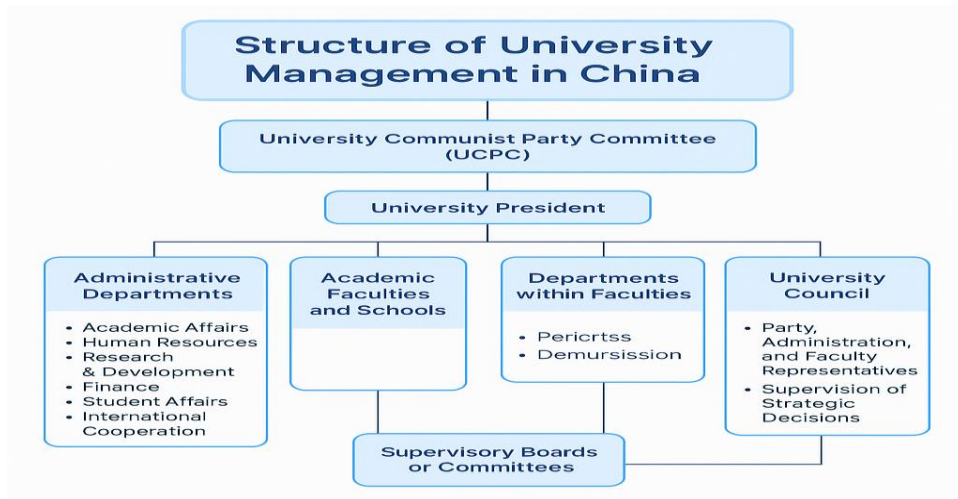
The structure of university management in China is highly centralized and hierarchical, reflecting the country's broader governance model. It combines state control with institutional autonomy, allowing universities to operate within a framework set by the government. Below is an overview of the structure of university management in China, including key components and their roles:



University management

University Governance Structure

Chinese universities have a dual leadership system, combining administrative and party leadership. This structure ensures that universities align with national policies and ideological goals.



University Party Committee

Role: The Party Committee is the highest decision-making body in a university. It ensures that the university adheres to the ideological and political directives of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Key Functions: Overseeing political education and ideological training for students and staff. Approving major decisions related to university development, budgets, and appointments. Ensuring compliance with national policies and regulations.

University President and Administrative Leadership

University President: The president is the chief executive officer, responsible for the day-to-day management of the university. The president is typically appointed by the government and works closely with the Party Committee.

Vice Presidents: Assist the president in managing specific areas such as academics, research, student affairs, and international relations.

Administrative Departments: Include offices for academic affairs, research, student services, finance, and human resources.

Academic Committees

Role: Responsible for academic matters, including curriculum development, research priorities, and faculty appointments.

Composition: Composed of senior faculty members and academic leaders.
Functions: Approving new academic programs and research initiatives. Ensuring academic quality and integrity.

