

EDUCATION IN CHINA SERIES



# Higher Education in China



Jianmin Gu Xueping Li Lihua Wang



ZHEJIANG UNIVERSITY PRESS

浙江大学出版社



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Paramus, New Jersey, U.S.A.

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## Series Editors' Preface

Of all human activities education is among the highest and noblest. As a social factor, it has been seen as “an engine of social development”, “a purifier of human harmony” and “an expression of culture”. Without education, the prospects for humanity would be bleak and world prosperity might be a mere dream. Civilization, social development and personal advancement are continuous with education: they precede and follow it. Nations, families and individuals stake their hopes on education. Because of its special role at all levels of human progress, education has been given priority in all ages in countries the world over.

As a result, humanity has accumulated a wealth of positive experience and, in the world's long history, many intractable problems have been solved, setbacks have been tackled and challenges have been turned into opportunities. But we cannot rest on our laurels or stop addressing the present and the future. New challenges and problems have come as a consequence of the faster pace of change and expansion, which characterizes the new century. To promote steady and sustainable development and foster understanding among peoples in this increasingly global world of ours, we should never give up exploring new avenues and finding new opportunities. Education, as history shows, is perhaps the single best approach we can rely on to achieve our goals. With this background, mutual exchange and cooperation become all the more important.

China's rise in the recent past has benefited from educational development spanning a period of sixty years, beginning with the birth of the People's Republic of China. China has made considerable strides and achieved enviable goals in the field of education during often very difficult times. Now, with a population of about 1.3 billion, our country, which has the largest educational system in the world, is well on track in successfully achieving the “popularization of compulsory education” and the “massification of higher education”. Some of China's achievements may surprise us: a modern educational system is basically in place; vocational and technical educational policy tries to meet the demands of social and economic development; the internationalization of education has set out along a broad avenue; educational policies and legislation are being regularly improved, etc. At the same time, however, as a developing country, China is facing many hurdles and challenges in her task of further developing the educational system.



Education is part of China's overall development, and as such it requires her own efforts, wisdom and innovation in order to set up and manage a modern educational system able to respond to the unique challenges she faces. To sustain development, however, China needs to learn from the experiences, the achievements, the research and experimentation of other countries, without underestimating in the process her own achievements and characteristics. In a word, since educational in China development will necessarily have a Chinese character, while at the same time being an inseparable part of the global educational system, we can expect China to play the role of a good citizen in the global village.

Mutual understanding is the precondition for international exchange and cooperation. However, up to now, foreigners have encountered many hurdles in trying to improve their knowledge of education in China. On the one hand, not many of them manage to achieve a working knowledge of the Chinese language and, on the other hand, there is an undeniable shortage of English literature taught in modern China. In order to help foreign friends and scholars know more about today's education in China, the *Zhejiang University Seeco Educational Research Centre*, which was established in 2007 to promote studies in the field of comparative education, has undertaken the task of producing the present *Education in China Series*. The various volumes endeavor to explain the context of education in China during the past sixty years, to introduce educational development in the present situation, to analyze the problems as they develop, and to look forward to the future of education in China in different areas, with each author offering his or her own original perspective. We hope that the series will help global society to better know the outline and features of modern education in China, that it will arouse interest in it, and will encourage readers to explore the legislation governing its development.

We are pleased to announce that the series has obtained the support of the General Administration of Press and Publication of the People's Republic of China, to whom we express our sincere gratitude. Many thanks are due to Zhejiang University Press and Homa & Sekey Books of U.S.A. for undertaking to publish the series. Finally, we would like to express sincere appreciation to the authors who compiled the books with true professionalism and selflessness, while handling busy schedules, and to all the friends and colleagues who have offered invaluable criticism, advice and encouragement.

Xiaozhou Xu & Carlo Socol  
Hangzhou, China

## Preface

For quite some time now, the world has been watching with interest China's 30-year reform and opening up to the outside world which has not only brought about changes within, but also propelled the country into the global scene as an important player in almost every field of commerce and industry. Among the factors that contributed to this unprecedented progress are, undoubtedly, the developments in its higher education system.

