

angielska podstawa rozdziału “Chińskie szkolnictwo wyższe”:

Chinese Higher Education Since 1977: The Historic Development

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INTRODUCTION

It has been more than a century since the modern Chinese education system began to take shape. *In 1977 an entirely new period in its development was initiated, and at the end of the first decade of our century the system has reached again important milestones.* The year 2008 marked the 30th anniversary of China's Reform and Opening-up policy, and 2009 was the 60th anniversary of People's Republic of China (PRC). In an atmosphere of reviewing and reflecting on the past, China has convened numerous conferences on the achievements of Chinese higher education, and copious Chinese books have examined the system's road of development^②. The international community has also been paying close attention to the development of Chinese higher education, with many English language publications available^③.

Rather than reviewing the current system and associated statistics^④, this paper aims to help readers understand the historic development of Chinese higher education since 1977. It focuses on how Chinese higher education was reshaped toward the end of the Cultural Revolution and thereafter. The main body of this article is divided into three parts. First, THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT reviews how Chinese higher education developed before 1977. THE NEW JOURNEY outlines changes that occurred from 1977 to 1984; key processes from 1985 until today; and striking transformations on the campuses. Finally, THE CROSSROADS introduces its latest reform plan, summarizes the achievements of Chinese higher education in the past three decades, and unfolds the inconvenient challenges ahead. China in this paper refers to mainland China.

Before beginning, readers must note and understand three points. First, the

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^② The highly recommended monographs include *Gaige kaifang sanshinian Zhongguo gaodengjiaoyu fazhan jingyan zhuantiyanjiu* [Research on the Experience of Chinese Higher Education in 30 Years' Reform and Opening-up] by the Association of Chinese Higher Education, Zhang Yingqiang's *Jingying yu dazhong: Zhongguo gaodengjiaoyu liushinian* [From Elitism to Massification: 60 Years of Chinese Higher Education] and Yang Quanming's *Zhongguo gaodengjiaoyu gaige fazhan yanjiu* [Research on the Reforms and Development of Chinese Higher Education].

^③ Michael Agelasto and Bob Adamson's *Higher Education in Post-Mao China*, OECD's *Current Issues in Chinese Higher Education*, Min Weifang's *Chinese Higher Education: The Legacy of the Past and the Context of the Future* and Ruth Hayhoe's *China's Universities, 1895-1995: A Century of Cultural Conflict* are among the volumes.

^④ For this reading, readers are advised to refer to the recently published English book *Higher Education in China* by Zhejiang University Press and a report named *Tertiary Education at a Glance: China* by Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press.

transformation of Chinese higher education has been so grand and complicated during the latest decades that it is “mission impossible” to describe all the details in a single article. Second, many scholars claim that writing about Chinese modern history is risky and unrealistic. This is essentially the same in writing about how Chinese higher education developed. Some historical authorities and events play a critical role and some facts are still shrouded in mystery. Third, the authors are Chinese scholars, insiders to the Chinese higher education community. This association inevitably influences the paper in many ways, such as its references and narrating perspective. Therefore, although this paper’s statements are all based on credible facts and academic research results, prejudice due to selectivity leaves the paper open to criticism.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

China has been prioritizing education for millennia. The first higher learning institutions can be traced back to at least what were named the *Piyong* and *Pangong* in *Xizhou* Dynasty (1046-771 BC) (Wu Zhenzhuo, 1982, p. 17). The earliest private institution of higher learning appeared in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-746 BC) to educate the *Shi* stratum, and its blossom at that time initiated *Baijiazhengming* (the first recorded academic prosperity). Confucius, the world famous Chinese educator, was one of the most prestigious teachers during this time.

When the Emperor of *Qin* State conquered the other six states in 221 BC, China became a unified country. In the following years, the traditional Chinese system of higher learning evolved with the frequent dynastic changes. From 134 BC, Confucianism began to dominate education. After the emergence of *Keju* (Imperial examination) in the *Sui* Dynasty (581-618 AD), education and examinations opened the way to political careers, power, and wealth. *Shuyuan* (Academies of Classical Learning), a form of private schooling, became glamorous in the *Song* Dynasty (960-1279 AD), and they continued to be the main form of higher learning for hundreds of years.

At the end of *Qing* dynasty—the last feudal dynasty of China, however, bitterness as a defeated nation in the First Opium War (1839-1842) and the next wars were twisted with the shock brought by Western technology and culture. This development broke the empire’s dream as “The Middle Kingdom” and pushed it to learn from the external world. Unprecedented changes in education began to take place. Foreign churches were allowed to set up schools. The government began to dispatch students abroad. New schools that taught Western languages, politics, and technologies began to shake the central status of Confucianism in education. Finally, in 1902, abolishing *Keju* and the subversion of *Shuyuan* symbolized the collapse of the Chinese traditional education system. During the transition period, some Christian schools and Western-style private schools combined with official higher learning institutions, such as Shanghai Nan Yang Public School and the Imperial University of Peking (established in the late *Yangwuyundong*, Westernization Movement, 1861-1894), can be seen as the seeds of Chinese modern universities.

When the Republic of China was established in 1912, it gradually established an integrated modern schooling system “following the American model”(Tian Zhengping

& Shang Lihao, 2006, p. 175). Although battles among warlords resulted in political chaos and intellectual changes resulted in rising anarchism, Chinese higher education still enjoyed a golden age in the three decades of the 20th century with many universities nurtured and grown to be outstanding^①. This was before the Sino-Japanese war (1937-1945) broke out.

When the Communist Party of China (CPC) took power in 1949, the newborn PRC government did not simply continue what remained from the previous government. It was keen to establish a higher education system of its own, following and supporting the system of socialism. Higher education in China therefore experienced three momentous changes before the Cultural Revolution. Driven by the transformation of the political system (Hu Jianhua, 2003), the three changes were, namely, 1) imitating the Soviet system, 2) *Jiaoyu Dageming* (the Great Educational Revolution), and 3) *Tiaozheng Zhengdun* (the adjustment and consolidation).

