

A Study on the Mechanisms and Pathways for the Party to Lead the Innovative Development of University Trade Unions in the New Era

Yueyang Jiang ¹, Jianing Liang ², Yangyang Zhang ³, Wenjie Cai ³, Xiaozhong Chen^{4,*}

¹ School of medical humanities and hospital management ,Wenzhou Medical University, WenZhou 325000, China

² School of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Wenzhou Medical University, WenZhou 325000, China

³ Hospital of Wenzhou People's Hospital, Wen Zhou 325000, China

⁴ School of Graduate, Wenzhou Medical University, WenZhou 325000, China

*** Correspondence:**

Xiaozhong Chen

chenxiaozhong@wmu.edu.cn

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Abstract

In the context of the new era, the modernisation of university governance has placed new demands on trade union work, and the Party's leadership of the innovative development of university trade unions has become an important issue in promoting the development of higher education institutions. This paper focuses on the mechanisms and paths for the Party to lead the innovative development of university trade unions. Using historical analysis, dialectical analysis, and a combination of theory and reality, it systematically sorts out the theoretical basis and historical evolution of the Party's leadership in the development of trade unions in higher education institutions, analyses the current challenges, constructs three major mechanisms of political leadership, coordinated action, and dynamic response, and proposes practical paths for conceptual innovation, carrier innovation, and capacity enhancement. The study aims to provide theoretical support for the innovative development of university trade unions based on the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics. At the same time, it hopes to provide practical strategies for strengthening the Party's leadership of university trade unions and improving the effectiveness of trade union services, and to provide new paths for promoting the modernisation of university governance.

Keywords: New Era; Trade Union Development; Party Leadership

1. Introduction

The new era marks China's entry into a new stage of comprehensively building a modern socialist country, and the modernisation of university governance has become one of the core goals of education reform. As a bridge and link between the Party Committee and faculty and staff, the effectiveness of the Trade Union's work is directly related to the cohesion of faculty and staff, the harmony and stability of the campus, and the long-term development of the university. The report of the 18th National Congress of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions clearly pointed out that General Secretary Xi Jinping's important remarks on the working class and trade union work profoundly answered major questions such as 'what kind of trade union to build and how to build it,' providing fundamental guidance for trade union work. *The Trade Union Law of the People's Republic of China* also emphasises that the leadership of the Party is the fundamental guarantee for doing a good job in trade union work in the new era. Against this backdrop, university trade unions are facing many new requirements: The structure of faculty and staff is becoming increasingly diversified, and their needs are expanding from the single dimension of rights protection to multiple dimensions such as career development and spiritual culture. The digital wave is promoting changes in campus governance models, and trade union work needs to break through traditional methods and move towards smart trade unions in the new era (Jin Min 2025). However, the Party still faces a series of issues in leading the innovative development of university trade unions: how to balance the leadership of the Party with the autonomy of trade unions, and how to respond to the contradiction between the diverse needs of faculty and staff and the insufficient accuracy of trade union services (Liu Jiang 2017). How to achieve the integration of digital transformation and traditional working models, etc. Based on this, the core research question of this paper focuses on: What specific challenges does the Party face in leading the innovative development of university trade unions in the new era? What mechanisms and paths should be constructed to promote their innovative development? Domestic academia has achieved certain results in its research on the Party's leadership of trade unions. However, existing research still has limitations: first, it often approaches the issue from a single perspective, either focusing on historical analysis or focusing on practical issues, lacking an organic integration of history and reality; second, there is insufficient discussion of the coupling relationship between 'Party leadership' and 'university trade union innovation' (Wang Lijing 2010). It fails to fully reflect the interactive mechanism between the Party's leadership and the functions of trade unions in the university context. Third, it does not respond deeply enough to the new challenges in the context of digital transformation and the integration of industry and education in the new era. This paper aims to fill the above gaps and construct a systematic analytical framework. The innovation of this paper lies in: integrating historical experience with the requirements of the new era to construct a 'mechanism-path' double-layer analytical framework, breaking through the limitations of a single perspective; focusing on the interactive relationship between 'Party leadership' and 'university trade union innovation,' highlighting the special characteristics of universities in terms of governance structure and faculty composition; and proposing forward-looking innovative

strategies in response to the new context of digital transformation and industry-education integration to enhance the practical relevance of the research.