Taking inspiration from former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping who said, "Education should open out towards the world, towards the future and towards modernization," a wide range of reforms have been introduced into higher education in China in the last 30 years. Several international exchange programs facilitating mutual visits of faculty and research scholars and other collaborative efforts with leading universities in the world have helped to advance the internationalization of higher education in China. As a result, the world is getting to know more about higher education in China and Chinese higher education is becoming more open to the world.

This book is an attempt to provide international readers a comprehensive introduction to higher education in China. It is hoped that this work will help readers across the globe make sense of the amazingly huge and complex machinery that higher education in China is today. The authors have taken pains to introduce readers, step by step, to all the important aspects of higher education in China—its history and development, its magnitude and structure, its operational system and management, its processes of enrollment and employment. There is also an overview of the various levels of higher education in China, namely, specialized higher education, undergraduate education, postgraduate education, research and teaching staff. In a word, this is a book that tells you what higher education in China is and how it works.

While economic globalization and internationalization of education have greatly reduced the differences among educational systems in various countries, it cannot be denied that higher education in a country needs to be deeply rooted in its culture and traditions. Besides, many aspects of higher education are to be defined



by the practical circumstances prevailing in the country. Thus, China makes it clear that while moving ahead with the rest of the world, it does not wish to limit or diminish its unique national and cultural characteristics. Without doubt, higher education in a country cannot thrive if it is distanced from the ground realities, if it has no roots in the soil, if it ignores the people and their daily needs.

Some of the distinguishing characteristics of higher education in China highlighted in this book are the following:

First, long history: China is a country with a long tradition of higher education. Although the process of modernization of higher education in China started only in the mid-19th century, mostly through contacts with the western world, one cannot forget the fact that China is a country with a 5,000-year-old history and a culture steeped in the pursuit of learning and excellence whose best-known icon is Confucius, who visualized education as a powerful means for transforming both the self and the State. Not surprisingly, Confucian thought still holds its influence on the social and moral fabric of China.

Second, enormous proportions: higher education in China is an institution of enormous proportions. With the rapid growth of education during the last decades of the 20th century, China saw the phenomenon of mass higher education entering its threshold in the beginning of the 21st century. As a result, today there are 2,300 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) catering to over 27 million college students (20 million full-timers), and over 5 million graduates coming out its colleges every year. Yet, in comparison with other countries, it cannot be said that China is a world leader in higher education. The major task facing higher education in China today is that of ensuring quality at every level of specialization.

Third, centralized management: China has long been a society with high centripetal tendencies. This is reflected in every aspect of administration, especially higher education. Even after the formation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the power of decision making and management mainly lay in the hands of the central government. In the new climate of reform and modernization, the operational system of higher education has definitely become more diversified. A new system of two-level management (by the central government and provincial governments) has been introduced in which provincial governments play the key role. However, the system still has the characteristics of centralized management which is reflected, for example, in the reform of cost-recovery policies, the merger of higher education institutions, the enrollment expansion of HEIs, the construction of higher education zones, the "211 Project", and the "985 Project".

Fourth, the pragmatic trend: The pragmatic trend in Chinese higher education is quite obvious. For the lack of the spiritual quality, higher education in China has

always focused on the needs of economic and social development. While the political function of higher education was emphasized in the past, its economic function has come to the center stage today. This is particularly evident in the phenomenon of HEIs running factories and farms. It is also seen in the kinds of specialties introduced in the curriculum, in the planning of curriculum and the teaching process in HEIs. While education must have a social dimension, and higher education must keep in mind socio-economic development, these cannot be the sole aims of higher education.

Another important feature of higher education in China is its non-formal forms. Besides the large-scale formal system, higher education in China has many non-formal forms, such as Distance Higher

Education (provided through continuing education departments), Evening University, TV University, Correspondence University and the Self-study Examination of Higher Education, and the like. This book mainly deals with the formal system of higher education in China, keeping universities as the main focus. If this book can arouse the interest of international readers to find out more about higher education in China, we would feel the book has served its purpose, which is what we do hope.

