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**Abstract**

The Chinese government has acknowledged that in order to turn Chinese universities into world class institutions, it will have to grant them a greater degree of autonomy. However, the reforms that have been introduced to achieve this goal run counter to a long tradition of central government oversight. The question now presenting itself is how much actual control government has devolved to universities. The qualitative evidence presented in this paper, obtained through interviews with university presidents and Party secretaries, not only confirms that, as one might expect, Chinese universities continue to operate “in the shadow of hierarchy,” but also and more importantly that formal efforts to devolve authority are being rendered ineffective by informal pressures and control mechanisms. Discussion reflects on the state of play in Chinese public administration studies, and urges public policy researchers examining devolution in China to account for both formal reforms and

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everyday “lived experiences.” (HRK / Abstract übernommen)

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