2. Theoretical Basis and Historical Evolution

Marxist classical writers laid the foundation for trade union theory. *The Communist Manifesto* and *The Condition of the Working Class in England* pointed out that trade unions are an organisational form of the working class's united struggle, whose mission is to protect workers' rights and promote class liberation. Lenin further emphasised that trade unions should play a 'transmission mechanism' role under the leadership of the party, transforming the party's ideas into mass action and serving the cause of socialist construction.

The Chinese Marxist trade union theory has been continuously enriched and developed in practice. Mao Zedong proposed 'relying wholeheartedly on the working class' and clarified the role of trade unions as a bridge in revolution and construction. Deng Xiaoping emphasised that trade unions need to adapt to the requirements of a market economy and give equal importance to protecting the legitimate rights and interests of workers and participating in democratic management. Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, based on the important thinking of the 'Three Represents' and the scientific concept of development, respectively emphasised the mass nature and service function of trade unions. General Secretary Xi Jinping's important remarks on the working class and trade union work systematically answered questions about the political nature, advanced nature, and mass nature of trade union work in the new era, providing fundamental guidance for the Party to lead the innovative development of university trade unions, with particular emphasis on 'upholding the Party's comprehensive leadership over trade unions' and 'enhancing the cohesion and fighting spirit of trade union organisations'.

From the founding of the People's Republic of China to the reform and opening up: Trade unions in higher education institutions were in the preliminary exploration stage. Under the leadership of the Party, trade unions mainly focused on socialist transformation and construction, undertaking functions such as ideological and political education for faculty and staff and organising labour competitions. Their organisational form was mainly administrative management, and their services were relatively simple, but they laid the organisational foundation for subsequent development. From the reform and opening up to the new era: University trade unions entered a period of standardised development. With the promulgation and improvement of the *Trade Union Law*, the functions of trade unions expanded from political leadership to the protection of rights and interests and democratic management. The staff congress system gradually matured and began to focus on the career development and welfare of faculty and staff. The Party's leadership mechanism was further clarified, forming a basic framework of 'Party Committee leadership, trade union execution, and faculty and staff participation,' but problems such as a strong administrative flavour and insufficient service innovation still existed. Since the new era: The Party leads the innovative development of university trade unions with deepened connotations. Trade union work has become more political, incorporating Xi Jinping Thought on

Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era into the ideological and political leadership of faculty and staff(Beibei 2020). ; Strengthening advanced nature, such as the representative Tsinghua University Changping Base, as the base for Tsinghua University's 13th and 14th Five-Year Plans, has made the promotion of service-oriented trade union construction its primary responsibility and has become a successful case study of a trade union base that brings happiness to both teachers and students (Haofang. 2025)At the same time, trade unions should also focus on the construction of 'Double First-Class' universities, organise faculty and staff to participate in scientific and technological innovation and talent cultivation, highlight mass participation, promote the construction of service-oriented trade unions, and pay attention to the needs of groups such as young teachers and teachers with dual responsibilities. At the same time, digital and intelligent means have begun to be integrated into trade union work, and the organisational form has become more flexible.

3. Practical Exploration and Practical Challenges of the Party Leading the Innovative Development of Trade Unions in Higher Education Institutions in the New Era

Under the comprehensive leadership of the Party, trade unions in higher education institutions have made remarkable progress in political leadership, service functions, and organisational forms through institutional innovation and practical exploration, injecting new momentum into the development of faculty and staff and school governance.

