

HIGHER EDUCATION IN CHINA – THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

Education is the most powerful force for human development. Over the centuries education is considered as an enabler. Among the different stages of education, Higher education is on the apex of the process. Molding and mentoring of students is the focal theme of higher education which results in holistic personality development. This paper reflects on the conceptual framework of higher education in china.

Keywords: *education, china, higher education, conceptual framework*

Higher education, Post secondary education or Third level education is the one which succeeds secondary education. This is also known as Tertiary education. The quality of higher education institutions should be given utmost focus than mushrooming of higher education centers. The right of access to higher education is mentioned in a number of international human rights instruments. The UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966 declares, in Article 13, that "higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education". Higher education includes teaching, research, exacting applied work (e.g. in medical schools and dental schools), and social services activities of universities. Within the realm of teaching, it includes both the undergraduate level, and beyond that, graduate-level (or postgraduate level).

Higher Education across Asia

As economies in the Asian region have grown larger and more intricate, they have also become more integrated through economic and social exchange. Higher education is seem to have an ever more important role in human resource development and the movement of people, students, and the workforce in the region.

Higher education across much of Asia is a remarkable success story. It enjoys a high level of government support. Leaders understand that higher education is an important ingredient in the economic and social development of their countries. They recognize that the globalization of markets, the interdependency of international financial systems, the expanded role of technology, and high-speed communications have created an enormous need for highly skilled technical, professional, and managerial leaders. They understand that modern economies cannot be managed by only primary and secondary school graduates. Evidence of this support is quite concrete. Enrollments have grown, participation in higher education has diversified, new universities have been created, and universities are experimenting with new forms of instructional delivery.

At the same time, higher education across the Asian region faces a set of interwoven challenges. Many higher education institutions (HEIs) in Asia are coping with explosive enrollment growth, shortages of qualified instructional staff, widespread concern over instructional quality and in many cases, severe financial constraints. These issues are interwoven, and their solutions are interdependent. Efforts to address any one problem need to be undertaken with attention to the larger constellation of issues.

While the contribution of higher education to economic development is generally accepted, the mechanisms through which those benefits are achieved are less well understood. It is widely accepted that higher education contributes to national development in three principal ways:

- Higher education institutions prepare the primary and secondary teachers, who shape the dimensions and quality of the overall education system of a country. Low-quality primary and secondary education leads to huge inefficiencies in higher education, as incoming students lack essential prior preparation for postsecondary study (Hanushek and Woessmann 2007). This creates a tarnished cycle, as poorly prepared entering students combine in many institutions with low-quality instruction to yield poorly prepared graduates. One way to break that cycle is to raise the quality of postsecondary preparation that future teachers receive. Those individuals need solid content preparation in the subjects they will teach, preparation in modern pedagogical techniques, and training in the use of technology for instruction. To the extent that schools receive better prepared teachers, and to the extent that those teachers have the support they need to implement their new abilities once they are in the schools, future secondary graduates will be better equipped for either direct entry to the labor market or higher education (ADB 2008).
- HEIs train the high-level technical and administrative personnel needed in government, business, and industry. International finance, business management, and national governance increasingly depend on mechanization, high-speed communication, and complex information flows, which all require high levels of administrative sophistication, technical expertise, and analytic capacity. Secondary education alone cannot provide the managerial and technical leadership needed in modern business, industry, and government.
- HEIs operate as incubators of innovation and creative thinking needed for an economically competitive society. Economic and social development increasingly depends on innovation. Universities have a potentially important role in driving innovation and development. They can do so both through their role in carrying out research and development and by training workers for the knowledge economy (LaRocque 2007). The ability of higher education systems to accomplish these ends depends, to a significant extent, on how the systems are designed, financed, and managed; on how well equipped the instructional staff are to meet the changing demands being placed upon them; and on how good at planning and how realistic governments are in the demands they place on their universities.

A Brief Description of Higher Education in China

History

Although China's modern universities were founded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the history of formal education in China pre dates the establishment of Western-style educational institutions by centuries. The imperial education and examination system developed as a meritocratic means to train and select civil servants during the Han dynasty (206 BCE to 220 CE.)

In the second half of the twentieth century the Chinese higher-education scenario was chiseled by the Soviet-style reorganization. Starting in the 1950s, universities became primarily teaching institutions, affiliated with specific government bodies. They taught subjects, such as medicine, art or agriculture. The result was a high degree of

specialization and lack of cross-fertilization between the disciplines. This changed in the 1980s and 1990s, when formerly specialized institutions were joined to form larger, more diverse universities. These institutions were granted increased autonomy over decisions about hiring, admissions, and the allocation of funds.

Over the last quarter century, China has seen a “massification” of its university system. The number of 18- to 22-year-olds in higher education has increased dramatically, from four percent in 1990 to 6.5 percent in 1999 to 37.5 percent in 2014. As of 2016, the number of graduates to flood China’s labor market each year is seven million. The factors behind this explosive growth are diverse, and include the demands of a growing middle class, economic expansion, and government policies that explicitly seek to boost participation in higher education. In terms of enrollment rates, those policies have been broadly successful, but critics charge that a focus on the country’s most prestigious institutions, led by Peking University and Tsinghua University, has created an imbalance in quality. Well-known initiatives such as Project 211 and Project 985, for example, have allocated billions of dollars to a limited number of top-tier public schools in an effort to increase their international standing and support research output.