After a very short time taking over colleges and universities owned by the previous government (124 schools), foreign churches (21 schools), and the private sector (60 schools) before 1949, the CPC government began sweeping reform based on the Soviet mode. The main measures included the national *Yuanxitiaozheng* (reorganizing higher education institutions); transposing the Soviet pedagogies and teaching materials; establishing a centralized and all state-owned university system; and founding the Chinese Academy of Science (CAS), which removed the science research function from higher education (Xie Xuefeng, 2004, pp. 75-87). Of this reform, *Yuanxitiaozheng*, which began in 1952, was the most critical and consequential process. It dismantled the previously comprehensive universities into single departments, and then realigned them into new single-discipline institutions. This system did not change much over the next 40 years, until these institutions merged again into larger comprehensive institutions in the 1990s (Hu Jianhua, 2001).

Jiaoyu Dageming, started in 1958, “diverged from the Soviet mode rather than reversed the Soviet mode”(Hu Jianhua, 2003). In fact, it was a part of *Dayuejin* (the Great Leap Forward) initiated by Mao Zedong. It followed Mao’s indication that “the higher institutions should be led by the Party committee, should serve the *people*, and should combine education with labor work” (Xie Xuefeng, 2004, pp. 94-95). It resulted in many wrongdoings in practice, such as the overstrained political criticism of the scholars and their research, chaos within teaching, and the blind growth of higher education scale. Therefore, *Jiaoyubu zhishugaodengxuexiao zanxing gongzuotiaoli* [Provisional Regulations for Ministry of Education Administered Universities] in 1961 terminated *Jiaoyu Dageming* and launched *Tiaozheng Zhengdun*. The effectual measures led the education system back to normal in the mid 1960s. The Cultural Revolution, which started in 1966, however interrupted these good efforts.

During the Cultural Revolution, education emerged as “both a means and an end”(Pepper, 1991); educational reform was “one of the movement’s ultimate aims”(ibid); and higher education was severely affected. All universities and colleges

^① They are still respected and memorialized by contemporary Chinese intellectuals (Chen Pingyuan, 2002; Chen Yuan, 2005). Some of them, such as the Peking University led by Cai Yuanpei and the National Southwestern Associated University incorporated during the Sino-Japanese War^①, are often recalled by the press and the public for their “true university spirit”.

stopped enrolling students late in 1966. Enrollment partially resumed in 1970, but admission from that point until 1977 became largely based on *Jiatingchengfen* (family political class) rather than academic merit^①. The admission policy was originally intended to expand opportunities for the students from working class and peasants, and to produce new intellectuals loyal to the working class and peasants. The admission process, however, turned into unequal competition due to bribery and nepotism, with most enrolled students being of low academic potential (Liu Hui, 2010).

Furthermore, a sequence of political movements targeting intellectuals continued to endanger the university faculty^②. From 1965 to 1977, the number of professors decreased from 3,500 to 2,200; associate professors from 4,300 to 3,500; and lecturers from 29,200 to 27,200. Higher education institutions, however, recruited about 8,000 new faculty from 1970 to 1977, many of whom were not qualified academically (Ying Wangjiang, 2008). The problems in recruiting qualified students and keeping excellent teachers, along with poor teaching conditions, insufficient academic training and the popularity of “useless schooling” resulted in a profound decline in the quality of higher education.

Additionally, research activities and postgraduate education in the universities were either transferred to the national laboratories or stopped, and many works of literature, archival materials, and cultural relics were damaged.

THE NEW JOURNEY

In 1976, Mao Zedong died in September, *Sirenbang* (the Gang of Four) fell in October, and the Cultural Revolution ended. At this time, a national reconstruction was much anticipated. The government led by Deng Xiaoping, a strong statesman, and his colleagues subsequently pursued national reconstruction of Chinese higher education.

Preparing for Change: 1977

Deng Xiaoping’s statecraft was very constructive. His ideas regarding science and education were deeply affected by those of Hu Yaobang and Hu Qiaomu (Tsou Tang, 1994, pp. 120-122), especially two reports they wrote in 1975^③. Deng regarded intellectuals as a major force in rebuilding the country rather than *Choulaojiu* (the Stinking Ninth Category of Class Enemies, a disparaging term advocated by Mao Zedong to name intellectuals). A recorded private conversation depicts Deng’s strategic thinking two months before he returned to the political centre. In this record, he said that the mission of Chinese government was to realize modernization; that

^① The admission from 1949 to 1965 was partially based on *Jiatingchengfen*, too.

^② At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, many professors and senior administrators were humiliated as the “reactionary academic czar” by *Hongweibing* (the Red Guard). Some were persecuted to death; and some committed suicide. Intellectuals who had been targeted in the pre-1966 political campaigns, such as *Sixianggaizao* (the Brainwashing Movement) (Xie Yong, 1999), *Fanyou* (the Anti-Rightist Movement) (Li Qinggang, 2002) and *Fanyou Kuodahua* (the Expansion of the Anti-Rightist Movement) (Yu Bing, 2009), were crushed in the Cultural Revolution again. Many *Youpai* (who had been recognized as the Rightists) died before *Pingfan* (the rehabilitation after the Cultural Revolution).

^③ In 1975, Deng and his colleagues tried to start the construction but failed.

science and technology would play a key role in this process; and that education should be developed first to produce the necessary talent to conduct important research. He also pointed out that education and science were key areas for restoring social order and that “within the party a special atmosphere—to respect knowledge and intellectuals and to fight against the wrong ideology that disrespects intellectuals—must be created”(Deng Xiaoping, 1994d).

As soon as Deng regained political power around July 1977, he volunteered to take responsibility for administering science and education. The scientific and educational communities were still barred by *Lianggeguji* (Two Estimations) and *Lianggefansi* (Two Whatevers) of the previous political authorities^①. Deng’s efforts started with the Symposium on Science and Education on 4 August 1977.

Deng himself initiated and oversaw this five-day Symposium. He invited 33 scientists and educators as well as some leaders of the CAS, the Ministry of Education (MOE), and the Policy Research Office of the CPC Central Committee to the meetings. Deng did not give an opening speech by convention, and most of the time he was listening carefully. In fact, Deng had prepared well before the Symposium (Party Literature Research Centre of the CPC Central Committee, 2004), and the attitudes and suggestions of the participants evidenced in the Symposium confirmed the faith Deng had in the new direction for education. Finally, Deng delivered a closing speech on 8 August and gave his own response about the highly concerned issues (Deng Xiaoping, 1994a). In this speech, he spoke of higher education many times. He suggested concentrating resources to strengthen some selected *Zhongdiandaxue* (key universities) and gradually increasing their research capacity; framing all higher education institutions around a national set of uniform subjects; and recruiting students directly from high schools.