This book is the joint work of Professor Jianmin Gu, Dr. Lihua Wang, and Dr. Xueping Li—all from the Institute of Higher Education of Zhejiang University—and doctoral student Jiyun Wang. Professor Jianmin Gu drew up the outline of this book and cooperated with Ms. Jiyun Wang in writing Section 5 of Chapter 3, Chapters 8 and 9. Sections 1 to 4 of Chapter 3, Chapters 5 and 6 were written by Dr. Lihua Wang, while Chapters 1, 2, 4 and 7 were written by Dr. Xueping Li. Dr. Lihua Wang also took responsibility for editing the English translation of this book. Lastly, we owe a great deal to Seeco Education Research Center of Zhejiang University and Professor Xiaozhou Xu. Without their planning, invitation, and support, the publication of this book would not have been possible.



## List of Acronyms

CAS	Chinese Academy of Sciences
CASS	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
CESRI	Central Educational Science Research Institute
CPC	Communist Party of China
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ICHEFAP	International Comparative Higher Education Finance and Accessibility Project
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
KMT	Kuomintang
LBHE & SNC	Liaoning Bureau of Higher Education & Shengyang Normal College
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MOL	Ministry of Labor
MOP	Ministry of Personnel
NAEA	National Academy of Education Administration
NCEE	National College Entrance Examination
NDRC	National Development and Reform Commission
NPC	National People's Congress
PRC	People's Republic of China
RC	Republic of China
SCCAD	State Council Committee on Academic Degrees
SEDC	State Education Commission
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

# Contents

<i>Series Editors' Preface</i> .....	ix
<i>Preface</i> .....	xi
<i>List of Acronyms</i> .....	xv
<b>1 History of Higher Education</b> .....	1
1.1 Higher Learning in Ancient Times.....	1
1.1.1 Confucius and his private academe.....	1
1.1.2 The <i>taixue</i> (institution of supreme learning) and <i>shuyuan</i> (academy or scholarly society).....	2
1.2 Modern Higher Education.....	4
1.2.1 The modern college in China.....	4
1.2.2 The modern university in China.....	7
1.2.3 Modern higher education in the Republic of China (1911 - 1949).....	9
1.3 Contemporary Higher Education in China.....	12
1.3.1 Higher education in the early years of the PRC (1949 - 1966).....	12
1.3.2 Higher education during the "Cultural Revolution" (1966 - 1976).....	12
1.3.3 Higher education in the new era (since 1978).....	13
<b>2 Structure of Higher Education</b> .....	17
2.1 Forms.....	17
2.1.1 Form of higher education.....	17
2.1.2 Form of ownership.....	18
2.2 Levels.....	20
2.3 Disciplines.....	23
2.4 Categories of Institutions.....	27
2.4.1 Discipline-based categories: single-discipline institutions, multidisciplinary institutions, and comprehensive universities.....	28
2.4.2 Function-based categories: teaching institutions, teaching- research institutions, and research universities.....	30
<b>3 Higher Education Management</b> .....	35
3.1 The Ownership System.....	35



