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REVIEW OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

The author: Zhiyin Guo

The subject:

Youth Policy in the Digital Era: From Policy Frameworks to Practice in Chinese Higher Education

The doctoral dissertation was prepared under the academic supervision of **Professor Arkadiusz Modrzejewski, University of Gdansk**. This review has been prepared pursuant to the Resolution of the Council of the Discipline of Political Science and Public Administration of the University of Gdańsk of 15 June 2026.

Subject of the review



The doctoral dissertation submitted for evaluation addresses the implementation of youth policy in the People's Republic of China under the conditions of the digital transformation of public administration. The author seeks to explain the mechanisms underlying the implementation of youth policy by analysing the relationships between institutional arrangements, governance structures at the university level, and the behaviour of students as the recipients of public policy. The dissertation is theoretically grounded in new institutionalism, while its empirical component is based on a case study of Zhengzhou University of Aeronautics and a questionnaire survey conducted among 757 students.

The subject of the dissertation is both timely and highly relevant from theoretical and practical perspectives. The rapid development of digital instruments of public governance has made it necessary to reassess classical models of public policy implementation. Of particular interest is the author's focus on youth policy, an area that has traditionally been analysed primarily from the perspective of policy design, whereas considerably less attention has been devoted to examining the actual mechanisms of policy implementation within higher education institutions.

Assessment of the the research topic

At the outset, it should be stated that the dissertation clearly falls within the academic discipline of political science and public administration.

The choice of the research topic is appropriate and well justified. The author proceeds from the assumption that contemporary youth policy cannot be analysed solely through the prism of legal regulations or governmental programmes. Rather,



equal importance should be attached to the manner in which these policies are implemented and to the responses of their intended beneficiaries. In this respect, the dissertation addresses a research problem that has received relatively limited attention in the existing literature by integrating an institutional perspective with the analysis of social behaviour.

The author convincingly identifies a research gap, arguing that previous studies have concentrated predominantly on the macro level while largely overlooking students' own experiences and the processes through which youth policy is implemented in the everyday functioning of higher education institutions.

Particular recognition should be given to the interdisciplinary nature of the dissertation, which combines perspectives from public policy studies, public administration, public management, and digital communication research.

Research objectives and methodology

The author formulates the principal objective of the dissertation in a clear and logically coherent manner. The primary aim is to explain the mechanisms of youth policy implementation by analysing the interactions between institutional arrangements and the behaviour of students operating within a digitally mediated communication environment. This objective is further developed through five research questions addressing the global, national, institutional, and individual levels of analysis. The research questions are methodologically sound and correspond well to the overall structure of the dissertation.



The research methodology constitutes one of the strongest aspects of the study. The author adopts new institutionalism as the principal theoretical framework, complemented by institutional analysis, legal analysis, a case study approach, and questionnaire-based survey research. Particularly commendable is the attempt to combine classical institutional analysis with an examination of the actual behaviour of public policy recipients. This approach successfully avoids one of the common limitations of public administration research, namely restricting the analysis exclusively to formal organisational structures.

At the same time, certain reservations may be expressed regarding the reliance on a single case study. Although the author provides a detailed justification for selecting Zhengzhou University of Aeronautics, insufficient attention is devoted to the issue of the institution's representativeness within the broader Chinese higher education system. While the use of a single case study does not diminish the scientific value of the research, it would have benefited from a more comprehensive methodological reflection on the limits of generalising the findings.

Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography. Its structure has been designed in a thoughtful and coherent manner, constituting a logical consequence of the adopted research problem as well as the formulated research questions and hypotheses.

It should, however, be noted that the adopted structure is characterised by a high degree of detail and multi-level organisation. Although the extensive division



into numerous subsections demonstrates considerable care in organising the material, it occasionally reduces the clarity of the argument and makes it more difficult to identify the main lines of analysis.

The theoretical part of the dissertation demonstrates the author's very good academic preparation. Particular attention should be paid to the comprehensive discussion of new institutionalism, encompassing its historical, sociological, and rational choice variants. The author accurately reconstructs the principal assumptions of each strand and convincingly demonstrates their relevance for research on youth policy. She appropriately justifies the selection of new institutionalism as the principal analytical framework by treating institutions as structural conditions and students' behaviour as the mediating mechanism linking policy design with policy implementation.

Introduction

The introduction is well structured and logically organised.

However, it should be noted that it is somewhat overly extensive. A substantial portion takes the form of a literature review, thereby blurring the distinction between the introduction and the theoretical chapter. Although the literature review is well organised, it is predominantly descriptive in nature. Greater emphasis should have been placed on a critical evaluation of the existing body of research and on providing a clearer justification for the identified research gap. A more concise presentation of the state of the art would have highlighted the research problem more effectively and made the author's original contribution more explicit.