Of all the consequent policies, resuming the college entrance examination is deemed to be “the turning point that ushered in the whole reconstruction of Chinese education”(Yan Guangcai, 2008). In December 1977, 5.7 million candidates rushed to *Gaokao* (the national college entrance examination), and after the exam was administered, 273,000 were admitted by 404 colleges. From that point on, all colleges select their students every year according to the scores the students obtain in *Gaokao*. The content of *Gaokao* and the scale of required scores has been a central issue and has aroused many disagreements. Further, deciding to what extent *Gaokao* scores reveal students’ academic potential is always questionable. Still, the general consensus seems to have arrived: the examination provides a relatively fair, effective, and efficient channel for the flow of intelligent young men and women in a country that was—as it is now—so thirsty for talent, but limited in educational resources. At the least *Gaokao* should not be eliminated or severely curtailed now or in the near future.

Turning Around: 1978-1984

For the governors of such a huge country, efficient decision-making and

^① *Lianggeguji* refers to the judgments of the Gang of Four that totally repudiated the intellectuals and the education in the 17 years from 1945 to 1965. *Lianggefansi* was brought forward by Hua Guofeng, the chairman appointed by Mao, that Mao’s sayings and doings were supreme directives.

determined execution were of primary consideration, especially at this crucial moment when the public were expecting more explicit information about whether the newly established political core was steady, ready to end the chaos, and lead them to a better life. Everyone was waiting for news from the capital. Thus, national meetings came intensively one after another to collect wisdom from the people, reach agreements among different groups, and push all local governments to action under the central government's instructions. Three important meetings in 1978 set the stage for the entire reconstruction in higher education.

The National Conference on Science (in March) and the National Conference on Education (in April) were held in 1978 by the CPC Central Committee as the first key signals for science and education. Deng made two important statements at these meetings (Deng Xiaoping, 1994b, 1994c), in which he again set forth policies to inspire intellectuals and measures to rebuild the science and education systems. He also patiently explained why the country needed to implement these policies. With his support, three detailed proposals, *1978–1985 quanguo kexuejishu fazhangangyao* [National Program for the Development of Science and Technology (1978-1985)], *1978—1985 quanguo jiaoyushiye guihuagangyao* [National Program for Development of Education (1978-1985)] and *Quanguo putonggaodengxuexiao zanxing gongzuotiaoli* [Provisional Rules for All the Higher Education Institutions] were formed at these meetings. The first two described the principal plans at the national level, with the third designed to regulate individual institutions.

At the end of 1978 came the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, an epoch-making transition in Chinese modern history, which reformulated an unprecedented political line to build a socialist society with Chinese characteristics. By this meeting, CCP decided to abandon *Jiejidouzheng* (class struggle) and focus on economic construction with four cardinal principles^① and the opening-up policy.

As Two Estimations were declared wrong, the period between 1949 and 1965 was recognized as the best times for the development of science and education in the short history of the new republic. Furthermore, China had long fallen away from the mainstream of international higher education, and the central government was conscious of the gap *between China and developed Western countries*. Thus, many measures initiated by the central government in the early reconstruction were taken, on one hand, to model the higher education system after 1965's principles and, on the other hand, to enlarge its size and scale. Specifically, they could be categorized as follows, and most of them involved some momentous official documents proposed by the MOE and issued by the State Council:

- **Reorganizing the teaching body.** In March 1978, *Guanyu gaodengxuexiao huifu queding he tisheng jiaoshizhiwu wenti de qingshibaogao* [Report on Restoring Teachers' Posts and Ranks in Higher Education Institutions] was released. Late this same year, the central government started to *Boluanfanzheng* (set wrong things right) and rehabilitate intellectuals who had been humiliated during and before the Cultural Revolution. In the higher

^① The principles to be upheld for the nation for long consist of the socialist path, the people's democratic dictatorship, the leadership of CPC, and Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong thought.

education institutions of Heilongjiang province alone, up to 3,472 people charged through false verdicts and 1,335 labeled as Rightists were rehabilitated in 1979 (Long Zhengzhong, 2005). As the teaching body gained enthusiasm for work, another administrative statute, *Guanyu gaodengxuexiao jiaoshi zhize ji kaohe de zanxing guiding* [Provisional Regulations on the Duties and Evaluations of Teachers in Higher Education Institutions] was issued in November 1979 to assure the quality of the teaching staff.

• **Rebuilding key universities.** On 17 February 1978, *Guanyu huifu he banhao quanguo zhongdian gaodengxuexiao de baogao* [Report on Rebuilding the National Key Universities] was issued. The purposes of rebuilding key universities were reported to be benchmarking the higher education institutions; immediately improving the quality of higher education; and adapting the universities to meet economic and social needs. The key universities were supposed to be built into both “education centres” and “research centres.” They were conferred with privileges, such as concentrating prominent teachers, high-quality resources, and prioritizing enrolling the best students (Hu Bingxian, 2006). These policies helped pave the road for Project 211 and Project 985 in the 1990s, and the hierarchical system of Chinese universities today^①.

• **Readjusting higher education institutions.** Data (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 1985) shows that the number of higher education institutions in both 1965 and 1970 was 434, but it decreased to 387 in 1975. Accordingly, the central government instructed institutions that had been moved, merged or split during the Cultural Revolution should retrieve their original status and institutional regulations, and some new institutions should be built. From 1977 to 1978, the number of higher education institutions increased by 50% to 598, and continued to increase to 902 in 1984 (*ibid.*). Still, only public colleges and universities, also called *Putong gaodengxuexiao* (regular higher education institutions), were legitimate. Additionally, those institutions were mostly administered by the surviving victims of the Cultural Revolution.