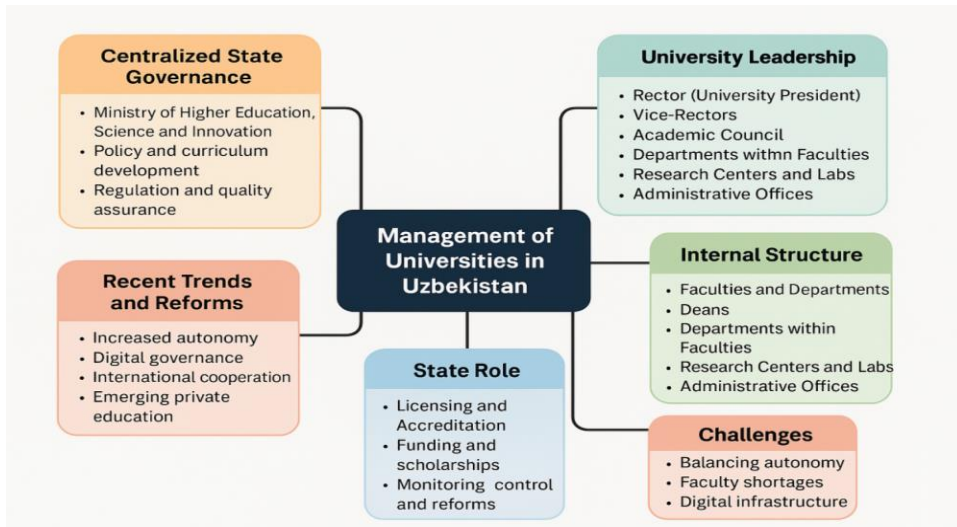
Faculty and Departmental Structure

Colleges and Schools: Universities are divided into colleges or schools (e.g., College of Engineering, School of Medicine). Each college is headed by a dean, who reports to the university president.

Departments: Colleges are further divided into departments, each focusing on a specific discipline. Department heads manage faculty, curriculum, and research within their departments.

Management universities in Uzbekistan

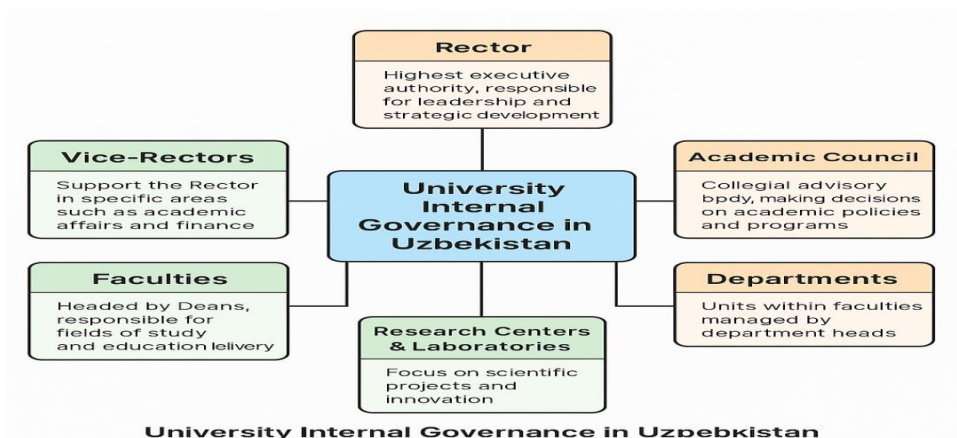
Management universities in Uzbekistan generally adopt a hierarchical and functionally divided structure that aligns with both national educational regulations and international academic standards. While specifics may vary between institutions, the typical organizational framework includes the following key components:



University management

University Governance Structure

Uzbek universities have a hierarchical management structure, with a combination of administrative and academic leadership. The governance model emphasizes transparency, accountability, and alignment with national goals.



University Internal Governance in Uzbekistan

A comparative analysis of the structure of university management in China and Uzbekistan

Below is a comparative analysis of the structure of university management in China and Uzbekistan presented in a table format for clarity and ease of reference:

Aspect	China	Uzbekistan	Comparison
Central Oversight	Ministry of Education (MOE) sets national policies, standards, and funding.	Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation oversees policies and reforms.	Both have centralized oversight, but China's MOE has a broader mandate.
Regional/Local Roles	Provincial and local education departments implement policies and manage regional universities.	Regional education authorities support local universities and ensure compliance with standards.	Both systems involve regional implementation, but Uzbekistan's regions have less autonomy.
University Leadership	Dual leadership: University Party Committee (ideological) and President (administrative).	Rector (President) as chief executive, supported by vice-rectors and academic councils.	China has a dual leadership system, while Uzbekistan has a single executive leadership model.
Academic Governance	Academic Committees oversee curriculum, research, and faculty appointments.	Academic Council approves academic programs, research priorities, and faculty promotions.	Both have academic bodies, but China's system is more integrated with party oversight.
Faculty/Department Structure	Colleges and schools	Faculties headed by	Similar hierarchical

