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# 合并、扩招、质量保障政策与创新:

## 一所重点大学的案例研究

张静宁 ◎ 著



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# 合并、扩招、质量保障政策与创新：

一所中国重点大学的案例研究

## **Amalgamation, Expansion, Quality Assurance and Innovations:**

A Case Study on a Key University in China

by

Jingning Zhang

张静宁 著



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著 者 张静宁  
责任编辑 刘 坚  
电 话 (025)83793329/83790577(传真)  
电子邮件 liu-jian@seu.edu.cn

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## **Abstract**

The Chinese higher education reform policies since 1993 have been pursued in a centralized, top-down manner, which some theorists characterize as “centralized decentralization” or governmental “steering at distance.” This case-study research has two purposes. First, is to evaluate the implementation or the “situated practices” of national higher education reform policies (the amalgamation, expansion, and quality assurance policies). Second, is to elaborate on the locally-grounded innovative ideas and practices at a key university in a large city in China. The methodological approach used is phenomenological interviews, a vehicle that elicits “local knowledge” and accords the status of expertise to the interview participants. This methodology maps out the different experiences and meanings that different social groups derive from the centralized policies and generates new ideas for policy actions.

The findings suggest that at the institutional level, the faculty members, administrators, and students are highly

reflexive, resilient and pragmatic. Instead of mutely accepting national higher education reform policies as given, the faculty members, administrators and students are making an active effort to reappropriate distant faculty members, fashioning them into locally meaningful and relevant terms and practices. Furthermore, the findings suggest that small-scale, inside-out innovations grounded in local people's meaning-making systems and congruent with their perceptions of organizational purposes, profuse and proliferate at the university of focus.

In conclusion, in this study, I stress the importance to distinguish universities which naturally defy top-down, centralized reform efforts, and other models of organizations (e. g., business organizations and annexations of governmental bureaus). Furthermore, I discuss the viability of inside-out, bottom-up approaches to policymaking in higher education reforms.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

There is no denial of the remarkable achievements of Chinese higher education (HE) reform since the economic reform in 1978, especially after the watermark year of 1993, in which the passage of *The Outlines of Chinese Education Reform and Development* (hereafter *Outlines*) was agreed to be a turning point (Ministry of Education [MoE], 1993). Yet the problems inherent in the reform process do not escape critics' scrutiny. In today's global society, a superpower is no longer defined by the size of national armies or possession of nuclear weapons, but by "the size and prestige of university system" (Baker, 2007). Chinese HE, benefited from governmental constant investment and shrewd reform strategies, not only grows a capability to serve domestic needs, but also gradually elevates itself out of its chronicle "giant-periphery" status in the world's knowledge system (Altbach, 1981, 2001, 2004).

Indicators of such growth are numerous. To name just a few, by 2004, China had the largest HE system in the world, "with 19 million students enrolled in universities, adult education, private (minban) institutions and distance learning programs" (Mohrman, 2008). The enrolments of Ph. D. students, an indicator of a university system's research capacity, were 34,000 in 2006, and are expected to surge past 50,000 in just three or four years, overtaking the current world's leader, the United States. Besides, China has three universities in top 100 plus another two if one includes Hong



Kong. In 2005, one of the Chinese flagship universities, Beijing University, had replaced the University of Tokyo as the highest-ranking Asia-Pacific university, according to the *Times Higher Education Supplement* (Yonezawa, 2007). Furthermore, Chinese universities have been increasingly internationalized, turning into a relatively inexpensive and adjacent destination for further education for students from Asia whereas its possibility to attract students from other parts of the world, such as North America and Europe, is inestimable. In the year of 2005, there were 140,000 international students in China, a 27.28% increase than in 2004 (MoE, 2009b; Shambaugh, 2004/2005; T. Wang & X. M. Liu, 2006; Ye & Xiao, 2007). All the seemingly random evidence points to the enormous growing capacities of Chinese universities, and is constantly cited as counterexamples to the “center-periphery” theories developed by Altbach and others (Altbach, 1981, 2001, 2004; Gopinatha & Altbach, 2005; R. Yang, 2002).