• **Restoring the postgraduate education.** From 1978 to 1984, 23 universities were accredited to establish graduate schools. In December 1980, the Academic Degrees Commission in charge of Chinese graduate education administration was established under the State Council. A year later, *Xuewei tiaoli* [Regulations on Academic Degrees] came into force. Since then, three degree levels—bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral—have been established. China began to enroll doctoral students in 1982, and 18 students received their doctoral degrees in 1983 to become the first doctoral graduates in China after 1978.

• **Establishing a uniform framework of subjects.** After the National Conference on Education, the MOE released the principles for resetting the

^① On the top of the pyramid are three levels of key universities: C9 League (an association of nine world-class university seeded players), the other 985 universities (30 universities), and the other 211 universities (about 70 universities).

subjects of higher education and established a special agency to solicit opinions from 89 prestigious scientists and professors about making the subject catalogues. By 1979, several suggested catalogues of higher education subjects had been published. Several years later, the mandatory *Gaodengxuexiao benke zhuanymulu* [Catalogue of Higher Education Subjects] came into use. Although this catalogue has been frequently revised, it is criticized for being inflexible and not adapting to the changing times.

- **Gathering resources.** In 1979, several national steering committees for college teaching were restored in many disciplines. These committees contributed greatly to revising the catalogues of higher education subjects, reviewing syllabi, and editing textbooks. By 1984, the newly published textbooks for higher learning included more than 6,000 volumes. Further, with funds and grants from the national and local governments, infrastructure such as libraries and laboratories were also greatly improved.
- **Developing a diversified system.** To help more high school graduates gain access to higher education, different types of higher education institutions, such as broadcasting and television universities, *hanshou daxue* (correspondence colleges), evening schools, and short-term vocational schools (at the level of junior college) were introduced or expanded. Private institutions were not lawful until 1982, when China started to encourage business ventures and other legal non-public sponsors to set up educational institutions.
- **Reestablishing extensive international communication.** As early as June 1978, Deng proposed to officially dispatch students to study abroad, and he said, “Do not worry about them not coming back, do not worry about working with the overseas institutions”(Zhou Mansheng & Teng Jun, 2008). Within 20 days, his proposal turned into MOE’s *Guanyu jiada xuanpai liuxuesheng shuliang de baogao* [Report on Dispatching More Chinese Students Abroad]. The first group of 52 selected students went to the United States in December 1978. After the first university delegation visited the US in September 1978, the Chinese academic community began international communication. For example, two teams of senior higher education administrators and university presidents went abroad to survey six countries’ systems of higher education in 1979, which resulted in a far-reaching influence (Zhu Jiusi, 1992). In 1983, the intense propaganda on Deng’s Three Orientations inscription^① gave rise to an upsurge in the education community of international communication.
- **Strengthening ideological education.** In August 1981, the MOE held the National Working Conference on Ideological Education in Schools. It was decided that higher education institutions should strengthen ideological education and thereby reinforce the Party’s leadership.

Table 1: Higher Education Data in 1962, 1965, 1970, 1978 and 1985

^① The Three Orientations is “making education geared to the needs of modernization, of the world and of the future”.

	HEIs	Faculty	Staff	Enrollment	Graduates	New Enrollment
1962	610	144 000	191 000	830 000	177 000	107 000
1965	434	138 000	195 000	674 000	186 000	164 000
1970	434	129 000	183 000	48 000	103 000	42 000
1978	598	206 000	312 000	856 000	165 000	401 000
1985	1016	344 000	527 000	1 703 000	316 000	619 000

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China, 1986.

Data (see *Table 1*) shows that the size and scale of 1985's higher education system increased 1.5 times from that of 1965's, and the number of graduates and enrollment both show a great trend of expansion from 1978 to 1985. In general, the reconstruction policies were quite successful, and the groundwork had been laid for further development.

Vigorous Strides: 1985-2007

From 1977 on, Chinese higher education bloomed in the political winds of reform and opening-up. Once *Sixiangjiefang* (*liberation of minds*), higher education has regained its vitality, and many local governments and institutions were revived. After Deng went behind the scenes in the late 1980s, the Chinese government went further in the direction Deng had explored. Under its leadership, several comprehensive plans and policies for education were made.

These plans and policies, especially the later ones, roughly expressed the public's needs and the broad consensus within the higher education community rather than merely the will of the government or political authorities. They were by no means the only source or reason for changes within higher education in this vast and complicated country. They did, however, sketch the reforms, and recorded how China responded to the changing context that mixed increasing student movements, a rising market economy, greater demand for higher education, internationalization and globalization, financial crises, and so on with the changes in Chinese political leadership. The following documents, therefore, were selected from the most influential periodic coordinating plans and policies that benchmarked the essential evolutions of Chinese higher education from 1985 to 2007.

•***Zhonggongzhongyang guanyu jiaoyu tizhi gaige de jueding* [Decision of CPC Central Committee on Educational Reform], May 1985.** The educational reform this document launched was in reality a companion of economic reform that started in 1984 and introduced more market forces. The essential effect of this education reform was that it drove “the reallocation of power and change of operational mechanism initiated by the authority over the highly centralized public education”(Fuxing Liu & Fang Li, 2008). Some universities took on bold reforms, then. Nevertheless, the student movements in the late 1980s alerted the government to take back administrative power and tighten control of the students and faculty in the universities.

•***Zhongguo jiaoyu gaige he fazhan gangyao* [Compendium of Educational**

Reform and Development in China], February 1993. This document came after Deng's Southern Tour in 1992, together with *Guojia jiaowei guanyu jiakuai gaige he jiji fazhan gaodengjiaoyu de yijian* [Suggestions of the State Education Committee on Speeding Up the Reform and Development of Higher Education]. The two documents signaled a return of a free atmosphere in higher education, under which private institutions were supported and the research functions of universities were advanced. China expanded the enrollment of postgraduate students, and started to invest in the fundamental sciences and applied sciences such as Project 211^①.

