

Liberal Arts Education in a Changing Society

A New Perspective on Chinese
Higher Education

You Guo JIANG, S.J.



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In *Liberal Arts Education in a Changing Society: A New Perspective on Chinese Higher Education*, You Guo Jiang, S.J., provides a unique focus on the re-emergence of liberal arts education in China. This is the first book that explores in depth the development of liberal arts education in China.

Through the extensive use of first-hand materials relating to the liberal arts and current viewpoints of Chinese scholars and higher education leaders, Jiang concludes that China must implement a good liberal arts education program to develop responsible global citizens.

You Guo Jiang, S.J., Ph.D. (2012), Boston College, is Assistant Dean and Visiting Professor at that university. He has published monographs, articles on international and liberal arts education, and translations on higher education and spirituality.

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YOU GUOJIANG, S

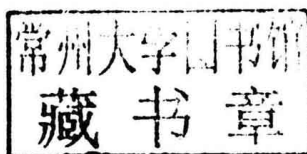
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By

You Guo JIANG, S.J.



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Liberal Arts Education in a Changing Society

Foreword

Liberal Arts and China's Higher Education

Ruth Hayhoe

Much of the current literature on Chinese higher education focuses on its expansion, its efforts to create world-class universities, and its contribution to China's economic development. This volume merits attention for its unique focus on the reemergence of an interest in liberal arts education in Chinese universities, which it places in a historical context, both in terms of Western traditions of the liberal arts and China's Confucian tradition. The extensive use of Chinese language source materials relating to the liberal arts brings an unusual balance to this topic. Also, current viewpoints of Chinese scholars and higher education leaders are captured through extensive interviews carried out in three leading universities in Shanghai. Given China's emerging leadership role in the international economy and geopolitics, the insights provided here into the cultural and spiritual dimensions of the vision of Chinese universities for their graduates are extremely important. After all, these young people are destined to take up leading roles at the national, regional, and global level and contribute to the shaping of our common future.

The core argument of this volume emerges gradually and becomes more compelling as it proceeds. A well-organized introductory chapter acquaints the reader with the research process and approach, while the second chapter provides an overview of the history of Chinese higher education in the modern period. The third chapter focuses on definitions of the liberal arts in the Western world and China, as well as key historical aspects of their development, such as the educational contributions of the Jesuit order, the initiatives of institutions such as Harvard and Yale, and persisting influences from China's distinctive educational civilization. Chapters 4 and 5 bring us to the three cases that were selected for intensive study—each a leading institution of a different type and all three located in Shanghai, which is probably China's most cosmopolitan city due to its history. While Fudan University is a leading comprehensive university, Shanghai Jiaotong University has an equally distinguished tradition of leadership in scientific and technological arenas, while the East China Normal University, youngest of the three, carries forward the model of the normal university as an institution giving education and the role of teachers the highest profile. Liberal arts has a distinctive meaning and interpretation for each of these leading institutions, and the degrees of engagement and response on the part of students, faculty, and administrators are different. At the same

time, there are also common obstacles to genuine transformation, which are rooted in the patterns of specialization adopted under Soviet influence in the 1950s, and exacerbated by the commercialization and utilitarianism that have accompanied China's opening up to globalization.

Chapters 6 to 8 draw the reader into a sustained argument around the themes of critical thinking, moral reasoning, and spirituality. Thought-provoking overviews of the broad literature and its application to the Chinese situation build on and integrate significant quotations from the scholars and administrators interviewed at the three universities and the Shanghai Department of Education. Of particular interest and importance is the theme of spirituality, which is dealt with in chapter 8, a topic of considerable sensitivity in the Chinese context. Here the best of the current literature on spirituality is used in engaging with a wide range of responses from Chinese interviewees. Also some insightful Chinese published sources are identified and discussed. Chapters 9 and 10 draw the threads of the overall argument together in a reflection on the transmission of culture and philosophy through the liberal arts and a consideration of future trends in Chinese higher education at both institutional and national levels.

This book has a very important message for policy makers, administrators and faculty in Chinese universities as they strive to implement a vision for the liberal arts that has genuine transformative potential. This is vital for a China that is increasingly recognized as an essential partner in global leadership circles. All those involved in university partnerships, such as Xian Jiaotong-Liverpool, Nottingham Ningbo, New York Shanghai, and Duke Kunshan, that seek to integrate the best of Western and Chinese academic values and practices in new collaborative institutions will also benefit greatly from a careful read of this volume. Finally, for the hundreds of universities around the globe that are hosting Confucius Institutes in partnership with Chinese universities, this book opens up the possibility of deeper understanding and dialogue that could enrich curricular development and cultural understanding on both sides.

Foreword

The Relevance of the Liberal Arts in a Global Context

Philip G. Altbach

Most of higher education worldwide focuses on relatively narrow education for specific professions and occupations—the education provided is largely vocational in focus. The idea of the liberal arts is exactly the opposite—education should be broadly conceived and aimed as producing well-educated graduates who have a range of knowledge in different fields and the ability to think independently. The liberal arts do not prepare a student for a specific job or occupation, but rather build capacity to fit into a range of possibilities—increasing the reality of the twenty-first-century knowledge economy.