3.2 The Administrative System	35
3.2.1 Administration of higher education	36
3.2.2 Decentralization of higher education administration after 1985	39
3.2.3 Higher education coordination	45
3.3 The Funding System	52
3.3.1 Diversification of higher education funding	52
3.3.2 Growth of private higher education	54
3.3.3 Government expenditures on education	56
3.4 Planning and Evaluation	57
3.4.1 State education plans	57
3.4.2 Evaluation of higher education	58
3.5 The Organizational Management of HEIs	64
3.5.1 Organization and structure of HEIs	64
3.5.2 Leadership system of HEIs	66
3.5.3 Rules and regulations of HEIs	68
<b>4 Admission and Graduate Employment</b>	<b>71</b>
4.1 College Admission	71
4.1.1 Reforms of admission	73
4.1.2 Forms of admission	74
4.2 Postgraduate Admission	81
4.2.1 Master's admission	81
4.2.2 Doctoral admission	88
4.3 Graduate Employment: Policy Changes and Current Situation	90
4.3.1 Policy changes	90
4.3.2 Current situation	92
<b>5 Specialized Higher Education</b>	<b>95</b>
5.1 Overview	95
5.1.1 Levels of tertiary education	95
5.1.2 Programs of tertiary education	98
5.2 Missions and Programs	98
5.3 Curriculum	104
5.3.1 Structure of the curriculum	104
5.3.2 Sequence of courses in the curriculum	110
5.3.3 Degree of control over curricular content	110
5.4 Establishment and Adjustment of Specialties	110



5.5	Modes of Education	113
5.5.1	Alternative Work and Study Mode	114
5.5.2	College-industry Collaborative Mode	115
5.5.3	Employment / Position-oriented or Made-to-order Mode	115
5.5.4	Platform plus Module Mode	116
5.5.5	Learning by Doing Mode	116
5.6	The Management System of Teaching	117
<b>6</b>	<b>Undergraduate Education</b>	<b>121</b>
6.1	Overview	121
6.2	Missions and Programs	121
6.3	Curriculum	124
6.3.1	Curriculum for undergraduate education before 1985	124
6.3.2	Curriculum of undergraduate education after 1985	129
6.4	Establishment and Adjustment of Undergraduate Specialties	137
6.5	Modes of Education	143
6.6	The Management System of Teaching	146
<b>7</b>	<b>Postgraduate Education</b>	<b>151</b>
7.1	Overview	151
7.2	Academic Degrees System	153
7.2.1	Establishment of Academic Degrees Ordinance of the PRC	153
7.2.2	Basic characteristics of the academic degrees system	155
7.3	Master's Degree Education	157
7.3.1	Recent developments	157
7.3.2	New directions	160
7.4	Doctoral Education	163
7.4.1	Recent developments	163
7.4.2	New directions	166
<b>8</b>	<b>Research in HEIs</b>	<b>171</b>
8.1	Present State of Research in HEIs	171
8.1.1	The research system of HEIs	172
8.1.2	Personnel engaging in research at HEIs	172
8.1.3	Research capacities of HEIs	173
8.1.4	Social contribution of researches conducted by HEIs	174
8.2	Features of Research in HEIs	175
8.3	Organizational Structure of Research in HEIs	176
8.4	Operation Mechanism of Research in HEIs	178



<b>9 Teaching Staff in HEIs</b>	181
9.1 Composition of Teaching Staff in HEIs	181
9.2 Recruitment of Teaching Staff in HEIs	185
9.3 Assessment of Teaching Staff in HEIs	188
9.4 Compensation of Teaching Staff in HEIs	190
<b>References</b>	193
<b>Appendices</b>	205
Appendix 1 Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China	205
Appendix 2 Regulations on Academic Degrees of the People's Republic of China	219
Appendix 3 "211 Project" and "985 Project"	223
Appendix 4 National Model Tertiary Vocational and Technical Colleges	227
Appendix 5 Websites for the Related Data on Chinese Higher Education	231
<b>Index</b>	233

# 1 History of Higher Education

## 1.1 Higher Learning in Ancient Times

Historically, higher learning in ancient China can be traced back to the Shang Dynasty (roughly 1600 BC – 1046 BC), but there is no consensus among historians about its exact origin. Most scholars, however, agree that in ancient China the institution of *daxue* (a Chinese term for “university” but with a special meaning in the Chinese context) originated from the *youxue* in the Shang Dynasty. The *youxue* was a special multifunctional place where education was only a part of its many activities. In the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046 BC – 771 BC), *daxue*, was established in the capital city as part of the national educational institutions (*guoxue*), and was even called “*piyong*” (imperial *daxue*) for a time.