- ***Gaodengjiaoyu fa* [Higher Education Law], August 1998.** This law provided the general regulations on higher education, such as the basic institutional rules, the requirements for establishing new institutions, how colleges and universities should organize, the prerequisites of faculty to work in higher education institutions, and the rights and obligations of students. The form and spirit of Chinese higher education that developed since 1977 were codified in this law.
- ***Mianxiang 21 shiji jiaoyu zhenxing xingdong jihua* [Revitalization Plan for Education in the 21st Century], January 1999.** This plan was developed by the MOE to help turn education into a driver of new economic growth. The goal of Chinese higher education by 2010 were made to be “increasing the gross enrollment rate to about 15% and building up some world-class universities^② and subjects.” Hence, providing education to the masses and building world-class universities became chief goals in Chinese higher education.
- ***Guanyu shenhua jiaoyu gaige quanmian tuijin suzhijiaoyude jueding* [Decision of CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Deepening the Educational Reform and Propelling the Quality-Oriented Education], June 1999.** This decision brought up the concept of “quality-oriented education”. In this policy, the entire higher education system was required to complete administrative modifications and structural adjustments by 2002^③. It also reconfirmed the government’s determination to increase enrollment rates and declared the role of higher vocational education in higher education.
- ***Guanyu shenhua gaodengxuexiao renshi zhidu gaige de shishi yijian* [Suggestions on Reforming Personnel System in Higher Education Institutions], June 2000.** It went further in devolving employment autonomy to institutions than the 1986’s *Gaodengxuexiao jiaoshi zhiwu shixing tiaoli* [Provisional Regulations on Faculty Ranks in Higher Education Institutions]. In this document, ending the lifelong employment relationship between a university and its staff was a critical turning point in institution-level higher education reforms.

^① This project aims at strengthening about 100 key universities and disciplines.

^② Project 985 proposed in 1998 was confirmed in this plan. This project aims at building several world-class universities, and it currently funds 39 elite universities.

^③ From 1992 to 2002, as many as 493 regular higher education institutions and 215 adult institutions were merged into 305 new institutions (of which 278 were regular ones).

• ***Minban jiaoyu cujin fa* [Law on the Promotion of Non-public Schools in PRC], December 2002.** From 1978 to 1997, non-public higher education (or private higher education) existed as an accessory to public education, although non-public schools mushroomed after Deng's South Tour in 1992. Several national policies turned to recognize the status of the private sector in the whole education system until 1997 when the private sector grew too big to ignore (Tong Xin, 2009). But this was the first specific one to encourage and support non-public education in China. Together with its Enforcement Regulations issued in 2004, various non-public higher education institutions won a legal place and a better operating environment in China. In 2003 and 2008, “independent school”^① was legalized and regulated as a new type of private institutions by two additional laws. In 2010 about 20% of higher education enrollments were in the private sector. But in reality, the private institutions are still treated unequally in funding, recruiting students, and some other aspects. Neither the education quality nor the reputation of private colleges and universities could compete with that of the public schools.

• ***2003-2007 jiaoyu zhenxing xingdong jihua* [Revitalization Plan for Education: 2003-2007], February 2004.** The sections concerning higher education in this plan emphasized the ideas and actions to build high-quality universities and subjects (such as investing more in Project 211 and Project 985) and to initiate various projects on innovation, research and quality assurance. In 2003, the first group of students graduated after the considerable enrollment expansion. Thus, a project to assist graduates in finding employment was pursued in this plan.

• ***Guojia jiaoyu shiye fazhan shiyiwu guihua gangyao* [The Eleventh Five-Year Guideline of Education], May 2007.** Replacing the word “plan”(Jihua) with “guideline”(Guihua) implied a subtle change in this document’s role in public policy. In this guideline, it highlighted quality assurance and higher education’s role in serving the country through innovation.

The elaborate wording of these plans and policies embedded a subtle balance between reality and ideal; concentrated good insights into the changing times; embraced short-term goals; and left space for promising progress in the long run (e.g., by approving experimental programs or pilot reforms). This review of plans and policies also reveals that, behind the rise and fall of reform enthusiasm from 1985 to 2007, there was at least the political zeitgeist (e.g., Deng’s South Tour); incidental events (e.g., the Asian financial crisis); and the evolution of core policymakers’ views on education (e.g., marketization and massification). Grassroots voices were heard, albeit few were directly answered (e.g., the private sector).

Once such plans and policies were released, each institution and individual within the system endeavored to read between the lines, employ the policies, and grasp the opportunities that could only be captured. Then, chain effects began to ferment and stimulate the community to reform. Those reforms involved

^① This new type of private higher education institutions are established by the private sector within the public universities.

administrative mechanisms, government-university-industry relationships, private higher education, undergraduate and graduate education, natural and social science research, institutional policies, national projects on equity and excellence, lawmaking in higher education, financing and logistics, international cooperation, and communication, among many others.

Thus, it appeared reasonable and natural that the moment when Premier Wen Jiabao initiated a national discussion in 2008 to decide which approaches Chinese education should take in the coming decade, every part of the system sensed the opportunity for a new wave of reform (detailed in the 2020 Reform Strategy).

Tangible Changes on Campuses

Except for the emergence of crowded university towns, rising buildings, fascinating infrastructures, new laboratories and facilities, the most visible change on Chinese campuses has been the expanding student enrollment that increased from 273,000 in 1977 to 1.08 million in 1998 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 1999). But this was still far from enough. In June 1999, Premier Zhu Rongji announced the decision to massively increase higher education enrollment. In the official statement, the purpose was to stimulate economic growth through great domestic demand and consumption and to alleviate employment tension. Under pressure from the central government (Yan Guangfen & Chang Qinghui, 2008), the number of new college entrants suddenly increased by 50% in 1999, and then rose to 6.08 million in 2008 with an average expansion of 500,000 students per year.

Regarding postgraduate students enrollment, before 1994 less than 50,000 new students were admitted per year, but this number rapidly rose to 73,000 from 1994 to 1998, and the growth rate from 1998 to 1999 reached 39.3% (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 1995, 1999, 2000). In the following decade, an average increase of 37,000 per year led to a tremendous enrollment expansion, and as many as 446,000 new postgraduate students were enrolled in 2008 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2009).

The enrollment expansion has made higher education more accessible to Chinese youth. However, it has also brought with it many problems, including a severe quality crisis and resource shortages (Li Jinhui, 2004).

Beyond enrollment expansion, there are various angles to investigate the dramatic changes of the student life. Here, three changes are given special mention.