Despite its success, critics constantly point out the problems inherent in the reform process. A plethora of recent literature assessing gains and losses of Chinese HE reform centers on three broad realms of concern: (a) the transition from the elite to mass HE, (b) the integration and differentiation of HE system (e. g., the appearance of “autonomous” institutions), and (c) the changing relationship between the government and universities, with attendant concerns of university governance and authority (e. g., Dong, 2004, 2005; Huang, 2005; Kang, 2000, 2005; H. C. Wang, 2004; Mohrman, 2005, 2008; R. Yang, 2004). The third area attracts most critical attention, as the disparate Chinese social-political traditions have given rise to the unique government-university dyad, a lack of institutional autonomy and academic freedom at the university level that stands in stark contrast to the experiences of Western “core” countries (Hayhoe, 1996). One line of Sinological literature tends to find sources in Chinese

indigenous scholarship for the explanation of this phenomenon. Hayhoe for instance, argues that the values and structures associated with traditional Chinese higher learning institutions have persisted and informed struggles and conflicts in the development of HE right up to the present time. In the traditional society before the abolition of the Civil Service Exam in 1905, education (e. g. the Civil Service exam) was the means to ascending political power, and the ruling class was able to control its servants by defining what valuable knowledge was. When Western-style learning institutions were transplanted and grafted on top of a highly sophisticated indigenous scholarship system in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, they tended to be viewed as an instrument of the State, and be annexed to state bureaucratic apparatus as traditional institutions of higher learning were (see also Bastid, 1987; Curran, 2005; Hartnett, 1996; Pepper, 1996; Weston, 2004).

More recent literature on Chinese HE reform, however, started to examine the uneasy coexistence of and tensions between a state-controlled HE system and the emergence of a market controlling mechanism in the neoliberal context (Hawkins, 2000; Law, 1996; Mok, 1997, 2001, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2007a, 2007b; R. Yang, 2002, 2004; R. Yang, Vidovich, & Currie, 2007), as critics point out that the fundamental assumption is that an authoritarian political system can coexist in harmony with a free market. The problems might not be manifest during earlier phase of the reform, but are becoming increasingly acute and in dire needs of attention in the current national policy context of favoritism, and post-WTO international competitions (Bao & R. Liu, 2002).

This case-study research follows the second venue of literature related to the contradictions between the bureaucratic and market controlling systems and highlights the uneasy government-university relationship through a specific angle, the analysis of the *ideologies*, *processes* and *effects* of national HE reform policies. By thoroughly

examining national HE reform policies, the readers can have a clear understanding of, despite the rhetoric of “decentralization”, how two types of independent entities, the national governmental bodies (MoE in this case) and universities interact with each other, and how one is apt to deploy, annex and steer the other to achieve goals that fit into the broader nation-building picture. This case-study research—the attempt to study the implementation of HE reform policies (amalgamation, expansion, quality assurance mechanisms) and the innovative change initiatives in a single university organization—will be based on this anatomy of the problematic government-university dyad.

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## Statement of Problem

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I will first define policy *ideologies*, *processes*, and *effects*, and explain why they help us understand the government-university dyad in face of the emerging market controlling mechanism of HE. I will then proceed to argue that national HE reform policies are neoliberal-ideology driven, which has both negative and positive consequences. However, in China the highly centralized policy processes are fundamentally discrepant with the ideologies underlying national HE reform policies, a fact that tends to amplify the negative and eliminate the positive side of neoliberal ideology. Given this understanding, questions profuse as to what effects national HE reform policies can achieve. The problematic government-university dyad, as is manifested in the analysis of national HE reform policies, gives rise to the necessity of this particular case study first on the “situated practices” of national HE reform policies and then on the innovative practices, the inside-out, bottom-up change forces at the university of focus.

Policy *ideologies* are the “taken-for-granted understandings that constitute parameters for what is legitimate—that is, what is

expected, appropriate and sacred, as well as the converse” (Gumport, 2000, p. 71). They explain what rationales are given for the policymaking; who stands to benefit from the policy, and if there are deeper purposes being served by the policy, etc. Policy *processes* refer to who participate, and how the policy objects are designed and formulated. Policy *effects* refer to the implementation: How policy practitioners and those at the “receive end” of the policy interact to bring about or fail to bring about the stipulated policy goals. By thoroughly examining the ideologies, processes and effects of national HE reform policies, I will demonstrate how the two types of independent entities, national governmental bodies (MoE in this particular case) and universities interact with each other, and how the latter is conceptualized, positioned and steered by the former to achieve goals that fit into the broader nation-building picture.