Roughly speaking, *daxue* and other similar institutions of higher learning in the later period of ancient China had several main features. They were usually controlled by the upper ruling class for the purpose of educating political elites. The content of education in these institutions centered upon Confucian classics. Education at *xue zai guanfu* (government-owned agencies) and at *li shi heyi* (combination of officials and masters) dominated most historical periods of ancient China.

Besides the *daxue*, the early private academe and the distinctive *shuyuan* (Academy or Scholarly Society) were particularly important alternative types of higher learning institutions in ancient China. The *taixue* (Institution of Supreme Learning) was another key institution of education for a long period of time.

### 1.1.1 Confucius and his private academe

During the Spring and Autumn Period (770 BC – 476 BC) and the Warring States Period (475 BC – 221 BC) of Chinese history, the entire society changed dramatically. Government-owned education declined while private education rose remarkably. Moreover, private education, supported by various kingdoms, became the normal way of education. Private educational institutions, as a new form of education, in



contrast to government-owned ones, recruited not only the children of the elite but also the children of the poor. In reality, many of them were institutions of higher learning, rather than of basic learning. Scholars in these institutions often opened up free discussions and heated debates.

Among these scholars, Confucius was a well-known practitioner of private institutional learning at the end of the Spring and Autumn period. His private academy at Xingtan (Qufu, Shangdong Province today) was a fairly large institution with a *tang* (hall) for giving lectures and a *nei* (inner room) for accommodating students. Confucius usually offered courses on various subjects based on the students' individual traits and personal differences. It was believed that Confucius had around 3,000 disciples, 70 of whom were sages.

During this period, besides Confucius, Mo-tse, Mencius and other great scholars from different schools of thoughts were committed to initiating various private educational institutions. Similar to the Confucian academe, they were also institutions of higher learning, which provided advanced knowledge instead of general knowledge and high-level professional training instead of practical occupational training. These academies aimed at educating the *shi* (intellectual elites) who served the ruling class.

### 1.1.2 The *taixue* (institution of supreme learning) and *shuyuan* (academy or scholarly society)

#### 1.1.2.1 The *taixue*

The positive recuperation (*xiuyang shengxi*) policy in the early Han Dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD) brought about the development of education. Prior to this period, education had been thoroughly destroyed by the infamous policy of "books to be burnt and Confucians to be buried alive" (*fenshu kengru*) that was followed by the Qin Dynasty (221 BC - 206 BC).

In the context of the policy change, the *taixue* was initially founded in Chang'an (Xi'an, Shaanxi Province today), the capital city, in the year of 124 BC, which is considered the earliest central institution of supreme learning in ancient China. The proposal of founding the *taixue* was first sent to the Emperor by Zongshu Dong who believed in the superior value of Confucianism, and succeeded in convincing the emperor about its importance. Although there were only around 50 *boshi dizi* ("disciples of doctors"—*boshi* is a doctor or mentor and *dizi*, a disciple or student) at the beginning of the *taixue*, the number grew to 30,000 in due course. The *taixue* marked the beginning of the government-owned, imperial institution for the most advanced learning in the Chinese feudal society. At the *taixue*, not only advanced

knowledge and scholarship were pursued by mentors and disciples but also the Five Classics (*wujin*) were taught as the typical Confucian classics. The Five Classics included *the Book of Songs (shi)*, *the Book of History (shu)*, *the Book of Change (yi)*, *the Book of Rites (li)*, and *the Spring and Autumn Annals (chunqiu)*.

During the long period between the demise of the Han Dynasty and the unification of the Sui Dynasty (220 AD – 589 AD), the *taixue* continued to grow. But the split of the dynasty into multiple princedoms, continuous wars, and social unrest slowed down its growth. However, it is noteworthy that the Institution of the Sons of the Emperor (*guozixue*) was established in the year of 276 AD in the Western Jin Dynasty, coexisting side by side with the *taixue*. This *guozixue* was the common origin of other *guozixue*, the Temple of the Sons of the Emperor (*guozisi*) or the Supervision Hall of the Sons of the Emperor (*guozijian*) in the later dynasties. All these imperial agencies, with different names, were similar supreme imperial institutions of higher learning for the sons of the emperors in many dynasties.