- **Campus culture.** Students enrolled in the late 1970s and the 1980s were highly self-motivated by the thirst for knowledge, even though campuses were not well equipped. These ambitious learners, with the sincere ideal to change the lagging motherland, made their campuses poetic, romantic and passionate ivory towers. With literary clubs and concerts, the zealous young people in the students' movement imbued that decade with an artistic and idealistic ethos. The older generation who still held the Communist ideology, stood against this "corruption" and criticized it as *jingshenwuran* (ideological contamination) and *zichanjiejiziyouhua* (bourgeois liberalization). The 1990s was a duller period as

the market economy was brought onto campuses. Students at that time were more preoccupied with the prospect to earn a good living; indeed, because college graduates were no longer ensured employment after graduation, the diploma gradually departed from its educational value. After all, chasing material dreams is more realistic in a more business-oriented economy. As the *80 hou* (the 1980s generation, China's Generation Y) provided the main portion of higher education students in the first decade of the 21st century, they brought unexpected vigor to campus. Thus, this generation, with unconventional behaviors and strong egos (a predictable outcome of the One Child Policy and cultural change) catch much media attention of both criticism and praises. Nowadays, *90 hou*, a generation growing cadres of digital natives with an interesting blend of globalism and nationalism, is set to rule the campus.

- **Learning experience.** Generally speaking, the ubiquitous politicization in schools has been gradually reduced since 1977, and teaching and learning have been improved. The overwhelming concept of marketability in the 1990s treated higher education somewhat as a market-oriented commodity. In the 21st century, the student-centred idea is a very popular concept in documents from the best universities in China. The transformation towards a market economy not only resulted in the end of free schooling and guaranteed jobs for graduates, but also prompted reforms in the classrooms. New curricula to improve students' learning experiences, foreign textbooks, bilingual classes, foreign lecturers, information technology, the pedagogical approaches such as case studies and seminars, all have appeared in Chinese classrooms. Today, quality-oriented education, general education, innovative education that combines teaching and research, and profession education are widely-implemented teaching concepts and patterns. Continuously adjusting subjects, implementing the credit system and the elective system, introducing minors and double-degree programs, and devolving some administrative authority from the university level to the departmental level bring many remarkable effects. Further, English learning is compulsory, and China has even set up a national test system to gauge and vet college students' English skills.
- **Sino-foreign cooperative institutions and programs.** The Johns Hopkins University-Nanjing University Center for Chinese and American Studies established in 1986 was the first Sino-foreign cooperative institution in China. After China's access to WTO in 2001, the policy to establish such institutions and programs transitioned from "limited opening" to "partial commitment." From 1995 to 2007, several laws and administrative regulations were issued to set the standards for such institutions and programs. According to present policies, the foreign institutions must find a local partner to settle a branch in China successfully. As of January 2011, 32 institutions and 358 programs for undergraduate education, along with 13 institutions and 137 programs for postgraduate education have been conferred official approvals^①. These institutions and programs, along with numerous student exchange programs, provide domestic students with more options for higher education. They are mainly high-quality oriented, but still limited in size and scale.

^① http://www.crs.jsj.edu.cn/article_read.php?id=12-19700101-59

•**International mobility.** Both international students coming to China and Chinese students going abroad for higher education each year have increased steadily in the past three decades. The former grew from 1,200 in 1978 to more than 60,000 in 2008, with most from Asian countries, more than half learning Chinese language and literature, and only a few coming to China for master's or doctoral study (He Xiangmin, 2008). On the contrary, data show that among the 1.1 million Chinese citizens staying abroad, about 75% are to obtain higher education or to conduct academic research. Additionally, more than 90% of the 229,000 people who went abroad in 2009 were self-funded.^① The main factors related to the fever to study abroad include the demand for high-quality higher education from the rising middle-class, the cultural capital and perceived distinction embedded in the experiences, and the demand for higher education unfulfilled by domestic institutions or the opening-up policies in education (Li Mei, 2008). The phenomenal brain drain worries the patriots, but increasing encouragement and support from the government and the institutions, especially the key universities (Fan Liping & Jiang Peng, 2010) is very certain. Another interesting phenomenon is that the Red Aristocrats or Communist dignitaries seem to be very keen in sending their decedents to the “capitalist countries” for at least higher education.^②

•**Research in universities.** Scientific research has always been of primary importance in China in the past century. After the Cultural Revolution, reviving the CAS brought tensions to its relationship with the higher education institutions because they had to compete for researchers and research resources. At the beginning of the 21st century, they are not only competitors but also close cooperative partners. Key universities play a profound role in strengthening China's R&D with equal support from the government. Each university in Project 985 is allocated billions of research grants per year from the central and local government, Natural Science Foundation, and other funding organizations. As the investment snowballs, Chinese universities have been making rapid progress in research performance. For example, Zhu's research (2009) shows that after the “bubble years” from 1994 to 2001, research performance (indicated by SCIE papers) in Chinese universities has been greatly advanced in both quantity and quality under a direct research incentive scheme. There is still a long way to go, however. According to the Academic Ranking of World Universities^③, a widely accepted university ranking based on six objective academic indicators originally designed to measure the distance between Chinese universities and other world-class institutions, only 22 Chinese universities (all of them 985 universities) entered 2010 among the world's top 500 and only two of them ranked among world's top 200.

THE CROSSROADS

2020 Reform Strategy

As mentioned, the year 2008 marked the beginning of a new phase in Chinese

^① http://www.gov.cn/gzdt/2010-03/12/content_1554230.htm

^② It is absolutely worth noticing. But the relevant research is still very rare.

^③ <http://www.arwu.org/>

higher education. Premier Wen Jiabao's role in coordinating the discussion and the broad consultation among the stakeholders finally led to the document *Guojia zhongchangqi jiaoyu gaige he fazhan guihua gangyao* (2010-2020) [National Outline for Medium and Long Term Educational Reform and Development (2010-2020)].

This outline represents the most exceptional plan in Chinese modern history of education in terms of its level of social engagement. According to the news release by the working group (Jiao Xin, 2010), the drafting sought to combine public voices with expert opinions; demand from the broad mass with national interests; Chinese conditions with foreign experiences. Drafting of the outline was completed by a leading group headed by Premier Wen Jiabao, a working group with more than 500 education experts headed by State Councilor Liu Yandong, and an advisory crew composed of more than 100 high-level scholars. A large number of workshops, institutions, academic societies, overseas and international organizations participated in preparing the outline. More than 4.5 million suggestions were received from the public. Even Presidents Hu contributed his direct efforts to modify the document.