Historically, the university curriculum was largely vocational—in the medieval universities the universities provided access to several professional occupations while at the same time focusing on several fields of knowledge now part of a liberal arts curriculum. Over the centuries, the curriculum in most countries became more vocational in orientation. Surprisingly, the main exception to this rule was a country with a very practical orientation to economy and society—the United States. A traditional liberal arts orientation, inherited from Cambridge University in England, dominated American higher education in its early years, and although much changed, has continued to be influential, particularly in the prestigious universities and the top undergraduate colleges.

In the early twenty-first century, there is a liberal arts revival in many countries, although it would be an exaggeration to say that the liberal arts are a dominating theme. A small number of universities are including a liberal arts component in the curriculum, and “university colleges” have been established that offer a liberal arts–focused undergraduate curriculum. Examples of these trends can be seen throughout the world.

The reasons for the rebirth or new establishment of a liberal arts orientation are twofold. First, as is the case in China, there is recognition that a higher level of critical and independent thinking is needed among university graduates, and it is assumed that a more diversified approach to knowledge combined with a pedagogical style that emphasizes discussion and analysis will stimulate such thinking. In addition, narrow specialization for a single career path is seen as inappropriate to the global knowledge economy of the twenty-first century, where jobs may not be permanent and flexibility is a necessity.

Further, knowledge changes quickly and interdisciplinarity is a core value. Traditional specialized higher education does not suit these new realities.

A liberal arts approach is a combination of a new approach to the curriculum that emphasizes a broad understanding of the key fields of knowledge and a new pedagogical orientation that stresses discussion, analysis, and independent work. It is unlikely that this combined approach will become a global norm, but without question liberal arts education is an ideal that has long historical roots and deserves careful attention in the twenty-first century.

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Introduction

Beginning with the foundation of the first modern Chinese university, St. Paul's College, by the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in Macau in 1594, the history of higher education in China already spans over four hundred years. Education, as in other countries and cultures, has always played an essential role in Chinese tradition, namely, to cultivate people's moral, social, and familial responsibilities as the basis of an ideal society. In the Confucian tradition, the goal of education was also to cultivate gentlemen and scholar-officials, and to help establish a harmonious society governed by a sage-king. The classical teachings of Chinese philosophy emphasized the role of education in government, family, social, and human relationships as a whole. For centuries, following the model of Confucian pedagogy, education in China was considered the pathway to social, political, and economic status. In recent decades, Chinese institutions of higher education have focused on professional studies and vocational training; this reflects the educational policies and curriculum formulated when the Chinese higher education system adopted the Soviet model of education in the 1950s. Students devote themselves to specific disciplines to become teachers, engineers, doctors, nurses, workers, ensuring a supply of professionals and experts for the labor market and contributing to economic development. As China continued to expand its educational system to meet social and economic needs, the past two decades witnessed radical reforms in all its dimensions, including private education, university mergers, internationalization and globalization, expansion and massification, and student and faculty mobility. All of these reforms contributed to the goal of turning Chinese universities into world-class institutions.

Over the last two decades, liberal arts education has become an emerging phenomenon in China. The revival of interest in liberal arts education in the mid-1990s demonstrates that the government and the universities have begun to realize that current curricula, with their narrow focus on professional training, are insufficient to enable students to meet today's global needs and challenges. The liberal arts, they are learning, not only lead to broad general knowledge, they also develop skills crucial to critical thinking, creativity, moral reasoning, and innovation. Indeed, the reemergence of liberal arts education is a result of the great need to educate well-rounded global citizens who possess these skills, as well a sense of social and moral responsibility in the Chinese context. Liberal arts education will have economic, political, social, and

cultural effects on contemporary China (Gan 2006). Internationally, liberal arts programs and curriculum reforms have emerged in many countries (Peterson 2012a; Godwin 2013). Chinese policy makers and educators have come to realize over the last twenty years the importance of the liberal arts in higher education if students are to receive a balanced education and to develop as critical thinkers. How contemporary policy makers, university administrators, faculty members, and students understand liberal education and how they view the role of the liberal arts in the curriculum of colleges and universities form the subject of this book.

Most of the current literature on Chinese higher education focuses on its expansion, its effort to create world-class universities, and its contribution to China's economic development. Very little, however, is known about the phenomenon of emerging liberal arts education in China. Through case studies of three universities in Shanghai, this book provides the academic and historical context for understanding a very important and timely topic related to higher education reform, namely, liberal arts education in China. It surveys the historical background of liberal arts education in China and describes the liberal arts programs recently developed by a few universities in China, as well as examining some of the challenges faced by Chinese higher education institutions in implementing liberal arts education. Beginning with a focus on liberal arts education in a historical context, the book explores definitions of the liberal arts in various contexts. It then considers Chinese higher education over the three and a half decades since China began its Open Door policy in 1978, which entailed reforms in the social, economic, political, and educational spheres. The past two decades, the period when liberal arts education emerged in China, will receive special emphasis. The emergence of the liberal arts in China and their place in the college curriculum are analyzed through their influence on China's educational, social, cultural, and economic system from the Confucian era to modern China. Key issues—curriculum reform, student development, faculty development, critical thinking, educational leadership, moral reasoning, spirituality, and policy initiatives—are addressed. Analysis will show how liberal arts can contribute to a new kind of educational development influencing the Chinese educational system in a global context.

This book explores the development of liberal arts education in China from a historical perspective and presents the current thinking of Chinese policy makers, university administrators, faculty members, and students on liberal arts education. It focuses on several main issues: How do contemporary Chinese educators understand liberal arts education? What are the predominant goals of higher education according to administrators, policy makers, and faculty members in contemporary China? What is the perception of the