

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE 21ST CENTURY

21

**Proceedings of the Forum of
Higher Education in
Conjunction with the Centennial of
Peking University
May 2-4, 1998**

PEKING UNIVERSITY PRESS

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in Conjunction with the Centennial of
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Organized by

Peking University

Sponsored by

Ministry of Education,
the People's Republic of China
Municipal Government of Beijing
IET Educational Foundation
The Founder Group of Peking University
Air China International Corporation
Shangri-La's China World Hotel, Beijing

Peking University Press

Beijing

Chief Editors Wei Xin Ma Wanhua
Executive Editor Ji Ren

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Published by Peking University Press,
Beijing, China

First edition 1998

ISBN 7-301-04015-6/G·0495

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Opening Address

Li Lanqing

Vice Premier of the State Council of China

Today, on the occasion of its centennial celebration of Peking University, presidents from prestigious universities around the world are gathering here in Beijing to attend the Forum on Higher Education of the 21st Century. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to meet with you, and I wish this symposium a great success.

Ever since the beginning of civilization, education has become increasingly important in human life. Although originated in Medieval Europe, university, as a flower of human wisdom, did not perish with the ending of the Middle Ages. Rather, it is flourishing and brimming with vitality, having drawn the essence from different cultures and traditions. Education has come to be a fundamental force in human existence and social progress.

University is an old institution. Some traditions established by scholars in Bologna, Paris and Oxford are still existing as of today. Ancient buildings on campus and timehonored academic principles all remind us of the past with deep veneration. University is also a young institution. It is not confined by traditions, but constantly renovates itself in order to keep abreast of our time and stay at the forefront of knowledge innovation to fulfill its historical missions.

Although China has a long history of education, modern universities in China were born and grows in the process of learning from the West, and developed with its base deeply rooted in our cultural and educational traditions. For over two thousand years, knowledge has been accumulated and developed in a unique way to become part of our own scholastic traditions. One hundred years ago, modern universities first appeared in China. As one of the earliest higher education institutions, Peking University has made significant contribution to the advancement of knowledge and promotion of academic and social progress for our country.

The core of higher learning is scholarship and people. The trend of academic division and specialization emerged in the 19th century. The division of academic disciplines has enabled each field of learning to develop in an efficient and innovative way. While it has undoubtedly promoted the development of knowledge, it has also led to segmentation of knowledge system, which resulted in a lack of communication, separation and even prejudice among different academic fields. A German scientist Max Planck once argued that science is an inherent unity. The fact of its being divided into separated branches is not due to its nature, but to the limitation of human cognition. Modern science and technology are progressing in a constant division and synthesis, where new findings often

occur at marginal or overlapping areas. Future economic well-beings will very much rely upon sustainable development. People are becoming increasingly concerned about issues such as population, environment, ecology, energy and space, which can not be resolved by any single discipline, but will require cooperation and concerted efforts across academic boarders and social sectors. In the future, society will need people not only specialize in a field or trade, but also have the ability to learn new knowledge and skills in order to adapt to the changes of economic and societal demand, and be familiar with the whole process of production. Learning a specific subject shall not pull our students closer to the classics and distant to the contemporary, nor should it mislead them to embrace science while neglect arts. It is crucial to foster a constant communication across academic boundaries so that they can be complimentary, mutually beneficial and cooperative. Universities have an important role to play in bridging the past and future, science and arts, theory and practice, individual and society.

At the dawn of the 21st century, we are facing with both challenges and opportunities of the future. It is commonly recognized that knowledge, including science and technology, will play an unprecedented role ever in the history of human civilization. Our government believes that a modernized China must build on education, and that education must serve the goal of modernization. *Invigorating China through science and education* has become the strategic priority for the nation. We can predict that higher education in China will make enormous contribution to our national development in the next century.