The two-year process consisted of four phases. The definitive version of the outline was released in July 2010. The 28,000 word document comprised four sections, 22 chapters and 70 points. The first section included the Overall Strategy; the second included the Missions of eight education types (in which “higher education”^① was the fifth); the third addressed Overall Institutional Reform, and the fourth detailed Overall Supporting Measures.

In the outline, the Overall Strategy for educational reform targeted “educational modernization, forming a learning society and transforming China into a country with globally competitive human resources by 2010.” The expected institutional reform laid out in Section 3 stressed six aspects, including *talent cultivation; the examination system and the admission process; the modern university system; the modern schooling system; the governing system; and the opening-up of education.*

In Section 2, the core mission of higher education reform was stated as improving the overall quality (including the quality of teaching, research and social services) and optimizing the structure and nurturing institutional diversity.

Section 4 outlined the comprehensive measures to be taken. Five of the listed six aspects were

- *To build up a high-quality teaching and administration body with professional ethics and skills;*
- *To guarantee overall financial investment from the government of at least 4% of GDP by 2012, and improve the funding mechanism;*
- *To accelerate infrastructure construction and educational informatization;*
- *To improve the laws and regulations and the accountability mechanism; and*
- *To intensify the leadership of CCP on education and sustain harmony and stability in the whole educational system.*

^① “Higher education” in this document meant regular higher education, excluding vocational education and continuing education.

The sixth aspect set out the key programs and pilot reforms.

The key programs related to higher education included:

- **Quality programs. Strengthening the local universities in Midwest China.** Encouraging inter-institutional collaboration between the east and the west and university-industry collaboration. Applying the Excellent Engineers Project and the Excellent Doctors Project. Carrying on the 985 Project and the 211 Project, and launching the Distinct Key Discipline Program. Continuing the Undergraduate Teaching Reform Project, the Innovative Postgraduate Education Program, the Prospering Program in Philosophy and Social Science, and the High-Level Talents Program.
- **International cooperation programs.** Support a cluster of Sino-foreign cooperative educational institutions, international joint laboratories and research centres. Brain-gain of a large number of overseas high-level talents. Encouraging presidents and leading faculty to study abroad. Enlarging the scale of students studying abroad with national scholarships. Enlarging the scale of students coming to China for education. Emphasizing foreign language learning. Supporting overseas Confucius Institutes.

The specific pilot reforms related to higher education included

- **Tiptop student projects.** Encouraging higher education institutions to jointly educate high school students with outstanding academic potential. Encouraging qualified high schools to collaborate with universities and research institutions to build innovative talents pool.
- **College admission process.** Piloting the joint college entrance exam. Piloting different ways of enrolling students. Exploring how to narrow the gap of higher education accessibility between different areas.
- **Modern university system.** Exploring approaches to realize the President's accountability system under the leadership of the Party committee. Improving university constitutions, and piloting universities being governed under boards or committee systems with functioning academic boards. Reforming contract employment and human resources management, including the open recruitment and the payment system. Establishing fulltime research teams. Improving the campus affairs publicity system.
- **Governing system.** Developing joint institutes in public universities, the Sino-foreign cooperative schools. Regulating the for-profit and non-for-profit private universities as well as the independent colleges. Establishing healthy and efficient financial, accounting and assets management systems.
- **Mechanism for local educational investments and province-level funding.** A mechanism with long-term effects for raising education funds through multiple channels shall be set up; basic benchmarks prescribed for per student school outlay and per-student fiscal funding at different levels of schools. Effective methods shall be searched for to coordinate the spending of government revenues in support of education. Mechanisms shall be established to facilitate the sharing of education funds on an itemized basis. Incentive policies to boost government spending on education shall be formulated according to law. Preferential salaries and welfare policies shall be granted to teachers working

for long years under harsh conditions in rural, remote or border areas.

It is evident in the outline that both the Chinese government and the academic community have recognized challenges and problems in higher education (such as instances of inferior quality and shortcomings of the contemporary system) and the necessity to acclimatize with the times.

The general public's impressive engagement showed they had high expectations about the new round of educational reform. Whether the outline will be fully accomplished is in question, however, because the policy history of Chinese higher education reveals that some educational ideas could be emphasized in the text again and again, but are never truly accomplished.

Achievements

At the beginning of the 21st century China had a complete schooling system from kindergarten (for children under age six), primary school (six grades), middle school (three grades), high school (three grades) and higher education (four years for undergraduate education, two-and-a-half years [or so] for master degree education^①, and two or more years for doctoral education). Higher education institutions are dominated by the public sector, supplemented by the private sector, and enhanced by the Sino-foreign cooperative institutions and programs.

Compared with the higher education mess at the end of the Cultural Revolution, almost everything reconstructed in this process of starting from scratch (though with inherited handicaps) can be observed as a triumph. This includes a system generally in order (*Tables 2, 3, and 4* provide the latest statistics on Chinese higher education institutions, students, faculty, and staff). It is making contributions to the national and local economies and communities, and to the advance of knowledge. But the most spectacular achievements can be identified as the massification and qualified graduates.

The gross enrollment ratio has been rising in recent years, especially since the 1990s. The gross enrollment rate was only 3.5% in 1991, but by 2002 it had reached 15%, and in 2009 it reached 23.3%^②.

Furthermore, many university and college students that graduated after 1982 have stepped forward to lead Chinese development in politics, science and technology, culture and education, economics and business. 1982's graduates have assumed a greater role in the Chinese political circle (Gao Xinmin, 2008). Eighty percent of today's administrators at Chinese top universities has been replaced by the post-1977 higher education graduates. And, the break of the scientific intellectual lineage that had raised serious concern in the early 1990s has been closed by the mainly the talented university students in the 1980s (Ke Ji, 2008). Therefore, the elites cultivated by China's higher education system after 1977 are virtually shaping China's today and tomorrow with their talents as informed by their particular experiences and views.