Public and private institutions

Many of the country’s best and most generously funded universities are in Beijing, Shanghai, and the great cities of eastern China, and all of them are public. However, China has seen exponential growth in the number of private institutions of higher education since the 1980s, when laws governing the sector began to be relaxed. More recently, China has come to see private institutions as a key mechanism for addressing the scale of demand. The 2002 Law on the Promotion of Privately Run Schools, for example, states explicitly that private educational institutions are integral to the invigoration “of the country through science, technology and education.

In the fifteen years leading up to 2014, the number of private higher education institutions in operation rose from 39 to 727. The quality of these institutions is highly variable, say observers, and their status and future are hotly debated. Recent enrollments have declined steeply for some schools, not least because internationalization has heightened competition for qualified students.

Programs offered by private institutions are generally more practice-oriented than their counterparts in the public sector. Other differences between the two types of institution involve admission requirements, governance, and funding models. Public universities, which receive government funding as well as tuition fees (introduced in the 1990s), are generally more affordable than their private counterparts.

Government improvement initiatives

Institutions in the Chinese higher education sector are of totally differing quality, with a select few at the top. This stratification is, the result of government policy. In the mid-1990s, the Central government launched two significant initiatives to improve the quality and international competitiveness of top-tier higher education institutions in China. These initiatives include: Project 211: The State Council, Department of Finance and the Ministry of Education of China co-issued the General Plan for Project 211 in 1995 to strengthen selected higher education institutions and key disciplines. The project started with 99 institutions. It currently includes 112 universities. Target areas of improvement are the overall infrastructure of institutions,

key disciplines, and higher education public services system. Project 985: The State Council and the Ministry of Education of China launched Project 985 in 1998 with the explicit aim of building world-class universities. Thirty-nine elite institutions from Project 211 received a large earmark of \$US 40.4 billion (264.9 billion CNY) from the central government and \$US 28.4 billion (186.3 billion CNY) from local government to enhance their research capacity.

Education system

Education in mainland China (excluding Hong Kong and Macau) is governed on three levels: national, provincial, and local. At the national level, the Ministry of Education is the central government agency responsible for formulating macro education policies; Provincial education departments manage the local policy development and implementation under the guideline of the state regulations. Apart from 111 prestigious universities under the direct jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and other central government authorities, and a few universities administered jointly by the central and provincial governments, the majority of higher education institutions are affiliated with provincial authorities or lower local governments; The local education authorities have primary supervision responsibility over elementary education. The most common language of instruction in elementary and secondary schools is Mandarin, the official language in China. In regions where the majority of students are ethnic minorities, instruction is offered in both Mandarin and the dominant local language.

Higher education

China's higher education is highly stratified. Structurally, it is divided into two sectors: regular higher education and adult higher education. As of 2015, the Education reported a total of 2,845 Chinese higher education institutions (HEIs) in both the regular and adult higher education sectors. Tertiary education can also be obtained through a prescribed self-study program.

Regular higher education: Ninety percent of China's HEIs (2,553) are in the regular higher education sector. Over 70 percent of undergraduate students are enrolled at regular higher education institutions.

Not all Chinese institutions of higher education, even in the regular sector, offer degrees; many offer only graduation certificates. Around 1,202 institutions in the regular higher education sector are academically oriented and grant degrees. The rest focus on practical and occupational skills and offer graduation certificates.

The regular higher education sector includes 447 private institutions, 275 independent colleges (quasi-private), and seven Chinese-foreign cooperative initiatives, set up as joint partnerships between Chinese and foreign education institutions.

Adult higher education: Adult education programs follow the curriculum offered by regular institutions, but the teaching format is more flexible and diverse, including distance-learning and part-time study. Just fewer than 30 percent of undergraduate students are enrolled in adult higher education institutions.

Self-study programs: In addition to regular and adult education, higher education can be obtained through a "*self-study*" program. Depending on the level of study (junior college or undergraduate), the program consists of 12-20 subject examinations in a pre-determined discipline. Success is assessed by Self-taught Higher Education Examinations.

Admissions

Regular higher education: Admission to a regular higher education institution depends on high school graduation and Gaokao scores. The Gaokao is held on June 7 and 8 every year. (Some provinces extend the exam to the 9th.) Results are released by the end of June. Applicants are typically high school students in their senior year, however there has been no age restriction since 2001. Nearly nine million students take the Gaokao annually.

Adult higher education: Admission to adult higher education institutions, or adult education programs at regular universities, is based on the National Adult College Entrance Examination (also known as “the adult Gaokao.”) Applicants are expected to have academic skills on par with high school graduates at the time of the examination, however a high school diploma is not required for enrollment in adult higher education programs.