### National HE reform policy ideologies

Situated in the context of corporate or capitalist globalization (Olssen, 2004; Went, 2000), Chinese HE since 1993 has been neoliberal-ideology driven; that is, it is the quest for economic efficiency, effectiveness, economy, productivity that dominates policy discourses, as Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) lament that educational policies no longer stand on their own right, but are treated as subsets of economic policies (see also Mok, 2004; Torres & Rhoads, 2006; Torres & Schugurensky, 2002; R. Yang, 2002). Since 1978 when it started to shift from its isolationist, politics-oriented policies to outward-looking, economy-oriented policies, China has been “enthusiastically and actively” engaged in the global process (Vidovich, R. Yang, & Currie, 2007). The period of 1993 and 2009, the time frame in which HE reform policies in this case study (amalgamation, expansion and quality assurance mechanisms) set in, witnessed a deepening of global impacts on HE

reform initiatives and drives. Such effects are achieved through conscious and active borrowing, the “mimetic” processes whereby China seeks to imitate the practices of countries perceived to be successful (e.g., building “world-class” universities), as well as through inexorable and irresistible imposition, the “diffusion” of norms and values from “core” to “periphery”/ “semi-periphery” countries through various mechanisms (Green, 1997, 1999; McNeely, 1995; McNeely & Cha, 1994; Torres & Schugurensky, 2006; Mohrman, 2005, 2008; J. N. Zhang, 2006). For instance, Vidovich et al. maintain that there is “isomorphism” of educational policies in China and the United States, though not in policy details, at least in policy ideologies (see also Green, 1997).

Neoliberal policies have both negative and positive consequences. On the one hand, in neoliberal quest for economic rationality, universities are conceptualized in a simplistic and reductionist way, as engines of economy, as Scott and Harding (2007) state that “universities are to the ‘information age’ what coal mines and steel mills were to the industrial economy” (p. 3). Other competing social goods, such as quality, equity and democracy are rendered powerless in face of the addition to GDP brought about by technological transfer or student cost-sharing, as Torres and Schugurensky (2002) point out that governments “withdraw from [their] responsibility to administer public resources and from the liberal premise of pursuing egalitarianism, replacing them with a blind faith in the market and the hope that economic growth will eventually generate enough of a spillover to help the poor and disenfranchised” (p. 433). R. Yang (2004) comments that social justice issues are not the first priority for Chinese HE policies since 1993. The pursuit for economy and efficiency produces social weakeners, as “the group located at the bottom of social resource distribution with the lowest living standards, [who] are especially vulnerable to new policy pitfalls” (p. 175).

On the other hand, neoliberal reform advocates “deregulation,” in which governments resign from the traditional role as providers and regulators of universities, and shift towards a “facilitator” role, fostering the free competition of different institutions in a deregulated market. Many theorists believe that market mechanism eliminates the pitfalls of traditional bureaucratic control of HE, and is an incentive for quality, efficiency, differentiation, and innovations at local institutions (Teixeira, Jongboled, Dill & Amaral, 2004; Vandenberghe, 1999). It is expected that, universities operating in financial stringencies and highly competitive market are more innovative, efficient and responsive to the needs of economy and societies. For instance, Vandenberghe (1999) argues that universities concerned with their economic survival in fierce competition with peers are not only carefully calculating spending but also motivated to generate resources in innovative ways. In a similar line, Clark (1998) exalts “entrepreneurial” university that “actively seeks to innovate in how it goes about its business... seeks to work out a substantial shift in organizational character so as to arrive at a more promising posture for the future... seeks to become ‘stand-up’ universities that are significant actors on their own terms” (p. 4). According to him, a university that embodies a “steering inner core” (e. g., self-organized teams and groups by faculty members, administrators, or students within a single university or across different universities) is capable of innovative revenue-generating practices, and survival or prospering, even if it is not protected by governmental funding as flagship universities. Following this venue of literature, many observers advocate and celebrate the “decentralization” of Chinese HE (Kang, 2005; Mok, 1997).

### National HE reform policy processes

Whereas the ideologies underlying HE reform policies, and the legitimating ideas regarding what is good, expected and sacred, are

enforcing a decentralizing system, the policy processes are highly centralized in China—some attribute this fact to the lingering effects of the comand economy; some trace back further in history, finding explanatory sources in indigenous scholarship tradition ( Bastid, 1987; Hayhoe, 1996; Hartnett, 1996; Pepper, 1996; Weston, 2004; R. Yang, 2002; R. Yang et al. , 2007 ). HE reform policies emanate from national ( sometimes international ) centers, and filter all the way down to the universities. Universities have been recast as economic resources, in need of being strategically deployed for national economic development or international competition. With very few exceptions ( e. g. , Beijing University and Qinghua University ) ( Kang, 2005; Y. Luo & F. G. Ye, 2005; S. Pan, 2007 ), changes are given to but not created within universities, as universities stay passively adrift in external forces of change. In other words, the policy processes tend to endlessly amplify the negative side of neoliberalism, emphasizing the efficient coordination of economic resources, while eliminating the positive side of neoliberalism, not allowing universities to acquire sufficient autonomy and steering power.

