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**Abstract**

The expansion of the higher education system and the rationalization of universities in South Korea, while broadly following the global patterns, reflect the characteristics of the national political system. We show the rapid growth of universities and document core organizational changes among universities: the elaboration of faculty performance evaluation rules, the expansion and differentiation of central administrations, and the emergence of engagement in vision statements. These changes, constructing universities as organizational actors, parallel the changes in higher education systems elsewhere. However, the uniqueness of the Korean experience lies with the role of the state as a catalyst guiding the overall direction and the structure and strategy of universities. We discuss the implications of our research for the rationalization of universities in a highly centralized system. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)