Self-study: Self-taught Higher Education has an entirely open enrollment policy that accepts applications from all backgrounds and academic levels. Applicants register with the provincial Self-taught Higher Education Examinations Committee and complete the program at their own pace. Depending on the level of study (junior college or undergraduate), the program consists of 12-20 subject examinations in a pre-determined discipline. Students receive a graduation certificate, called the *biye zhengshu* when they obtain satisfactory test results in all subjects. Upon completion of a self-taught undergraduate program and fulfillment of a handful of additional requirements, students can apply for a bachelor’s degree certificate called a *xueshi xuewei zhengshu*

Degrees and certificates

As of 2015, roughly 1,350 of China’s HEIs offer two- to three-year junior college programs leading to a graduation certificate rather than a degree. Compared to academically oriented degree programs, these non-degree programs focus on practical and occupational skills. Graduates of these programs either enter the workforce or opt to apply for “top-up” programs, which are designed to allow them to study further in a bachelor’s program for an additional two to three years.

An estimated 1,200 institutions in the regular higher education sector grant degrees. There are three ladders of degrees in China: bachelors, master’s and doctorate.

Bachelor’s degrees: Bachelor’s programs normally require four years of full-time study in a traditional classroom setting. (Some programs at the bachelor’s level - for instance, architecture, medicine, and a few engineering programs - require five-years of study.) Upon successful fulfillment of these criteria, students are typically awarded two types of certification: A graduation certificate issued directly by the institution; A bachelor’s degree certificate issued by the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council; The graduation certificate is the prerequisite of the awarding of degree. In cases where the student does not meet the requirements for a bachelor’s degree, they may still receive the graduation certificate.

Master’s degrees: Students with a bachelor’s degree can apply for admission to master’s programs. At master’s level, there are two types of program: academic and professional. Most full-time academic programs are three years long. Professional programs are typically two years long; there are 39 recognized professional degrees at master’s level. Upon successful completion of master’s programs, students receive a

master's degree certificate, called a *shuoshi xuwei zhengshu*. The certificate should denote whether the program was academic or professional.

Doctoral degrees: Doctoral programs, the highest-level degree programs offered in China, normally require a minimum of three years to complete. During this period, students are expected to complete coursework, pass a final examination, and write and defend a dissertation. A doctoral degree certificate, called a *boshi xuwei zhengshu* is awarded upon successful completion of all requirements.

Curriculum

The curriculum in most disciplines consists of four major areas: General compulsory subjects such as computer basics, English, mathematics, ideology and politics, fundamentals of law, and physical education; General elective subjects in humanities and sciences; Specialty compulsory subjects in the chosen field of study; Specialty elective subjects in the student's focus of interest; Students also have to complete other components of the graduation requirements, including short-term or long-term internships, social practice, external English tests, and a thesis.

Accreditation

Higher Education Evaluation Center (HEEC): The Higher Education Evaluation Center was founded in 2004 and operates under the Ministry of Education. The HEEC is tasked with systematic evaluation of institutions of higher education and their programs.

Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Center (CDGDC): The Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Center was set up in 2003 and operates under the joint leadership of the Ministry of Education and the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council.

The CDGDC evaluates academic degrees and graduate education, and verifies the authenticity of academic degree certificates.

Governance for China-foreign cooperative programs

The Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools took effect in September 2003. These regulations standardise governance of jointly run Chinese-foreign schools, with the objective of fostering international educational exchange and enhancing development of China's education system. The regulations articulate the legal and procedural responsibilities of Chinese educational institutions and foreign partners involved in the establishment, administration, financing, and teaching at joint venture schools. All approved programs can be observed on an authorized platform. The types of institutions eligible do not include compulsory education service or special education services such as military, police and political education.

Types of Colleges and Universities

In China, according to ownership-based categories of HEIs, the higher education can be divided into two categories---State-owned or government-owned HEIs, including Regular HEIs, Independent Institutions, Higher Vocational Colleges, Adult HEIs, and non-government or private universities. Due to the long-time influence by Soviet Union and late development of private universities, it has deeply rooted in Chinese heart that government-owned is much better than private ones. Regular HEIs is the cornerstone in China's higher education, while private universities development could not be ignored. According to the latest data(2015) of People's Republic of

China Ministry of Education, total number of Chinese National Higher Institutions is 2845, including 2,553 National General Colleges and Universities and 292 Adult Higher Institutions. Government-owned HEIs are likely to receive more policy and finance support from official level. Due to the large population, Chinese public universities are impossible to satisfy everyone's needs. Under this condition, private universities of China come into being. The advantages of their professional setting that more in line with market requirements could not make up for the lack of financial funds and students. Actually, these two factors are equal. The source of funds for them depends largely on students' tuition fees.

Analysing the higher education in Asia and in particular China, which is the first populous country in the world, it can be said undoubtedly that China promotes quality higher education. The pattern of educational framework with the number of institutions in the governmental and private sector gives clear evidence on the benchmark followed in the educational system of China. The curriculum in higher education also provides much scope for students to develop holistically. Self empowerment and societal empowerment are the two major goals emphasized in China through their Higher Education System. Thus the country serves as a role model in promoting quality education to the world.

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