As a developing country, China's modernization drive is a long-term process. It is important to acknowledge that development across its vast territory is uneven. We can not talk about our higher education without noting this reality. Today, higher education is no longer an isolated system. Its development increasingly hinges upon the needs and support from its external environment. Changes in the mode of economic growth call upon not only quantitative growth of higher education institutions, but also improvement in structure, quality, and efficiency. China runs a large higher education system, with over one thousand universities and colleges, one thousand adult higher learning institutions, and a total student body of six million. However, the share number does not readily translate into quality. In the next century, we will aspire to build a number of world-class universities, which will undertake the missions of training creative people, promoting knowledge innovation, technology transfer, and strengthening ties and exchanges with other countries.

China is now in a crucial period of development. The goal of our reform is to bring modernization to 1.2 billion people. This is a gigantic project unparalleled in history. The magnitude, complexity and difficulties of the task are enormous. Clearly, we can not respond to these and many other challenges without depending on our universities and people they educate. We have reasons to expect that China's universities will become centers not only for knowledge creation and innovation, but also practical strategies and solutions to problems that China and the rest of the world face. Most importantly, higher education will further contribute to our modernization drive and revitalization of the

nation.

Peking University has one hundred years behind it. Few universities in China enjoy such a long history, which is why we often call Peking University an old university. The very presence of so many university presidents at its centenary brings new glory to its proud history. It also provides an excellent opportunity for university presidents around the globe to meet each other.

If we look at international higher education community as a big family, each university is a member who lives and interacts with each other in this family. Today's forum speaks to the very nature of this relationship and bondage. I believe that this gathering will deepen our mutual understanding and friendship, open up more opportunities for future exchanges and cooperation, and contribute to a brighter future for the mankind.

Welcome Speech

On this happy celebration day for the centennial of Peking University, I feel greatly honored to have all of you here for this grand occasion. Please allow me, on behalf of the faculty and staff of the university, to express our warm welcome and sincere thanks to all of you, our distinguished guests from all over the world.

Today, all of us gather here to express our ideas, to review our history, to examine the present, and to look into the future. I believe whatever the speakers have to offer in this forum will contribute greatly to our thinking about higher education worldwide, which will, in turn, help direct us where to go and what to do after we leave this room by the end of the forum.

I wish this forum a great success and a memorable occasion, and wish all the distinguished guests and friends a very enjoyable time and good health during your stay in Beijing.

Sincerely yours,

Chen Jia'er
President
Peking University

A Welcome Note from International Engineering Technology (IET) Educational Foundation

Mr. Chairman, distinguished guests, university presidents, and friends,

IET Foundation and IET Member Universities join with many others in warmly welcoming you to this higher education forum during Beida's centennial celebration. We are very pleased to have the opportunity to help initiate and sponsor and be part of this important and historical gathering.

It is our hope that you will be able to enjoy many ancient and modern wonders of China and to experience both personal and professional enrichment during your stay. We are deeply honored by your presence and sincerely thank you for sharing your wisdom and energy.

In our increasingly interconnected world, we all share common aspirations, responsibilities, and challenges; these cross all boundaries of culture, politics, and language. The central mission of universities around the world is to advance humanity on practical and spiritual levels, both equally necessary.

Higher education makes progress possible on the practical level through developments in technology, economics, organizational and environmental issues. Higher education also addresses mental quality of life with respect to philosophy and moral virtue and encourages curiosity, creativity, and insight to flower.

Our common desire is to encourage and help young people obtain the knowledge and skills they need to live a meaningful and productive life with dignity and integrity.

Our common goal is to ensure efficient and affordable access to high quality education for anyone with a desire to learn, and to provide sufficient graduates to meet the demands of rapid development around the globe.

We, as administrators, can accomplish this through good teaching and research, prudent management, community service, and foresight in obtaining adequate resources.

Our common challenge in academia is to teach ourselves and future generations how to enrich current understanding and technology with classical wisdom of the ages.

We are optimistic that this forum will facilitate collection and integration of wisdom which will benefit not only those institutions represented here but which can also be applied to enhance higher education around the world. We can link hands with noble purpose and mutual understanding.

In English, I wish everyone good health, continued great success, and ease in obtaining many blessings in life. Here is the same wish in Chinese. Zhu he women da jia shen ti jian kang, shi ye cheng gong, wan shi ru yi! Thank you.

Fun-Den Wang
President, IET Educational Foundation and
IET Member Universities