From the perspective of political leadership, the deep integration of Party building and trade union building has become a core highlight(Wang Liang 2024). Many universities have established a three-level linkage mechanism of 'Party Committee-Trade Union-Academic Departments.' For example, Wenzhou Medical University has implemented a 'Party Branch-Trade Union Group' co-construction model, organically combining activities such as theme party days and teacher ethics education with trade union work to ensure that trade union activities are in sync with the central work of the Party Committee. At the same time, targeted ideological leadership has been carried out for different groups of faculty and staff. Through vehicles such as the 'Model Worker Lecture Hall' and the 'Young Teacher Political Capacity Improvement Plan,' the Party's theoretical guidelines have been promoted among faculty and staff in higher education institutions, while also strengthening their political identity and professional ideal cultivation.

The diversification of service functions is an important feature and manifestation of the development of contemporary trade unions. University trade unions improve democratic management with the faculty congress system at its core, guaranteeing the participation rights of faculty and staff in major school decisions. They focus on the 'urgent, difficult and anxious' issues of faculty and staff, and work with multiple departments to establish a 'one-stop' assistance channel, focusing on solving practical problems such as housing and school enrolment for young teachers. In terms of career development, they have launched projects such as 'teaching ability

workshops' and 'academic salons' to promote professional growth. Through the construction of humanistic care platforms, they have carried out cultural and sports activities, psychological counselling and other services, gradually forming a diversified service system covering career development, livelihood security and spiritual needs.

At the same time, some universities have promoted the construction of digital trade unions, developed 'smart trade union' platforms to realise online and accurate services, and utilised big data to analyse hot demand points. Through 'miniaturisation and flexibilisation' reforms, grassroots organisations have formed specialised trade union groups based on academic departments or disciplines, selected outstanding faculty members to serve as trade union committee members, and improved the efficiency of grassroots responses. At the same time, they have combined the characteristics of their schools to create brand projects, such as 'Health Science Popularisation in the Community' for medical schools and 'Innovation Achievement Exhibition Week' for science and engineering universities, to promote the deep integration of trade union work with school development and social needs.

However, the process of innovative development still faces multiple challenges that constrain its further high-quality development.

The primary contradiction is the lack of compatibility between theory and practice. There is tension between the Party's leadership system and the autonomy of trade unions: some university trade unions rely too much on the Party Committee's decisions and lack the initiative to independently plan activities and respond to the needs of faculty and staff, leading to administrative and formalistic work; a small number of trade unions ignore the Party's political leadership and deviate from the correct direction. In addition, there are difficulties in adapting the Chinese expression of Marxist labour movement theory to the diverse needs of university faculty and staff. How to transform the essence of the theory into practical measures that fit the characteristics of the teaching group still needs to be explored in depth.

Bottlenecks at the practical level still need to be overcome. The weakening vitality of trade unions is a prominent issue: trade union cadres are mostly between 45 and 55 years old and have limited energy, which means that the implementation of their work needs to be improved. In terms of overall educational attainment, 35% have a college degree (or below), which means that the accuracy of their services is insufficient and they are unable to provide targeted solutions(Wang Daqing 2016). Digital transformation is lagging behind, with some university trade unions still relying on traditional working models, online platforms with single functions, and insufficient data empowerment, making it difficult to adapt to the needs of faculty and staff for convenient and personalised services.

The impact of the external environment has intensified the pressure for functional transformation. The diversification of social trends poses a challenge to the ideological leadership of faculty and staff. The modernisation of university governance has placed new demands on the positioning of trade union functions: in the context of the integration of industry and education and school-enterprise cooperation, trade unions need to expand from internal campus services to

connecting with social resources and promoting the coordinated development of industry, education and research. Functional boundaries need to be extended, and traditional working models are facing the test of transformation.

4. Mechanism Construction and Practical Paths for the Party to Lead the Innovative Development of University Trade Unions

Mechanism construction and practical paths are the two driving forces behind the Party's leadership of the innovative development of university trade unions. The former clarifies the direction and support through institutional design, while the latter promotes implementation and effectiveness through specific measures. The two complement each other and work together.