The methodological section also requires some clarification, particularly with regard to the relationship between the research methods employed and the research questions and hypotheses, which remain relatively general. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that the overall research objective, research questions, hypotheses, and research problem are formulated correctly and are fully appropriate to the subject of the study.

Despite these observations, the introduction demonstrates the author's sound preparation for conducting scholarly research. She accurately identifies the research problem and proposes an interesting analytical framework that combines the perspective of new institutionalism with an examination of students' experiences.

In my opinion, the introduction would benefit from a more concise descriptive section, a deeper critical discussion of the literature, and a more precise presentation of the methodological assumptions. Such revisions would better highlight the originality of the research and strengthen the overall coherence of the dissertation.

Chapter One

The first chapter provides a valuable theoretical introduction to the issue of youth policy in the digital era. It is distinguished by a broad literature base encompassing publications and policy documents produced by international organisations, as well as by the author's successful attempt to frame the discussion within the perspective of new institutionalism. The author demonstrates a solid



command of the international scholarly literature and establishes a sound conceptual foundation for the subsequent chapters.

At the same time, the chapter is largely review-oriented. It is dominated by the presentation of definitions and theoretical concepts drawn from the literature, while critical analysis and the author's own scholarly contribution remain relatively limited. Furthermore, the theoretical discussion is not sufficiently connected to the research methodology, research questions, or the empirical analysis. The section devoted to the biological and psychological aspects of youth development appears disproportionately extensive in relation to the dissertation's principal research problem.

From an editorial perspective, the chapter would benefit from greater conciseness, the elimination of repetitive passages, and a stronger focus on scholarly argumentation. Notwithstanding these comments, it constitutes a valuable theoretical foundation for the dissertation, the significance of which would be enhanced by a closer integration of theoretical concepts with the subsequent empirical analysis.

Chapters on the evolution of Chinese youth policy

The chapters devoted to the evolution of youth policy in China are of a high academic standard and are based on a rich body of source material. Their principal strengths lie in their clear chronological organisation and the consistent application of the perspective of new institutionalism. The author effectively presents the



transition from ideologically driven mobilisation to a more complex system of youth governance.

Their principal limitation, however, is the predominance of description over analysis. In many instances, the author focuses primarily on presenting reforms, official documents, and policy programmes, while devoting comparatively less attention to analysing the mechanisms underlying their development, their consequences, and their limitations. The theoretical framework of new institutionalism could have been employed more systematically through explicit references to concepts such as *path dependence*, *institutional layering*, and *critical junctures*.

It would also have been beneficial to incorporate a broader range of international literature and to adopt a more critical approach towards official sources and statistical data. Reducing the amount of detailed numerical information and placing greater emphasis on its interpretation would have improved both the clarity and the analytical value of these chapters.

Assessment of the chapters on Zhengzhou University of Aeronautics and Students' Experiences

The chapters devoted to the organisational structure of Zhengzhou University of Aeronautics and to students' experiences constitute an interesting extension of the dissertation's central research problem. A particular strength is the application of the new institutionalist perspective together with the use of the three institutional dimensions—regulative, normative, and cognitive. The author convincingly



demonstrates the significance of digital communication platforms, social norms, and cognitive processes in shaping the implementation of youth policy.

The empirical part represents the dissertation's most significant scholarly contribution. The author presents the results of research on digital communication between the university administration and students, examining the processes of information reception, selective attention, adaptive behaviour, and the role of informal communication networks.

The appendix constitutes a valuable supplement to the dissertation and meets the fundamental standards for presenting quantitative research in political science. Its strengths include a clear structure comprising a description of the research design, characteristics of the sample, operationalisation of variables, applied analytical methods, and the complete survey questionnaire. The author presents the statistical procedures in a systematic manner, including factor analysis, reliability assessment of measurement scales, path analysis, and hierarchical regression.

The methodological transparency and objective presentation of the findings deserve particular recognition. The appendix effectively supports the empirical analysis presented in Chapter Four and demonstrates the correct application of quantitative research methods.

Nevertheless, several aspects require further elaboration. The most important concerns the need for a clearer justification of the relationship between the questionnaire and the dissertation's central research problem, namely the implementation of youth policy in higher education. The author should explain in



greater detail why the selected variables concerning digital communication, information processing, and students' behaviour constitute meaningful indicators of policy implementation processes.

It would also be advisable to expand the description of the sources of the measurement scales, explain the procedures used for their adaptation, and include several standard model fit indices (e.g., CFI, TLI, and RMSEA). Furthermore, the sampling procedure and the limitations regarding the generalisability of the findings should be discussed in greater detail.

Overall, the appendix demonstrates a high methodological standard and provides a solid foundation for the empirical part of the dissertation.