In the Sui Dynasty (581 AD – 618 AD), the *guozijian* took charge of the entire education enterprise in the country and consisted of five schools, namely, *guozixue*, *taixue*, *simenxue* (four subjects), *shuxue* (calligraphy), and *suanxue* (arithmetic and math). Following the Sui Dynasty, the *guozijian* in the Tang Dynasty (618 AD – 907 AD) expanded into six schools, adding law (*lixue*) to the previous five. The education offered at *guozixue*, *taixue* and *simenxue* of the six schools was classical education of higher learning.

Due to the gradual decline and eventual collapse of higher learning in the dynasties of the Yuan, the Ming and the Qing (1271 AD – 1911 AD), the imperial institution of supreme learning could hardly develop. There were *guozixue*, *menggu guozixue* and *huihui guozixue* in the Yuan Dynasty. The central *daxue* was named *guozixue* at first and renamed *guozijian* later in the Ming Dynasty. In the Qing Dynasty, *guozijian* was also called *taixue*.

#### 1.1.2.2 The *shuyuan*

The earliest *shuyuan* in Chinese history also emerged in the Han Dynasty, three centuries after the *taixue*. In 178 AD, the Hongdumen Academy (*hongdumenxue*) was founded at Hongdumen, Luoyang, where literature and art were studied and taught. It is commonly viewed as the first special *shuyuan* in Chinese history. Its focus on phraseology and ode (*cifu*), novel (*xiaoshuo*), epistolary art (*chidu*), and calligraphy and painting (*zihua*) went beyond the long-standing educational ideology according to which Confucian classics was to dominate the content of teaching.

For similar reasons, the Hongdumen Academy, like the *taixue*, developed very





slowly during the period of the Three Kingdoms, the Wei, the Jin, and the Nan-Bei Chao (Northern and Southern) Dynasties. In the early Song Dynasty, *shuyuan* became a real institution of higher learning, no longer as the National Library or a private learning center in the Tang Dynasty. At that time, the distinctive features that characterized the teaching at *shuyuan* were: the connection between research and teaching, freedom of teaching, freedom of learning; the predominance of self-study in students' learning process, teachers' emphasis on enlightenment in their teaching and the close relationship between students and teachers. The well-established "Four Great *Shuyuan* on Earth" in history, namely: *Bailudong Shuyuan* (in Lushan, Jiangxi Province), *Yuelu Shuyuan* (in Changsha, Hunan Province), *Yingtianfu Shuyuan* (in Shangqiu, Henan Province) and *Shitougu Shuyuan* (in Hengyang, Hunan Province) flourished in the Northern Song Dynasty.

The *shuyuan* was transformed into a government agency when the Qing Dynasty started to control the country. As a result, it functioned very passively, serving simply as a vassal of the imperial examination system. In 1901, the *shuyuan* was replaced by "college", a modern or new type of Higher Education Institution (HEI), leading to the discontinuation of the academy which had a history of nearly one thousand years.

## 1.2 Modern Higher Education

The traditional higher education in the Qing Dynasty was gradually replaced by the modern system of higher education; this transformation of traditional higher education was shaped slowly between 1840 and 1911. In these seventy years of the last dynasty, the emergence of modern higher education in China was the result of both the introduction of western systems of higher education and the impact of other social reforms in the late Qing Dynasty.

There were two important types of modern HEIs in the late Qing Dynasty. The earliest type was the modern college (*yangwu xuetang*), a new, government-owned type of specialized institution aimed at training the kind of modern workforce the nation badly needed at that time. Another type of institution was the modern university (*daxuetang*), a western-style university offering 4-year courses, primarily focusing on specialized academic disciplines.

### 1.2.1 The modern college in China

The first and second Opium Wars prompted the Qing Dynasty to initiate a wide range of social reforms. Many top officials were determined to learn from the outside world,