At the level of mechanism construction, political leadership is a fundamental prerequisite. The Party Committee of higher education institutions needs to incorporate trade union work into the overall layout of Party building, regularly study major issues, and ensure that trade union work resonates with the central tasks of the Party Committee(Wei. 2023)

Trade unions need to closely follow the Party Committee's deployment in formulating annual plans and integrate political leadership goals into the political learning incentive mechanism for faculty and staff. Through methods such as a points system and linking excellence evaluations, they should promote activities such as 'model worker lectures' and 'course political thinking seminars' to deepen and solidify theoretical training and promote the transformation of political identity into professional ideals. Collaborative coordination is a key support. It is necessary to build a system of responsibilities and powers that is 'coordinated by the Party Committee, led by the Trade Union, and implemented by the Academic Departments': the Party Committee sets the direction and secures resources, the Trade Union takes charge of organisation and promotes implementation, and the Academic Departments refine activities and strengthen the foundation. At the same time, a cross-departmental coordination platform should be established to bring together personnel, academic affairs, scientific research and other departments to solve difficult problems in faculty development. For example, the construction of a 'teacher career development centre' should be jointly promoted to integrate services such as training, consulting and resource matching, forming a resource integration pattern in which Party building leads labour union building and labour union building promotes development (Youqun. 2023).

Dynamic response is a necessary guarantee. On the one hand, it is necessary to improve the entire process mechanism of 'research-feedback-transformation' of demand, collect demand through questionnaires, discussions, online message boards and other channels, and form a closed-loop management system of 'demand list-task list-results list.' On the other hand, in response to potential risks such as rights disputes and hot topics in public opinion, an emergency response team led by the deputy secretary of the Party Committee and participated in by the Trade Union should be established to formulate contingency plans and intervene and deal with issues in a timely manner, thereby creating a stable environment for the work of the Trade Union.

The exploration of practical paths needs to be closely linked to the effectiveness of the mechanism, with coordinated efforts in three areas: concept, vehicle, and capability. In terms of concept, promote the transformation of the Trade Union from 'management-oriented' to 'service-oriented,' take faculty and staff satisfaction as the core evaluation indicator, focus on 'urgent and difficult' issues (such as housing for young teachers and school enrolment for their children), and at the same time deeply integrate the work of the Trade Union into the 'Double First-Class' construction of universities. Through activities such as 'Teaching Innovation Competitions' and "scientific research collaboration and breakthroughs" and other activities, allowing trade unions to play a unique role in discipline construction and talent cultivation. In terms of vehicles, digitalisation and branding should be used to improve service accuracy: upgrade the 'smart trade union' platform, integrate service, communication and management functions, develop mobile terminals to realise 'one-click' activity registration, welfare claims and other matters, and use big data to analyse demand and accurately push service content (such as providing work-life balance guidance for teachers with dual responsibilities and customising career development resource packages for young teachers)(Guoming. 2011). At the same time, create distinctive service brands, such as the 'Young Teacher Growth Camp,' 'Silver-haired Teacher Care Plan,' and "Faculty Mental Health Escort Project," to form a differentiated service pattern of 'one school, one product' and 'one college, one feature," thereby enhancing the recognition and attractiveness of the Trade Union. In terms of capabilities, strengthen team building and institutional guarantees: implement a professional training plan for Trade Union cadres, and improve party affairs capabilities, service skills, and innovative awareness through specialised training, temporary assignments, and exchange learning. Recruit outstanding young teachers and academic leaders to serve as part-time cadres to optimise the team structure. At the same time, strive to increase the school's financial investment, establish a special fund for innovative work, establish an assessment and evaluation system, commend grassroots trade unions and individuals with outstanding achievements, and stimulate grassroots vitality and service motivation.

The organic integration of this mechanism and path not only provides a stable institutional framework for trade union innovation, but also improves service efficiency through specific practices, ultimately promoting the Party's leadership of university trade union work from 'tangible coverage' to 'effective coverage.'