Aspect	China	Uzbekistan	Comparison
	headed by deans; departments focus on specific disciplines.	deans; departments manage specific disciplines.	structure, but China's system is more centralized.
Quality Assurance	National standards for accreditation, evaluations, and inspections.	Internal quality assurance units and external accreditation agencies ensure standards.	Both have quality assurance mechanisms, but Uzbekistan emphasizes international alignment.
Internationalization	Encourages partnerships with foreign institutions, student/faculty mobility, and joint programs.	Actively promotes international collaboration, student exchanges, and joint degree programs.	Both prioritize internationalization, but Uzbekistan's efforts are more recent and focused.
Funding and Resources	Funded by government budgets, private investments, and international partnerships.	Similar funding mechanisms, with emphasis on international grants and scholarships.	Both rely on mixed funding, but Uzbekistan places greater emphasis on international support.
Innovation and Research	Strong focus on research and innovation, particularly in strategic areas (e.g., AI, biotech).	Increasing emphasis on research and innovation, aligned with national development goals.	China's research infrastructure is more advanced, while Uzbekistan is in the early stages.

Aspect	China	Uzbekistan	Comparison
Digital Transformation	Advanced integration of e-learning platforms, AI, and big data in education.	Recent reforms emphasize digital transformation, including online learning platforms.	China's digital transformation is more mature, while Uzbekistan is catching up.
Challenges	Regional disparities, academic pressure, faculty shortages.	Limited funding, outdated infrastructure, faculty shortages.	Both face similar challenges, but China's reforms are more advanced due to its larger economy.
Recent Reforms	"Double First-Class" Initiative, digital transformation, vocational education.	Adoption of the Bologna Process, digitalization, and vocational education reforms.	Both are reforming to improve quality and global competitiveness, but China's reforms are broader.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of higher education management strategies in Uzbekistan and China reveals both convergence and divergence in their approaches to modernization, governance, and reform. While both countries operate within centralized political systems and have undertaken ambitious reforms to improve the quality and global standing of their higher education sectors, the scope, maturity, and implementation of strategies differ significantly.

China's higher education reforms, driven by initiatives such as Project 985, Project 211, and the Double First-Class Initiative, reflect a long-term, state-led vision focused on creating world-class universities and research ecosystems. The country has successfully expanded access to higher education while enhancing research productivity, international collaboration, and digital infrastructure. Governance in China features a dual leadership model, balancing administrative functions with ideological oversight from the Communist Party, which ensures alignment with national priorities (Ngok 2008; World Bank 2014).

In contrast, Uzbekistan's reform process is more recent and characterized by rapid policy shifts aimed at aligning with international standards. Since 2017, Uzbekistan has made considerable progress in adopting the Bologna Process, improving quality assurance mechanisms, and encouraging foreign partnerships through the establishment of international branch campuses. The introduction of the Digital Uzbekistan–2030 strategy further emphasizes the nation's commitment to digital transformation and global integration (Decree of the President of Uzbekistan 2020; Zhao 2021).

Despite these efforts, both countries face ongoing challenges. China must contend with academic pressure, regional disparities, and the tension between global competitiveness and political control. Uzbekistan continues to address foundational issues such as limited faculty capacity, outdated infrastructure, and the complexity of transitioning from a Soviet-style education model to one grounded in autonomy and innovation.

This study contributes to the growing body of comparative education literature by offering a context-sensitive framework to evaluate higher education reforms across different political and economic systems. It underscores the importance of tailoring reform strategies to national contexts, while also learning from global best practices in governance, quality assurance, and institutional autonomy.

Ultimately, the experience of China offers valuable lessons for Uzbekistan in terms of long-term planning, investment in research capacity, and policy coherence. Meanwhile, Uzbekistan's recent strides in internationalization and digitalization show promise for its continued development as a competitive higher education hub in Central Asia. Future research could benefit from empirical data gathered through stakeholder interviews, institutional case studies, and longitudinal analysis to further assess the effectiveness of these reforms.

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