^① Many master degree programs in China exist as a terminal rather than transitional degree education.

^② http://www.gov.cn/gzdt/2010-08/03/content_1670245.htm

Table 2: Number of Higher Education Institutions

Unit: Institutions

	HEIs under Central Ministries & Agencies	HEIs under Local Authority	Non-state/ private HEIs	Total
Regular HEIs	111	1538	656	2305
Of which: Independent	0	0	322	322
Of which: Vocational	2	790	279	1071
Of which: Providing Graduate Programs	98	383	0	481
HEIs for Adults	14	368	2	384
Other Non-state/private HEIs	0	0	812	812

Source: Ministry of Education of China, by December 2010<http://www.moe.edu.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/s4971/201012/113595.htm>

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Table 3: Number of Students in Higher Education Institutions

Unit: Persons

	Graduates	Degrees Awarded	Entrants	Enrolment
Postgraduates in Regular HEIs	371273	367871	510953	1404942
Of which: Doctor's Degrees	48658	46616	61911	246319
Of which: Master's Degrees	322615	321255	449042	1158623
Undergraduates in Regular HEIs	2455359	2298200	3261081	11798511
Students Enrolled in Adult HEIs	1943893	108750	2014776	5413513
Students Enrolled in Distance Learning	983521	24404	1625687	4172721
Students Enrolled in In-service Programs	0	101956	115985	394331
Students Enrolled in RTVUs	1113	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
Foreign Students	55251	9013	73266	117548

Source: Ministry of Education of China, by December 2010<http://www.moe.edu.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/s4971/201012/113591.htm>

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Table 4: Number of Faculty and Staff in Higher Education Institutions 2008

Unit: Persons

	Full-time Teachers	Administration Personnel	Supporting Staff	Personnel in Others Units	Total
Regular HEIs	1295248	292046	199692	324465	2111451

Adult HEIs	50402	15238	9497	9059	84196
Non-state/Private HEIs	17881	9500	5369	5325	38075
Total	1363531	316784	214558	338849	2233722
Of Which: Female	629289	143310	114893	124987	1012479

Source: Ministry of Education of China, by December 2010

<http://www.moe.edu.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/s4971/201012/113561.htm>

Challenges Ahead

Although Chinese higher education has progressed greatly since 1977, criticisms about the current system abound, both externally (from public policymakers, parents, employers, and social commentators) and internally (from administrators, teachers, students, and higher education researchers). *The National Outline for Medium and Long Term Educational Reform and Development (2010-2020)* has recognized many of the problems and is itself a response. But the written ones only touches the surface. The authors of this article discuss three of the unwritten ones that touches the core here.

First, Chinese higher education lacks self-reliance, independent judgment, and sufficient control of its own future. Studies of higher education development in China before and after 1977 show that the system and its development have been dominated by politics and the economy. The political factor is mainly the ideological perspective that Chinese higher education should be purely socialist with Chinese characters under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. The economic factors stem mainly from policymakers' demands that higher education should serve economic growth, originating from political values. Those political factors have been powerful and intensive, thus pointing to another problem: past reforms of higher education have been always initiated externally, rather than from within higher education system itself, and it tames the entrepreneurship and gumption of the system.

Second, the system is weighed down by excessive bureaucracy. Currently, public higher education institutions in China have the status of semi-governmental authorities. Institutional leaders are appointed by the administering educational authority, and administrative units (even academic units) within an institution exhibit similar bureaucratic structure and culture to government bodies. This bureaucracy has contributed to overstaffing, low productivity, and low efficiency. Indeed, it is feeding a crisis of morale in higher education institutions.

Third, proper academic values and ethics need to be established. Recently, China has many academic scandals, which have damaged the academic community's image both domestically and internationally. It has been pointed out that the reason for academic misconduct in China might be "the pressure to rack up publications in high-impact journals" (Qiu, 2010). There are also problems in the research culture. For example, *Guanxi* (social network) sometimes plays a more important role in

applying for research grants, and “it is almost an open secret that doing good research is not as important as schmoozing with powerful bureaucrats and their favorite experts” (Shi Yigong & Rao Yi, 2010).

With persistent reform and opening-up policy, the contemporary Chinese higher education system is not a monolithic whole. And such problems hindering China’s academic independence, excellence and equity are under discussion. The possible solutions are hotly debated at present, and the future is full of uncertainty.

The reform of governing systems toward university autonomy in the 2020 Reform Strategy could be either a mere beautiful promise or a substantial turning point. Regarding the devolution of institutional bureaucracy in higher education, prominent reforms in Shenzhen^① and quieter reforms in some other regions might inspire some hope. Moreover, China is sparing no effort to attract high-level overseas academics, and the new blood brought in by *Qianren jihua* (1000-Elite Program) and other schemes will surely lead to some change.

The odds are there to beat. What really matters for the future of Chinese higher education might be whether it is willing to embrace the reforms deep into core educational and academic values. Besides, there are two clouds—political stability and economic stability—hanging over the country in transition. If possible, they could become the leading factors that direct the development of Chinese higher education. This consideration is not a nonsense as China is confronting an increasing number of serious social problems.

SUMMARY

Contemporary Chinese higher education was born partly in denial of, and in opposition to, a long-standing higher learning history of more than 2,000 years. It has grown as a hybrid of the Eastern and Western forms, and has struggled to develop its own identity since 1949.

The year 1977 is of special significance in this great process. It was the turning point between chaos and order, and the divide between being closed and opening-up. In the first few years after 1977, reconstruction under the leadership of CCP and the central government was very effective. Then, a series of further reforms were executed to establish a new system in place of the ruin left by the Cultural Revolution.

In a short three-decade period, a complete higher education system, with its own unique characteristics, has been built with efforts emanating from the top down. Now, it has stepped onto the track of massification and has contributed millions of qualified human resources to the flourishing country.

Thirty years of change, however, is still not enough. Consequently, many tough problems accompanied the dramatic shifts and excessive evolution. The coming decade, starting with the 2020 reform strategy, holds every possible change that will

^① One of the remarkable examples is the South University of Science and Technology. This institution is still under construction, and its ideal includes de-bureaucracy, university autonomy and academic freedom.

lead Chinese higher education to a brave new phase of history.

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