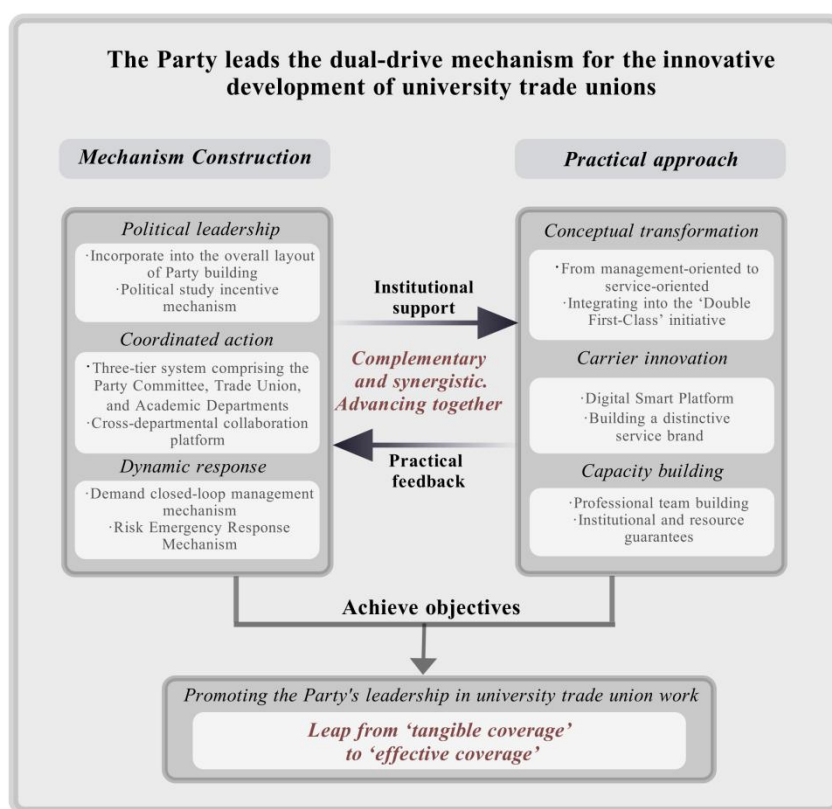


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of mechanism construction and practical path model for the Party leading the innovative development of university trade unions

5. Conclusion and Outlook

Through systematic research, this paper concludes that in the new era, the Party leads the innovative development of university trade unions by constructing three major mechanisms: political leadership, coordinated action, and dynamic response. Breakthroughs are achieved through innovation in three areas: ideology, vehicles, and capabilities. Combined with the important theory that the Party's comprehensive leadership is the fundamental guarantee for the innovative development of university trade unions, this is carried through in political direction, organisational construction, and functional performance(Xue. 2021). The innovative development of university trade unions is based on the requirements of 'political nature, advanced nature, and mass nature,' taking into account the dual goals of serving faculty and staff and promoting the development of the school, solving the problem of only being able to focus on one of the two and the high degree of overlap between the two, which hinders each other. In terms of practical paths and mechanism construction, digital transformation and brand building are key levers for improving the effectiveness of trade unions, which are conducive to giving full play to the role of trade unions in uniting and rallying the party organisation, while providing a new paradigm and direction for the innovative development of trade unions.

At the same time, the model and mechanism are still in the conceptual model stage, and its empirical analysis mainly relies on case sorting, lacking nationwide quantitative data support. There is also a significant lack of discussion on the differences in the innovative development of different types of university trade unions. In the future, the team will expand its research direction based on solving the above problems: Conduct cross-regional comparative studies of university trade unions and summarise the unique experiences of different regions. Conduct in-depth analysis of the long-term impact of digital transformation on the organisational form and working model of trade unions, and explore long-term mechanisms. focus on the application boundaries and risk prevention and control of technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data in trade union work. In short, the Party leading the innovative development of university trade unions in the new era is a systematic project that requires continuous deepening of theoretical research and practical exploration. With the Party's leadership at its core and the needs of faculty and staff as its guide, it will continuously enhance the cohesion and combat effectiveness of trade union organisations and contribute to the modernisation of university governance and the high-quality development of education.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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