The doctoral research leads to several important findings. First, it demonstrates that the development of digital platforms has enhanced the administrative capacity to manage youth policy while simultaneously contributing to information overload among students. Second, the author shows that the effectiveness of policy implementation depends not only on the transmission of information but, above all, on how that information is interpreted by its recipients. Third, she highlights the importance of peer networks as informal communication channels that co-shape the implementation process. Finally, the study reveals a discrepancy between the formal fulfilment of administrative requirements and students' actual engagement with youth policy.

Particular recognition should be given to the interpretation of the empirical findings. The author does not merely present the data but also seeks to explain the



mechanisms underlying the observed phenomena. Consequently, the empirical part of the dissertation possesses a distinctly explanatory rather than merely descriptive character.

Source Base

The dissertation is supported by a very extensive body of sources, comprising nearly 40 pages, which attests to the thoroughness of the literature search conducted by the author.

The breadth of the references also demonstrates the author's comprehensive familiarity with the scholarly literature relevant to the research topic. The dissertation draws exclusively upon sources published in English and Chinese. The bibliography includes both classical works on institutional theory and numerous publications concerning digital governance, youth policy, and higher education research. Particularly noteworthy is the extensive use of Chinese-language literature, which remains largely inaccessible to most European scholars.

The author's substantial contribution in identifying and assembling the source materials necessary for the analysis deserves particular recognition. This reflects the doctoral candidate's ability to select appropriate scholarly sources and demonstrates her excellent command of the subject matter.

Formal Assessment

The dissertation has been prepared with considerable care. Its structure is logical, the scholarly apparatus has been employed correctly, the references and



footnotes comply with accepted academic standards, and the bibliography is both extensive and up to date. The language of the dissertation is precise and consistent with the standards expected of doctoral research, although some repetitive passages could have been eliminated and certain sections of the literature review condensed.

Critical Remarks

Despite the overall positive evaluation of the dissertation, several issues merit critical discussion.

The most significant concerns the limited scope for generalising the findings. The empirical research was conducted at a single university operating within a specific organisational context. The author devotes relatively little attention to discussing the limitations arising from this sampling strategy.

A second issue relates to the insufficient exploitation of the potential of the quantitative data collected. Although the survey included 757 respondents, the statistical analysis remains relatively straightforward. The application of more advanced analytical techniques could have provided additional support for the dissertation's arguments.

The third observation concerns the relationship between the theoretical framework and the empirical findings. In several places, the theoretical discussion appears to function alongside the empirical analysis rather than serving as a direct interpretative framework for the research results. A more systematic integration of the concepts of new institutionalism into the analysis of the empirical material would have enhanced the overall coherence of the dissertation.



Furthermore, the comparative perspective could have been developed more extensively. The findings obtained could provide an interesting point of reference for studies conducted in other countries employing digital instruments of public governance.

Another point concerns the conclusion. Although it formally addresses all the research questions and hypotheses, it is more summarising than synthesising in nature. Rather than presenting an integrated analytical model illustrating the relationships between the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels of analysis, it largely reiterates the contents of the preceding chapters.

Finally, the dissertation would have benefited from a more critical reflection on the limitations of the adopted theoretical framework. While the author consistently employs new institutionalism throughout the study, she pays little attention to alternative theoretical approaches or to identifying those aspects of the analysed phenomena that remain insufficiently explained by this perspective.

Conclusion

The above remarks are intended as constructive observations and in no way diminish the high scholarly value of the dissertation. The study demonstrates methodological maturity, a sound command of academic research methods, and makes an original contribution to research on the implementation of youth policy in the context of the digital transformation of public administration.

The doctoral dissertation constitutes a valuable contribution to the discipline of Political Science and Public Administration. It addresses a timely and significant



issue concerning the implementation of youth policy in China under conditions of digital transformation, successfully combining an institutional perspective with an analysis of students' experiences as the recipients of public policy.

Among its principal strengths are the well-chosen research topic, clearly formulated research objective, appropriate methodology grounded in new institutionalism, and a rich source base comprising both English- and Chinese-language scholarship. The empirical part of the dissertation deserves particularly high recognition, being based on a case study of Zhengzhou University of Aeronautics and a questionnaire survey conducted among 757 students. Rather than merely presenting empirical findings, the author seeks to explain the mechanisms underlying youth policy implementation by highlighting the importance of digital communication, students' interpretation of information, and informal communication networks.

The dissertation's well-designed structure, sound academic methodology, and the high methodological standard of both the empirical research and the appendix also deserve recognition. The study makes an original contribution to research on youth policy and public governance in the digital era.

The author demonstrated her ability to conduct independent scholarly research.

Final Recommendation

In my opinion, the dissertation fulfils the requirements for doctoral dissertations set forth in Article 187 of the Act of 20 July 2018 – Law on Higher



Education and Science. It constitutes an original solution to a scientific problem, demonstrates the candidate's comprehensive theoretical knowledge in the discipline, and confirms her ability to conduct independent scientific research.

I therefore recommend that Ms Zhiyin Guo be admitted to the subsequent stages of the doctoral degree proceedings.