First, major HE reform policies are mandates of the MoE. They are pushed forward by “heroic” ministers, in a non-consensus seeking manner, forming national tidal waves of change and co-opting all universities, in spite of some universities’ reluctance ( Dong, 2004; Mohrman, 2005, 2008 ). Taking the major HE reform policies since 1993, amalgamation, expansion and national quality-assurance policies for example, Mohrman (2003) observes that during the tidal wave of amalgamation between 1992 and 2006, some reluctant universities experienced “ ‘shotgun weddings’ at the behest of government leaders.” Y. M. Wan and Peterson (2007) lament that a proliferation of research emphasizes government’s role in initiating, prescribing and regulating university mergers, while there is hardly any research devoting to describing an institutional perspective.

The expansion policy in 1999 received even more critical attention, as the decision to increase undergraduate enrolments by 42% in one year was made and enforced in a 4-month time frame by MoE, detached from universities' preparedness or the market's ability to absorb university graduates (D. M. Luo & J. Liu, 2008; Kang, 2000). Likewise, national teaching and research quality assurance mechanisms are adopted despite frontline academic staffs' virulent criticisms of and resistance against them (J. N. Zhang, 2010). Song and Liao (2004) comment that, in China, top political leaders' will and government intentions are more likely to be crystallized into policies. "We use the word 'project' to describe a policy...The word indicates central planning and political sloganeering. Such policies hardly grow out of the market logic; rather, they reflect government's will and intentions" (p. 26).

Moreover, national HE reform policies bear imprints of the World Bank's agenda, who is consulted or participates in drafting of national plans since Chinese substantial educational borrowing in the 1980s (Hayhoe, 1996; Jacobson & Oksenberg, 1990). The World Bank is famous for attaching project covenants—side conditions—to its purse, dictating reforms in borrower countries, despite its rigid views on education and development and its ignorance of the borrower countries' perspectives (Jones, 2007; J. Xu, 2006). Furthermore, the Bank's tremendous power in educational decision making is attributed to not only "its capacity to mobilize funds and to impose conditions" (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002, p. 438), but also its capacity in research: the expertise, analytic skills and experience of its professional staff, its capacity to collect data throughout the world, and its efficiency in distributing the documents to key educational and political leaders in developing countries.

The Bank more successfully engages China in a policy dialogue, as the authoritarian and centralized Chinese government is



more able to enforce ministry edicts without fear of critical opposition parties and free press, as compared to “the quarrelsome, fractious, short-term, decentralized parties and democratic government of India” (Drake, 2001, p. 227). Y. Wang’s (2001) research finds out a surprising congruence between the World Bank’s policy suggestions on education and the actual policies adopted in China. The research cites eight areas where Chinese educational policies and the Bank’s advocacy overlap, such as decentralization, amalgamation, student admission, student cost-sharing, accountability measures. J. Xu (2006) writes that “the Bank’s suggestions are accepted and implemented wholesale as the first-priority mandates, although some Chinese leaders are skeptical about them. The ideas on efficiency and related practices ... are faithfully adopted” (p. 15).

In short, most national HE reform policies bear the imprint of the World Bank’s agenda. Some protector views maintain that the Bank “while influential, has not been the source of the reform program with which, after all, began before China’s participation in the World Bank. Rather, there has been a convergence of views” (Drake, 2001, p. 225). However, stronger evidence suggests that the Bank has been the source of many HE reform initiatives which are several layers removed from the universities that are actually affected, as Torres and Schugurensky (2002) state that the “World Bank has become the most important single source of multilateral technical co-operation and the lead agency in setting the education and development agenda” (p. 438, see also Hayhoe, 1996; Task Force on Higher Education and Society, 2000; J. Xu, 2006; Y. Wang, 2001).

Some attribute the highly centralized policy processes to the lingering effects of the planned economy; Some trace back further in history, finding explanatory sources in indigenous scholarship tradition (Bastid, 1987; Hayhoe, 1996; Hartnett, 1996; Pepper,