

# 开放教育资源在中国:高等教育改革中的辖治术探析

沈鞠明◎著



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# **Open Educational Resources in China: A Governmentality Analysis**

## **开放教育资源在中国:高等教育改革中的辖治术探析**

**Juming Shen**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>2010 Long-term Plan</i>	National Long-term Educational Reform and Development Plan (2010 – 2020)
<i>2003 Announcement</i>	Announcement by the Ministry of Education about Initiating the Teaching Quality and Teaching Reform Project for Colleges and Universities, the Construction of Quality Open Courseware (2003)
<i>2011 Implementation Opinions</i>	Implementation Opinions about Constructing National Quality Open Courses (2011)
<i>2012 Enforcement Measurement</i>	Enforcement Measurement of Constructing Quality Resource-Sharing Courses (2012)
<i>211 Project</i>	A project of developing about 100 national key universities for the 21st century
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CORE	China Open Resources for Education
CRTVU	China Central Radio and Television University
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MoE	Ministry of Education (China)
OCW	OpenCourseWare
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OER	Open educational resources
PRC	People's Republic of China
Quality Project	Project for Reform of Teaching and Improvement of Teaching Quality in Higher Education Institutions
QUT	Queensland University of Technology (Australia)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation

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## CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION

In a small, native-American college, a student is exploring materials about Middle Eastern history that have been digitised and organised into an open collection drawn from the Harvard libraries. A student in India is viewing film and texts describing Martin Luther King's life and examining the parallels with the life of Gandhi, accessed through online resources. A junior from the United States, who is spending the spring semester in Israel, contrasts Web-based data from archaeological digs in Turkey with the findings from her own explorations at Hazor. In China, students at DW University are watching lecture video recordings and downloading course materials from the website of National Quality Open Courseware.

The above examples are practices of open educational resources (OER) being used by different learners in various contexts and settings. Open educational resources are freely accessible, online resources, openly formatted or openly licensed documents and media that are useful for teaching, learning, education, assessment, and research purposes (OECD, 2007). In Mainland China, a number of programmes have been initiated to open higher educational resources to the public, and the use of OER has brought about a new form of the delivery of higher education. Furthermore, the programmes compose an educational reform that heralds changes to both the education sector and Chinese society. However, only a few studies have explored this rapidly changing phenomenon.

This study examines the nature of OER reform in China by utilising a governmentality analytical framework. The research question is: *How is China's OER policy reform process governed and in what ways has the practice of governing changed the conduct of higher education in this country?* In order to answer this question, the study employs a qualitative research methodology, as it is



considered to be the most suitable approach in seeking to understand and explaining social phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). By answering the research question, this study provides a better understanding of the unique approach to OER taken in China and how the OER reform affects higher education in China today. This kind of analysis has not been done before.

## 1.1 Open Educational Resources (OER)

The OER movement was inaugurated by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the United States in 2001, when their curriculum resources were placed online in order to share intellectual commons in academia. Since then, the movement has been adopted by many nations and institutions worldwide (OECD, 2007). Key OER programmes include Open Learn by the United Kingdom's Open University, OpeER by the Open University of the Netherlands, Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT) funded by California State University, and OpenCourseWare in Japan. China has been an active and significant participant in the OER movement through implementing the National Quality Open Courseware programme and its subordinate systems and programmes, such as the radio and television university system and the programme of China Open Resources for Education (CORE).

Much of the academic literature on OER suggests that most OER programmes involve three interrelated groups of participants. They are resource administrators, resource providers, and resource receivers. These three groups of participants play different roles in the movement. Resource administrators are institutional administrative departments, educational organisations, or government departments at different levels, which all organise and administer the movement. Resource providers are higher education institutions, their faculties, and individual academics. Resource receivers include learners from various backgrounds. The OER movement in China involves these three groups as well, and they are examined in this study.

Different perspectives have been adopted in the existing literature that investigates and analyses the nature of the Chinese OER reform process. Some

researchers examine the reform measures, some propose reform models and strategies, while others compare the OER programmes in China with those in other nations. There are also studies that investigate the accomplishments and problems in the construction of open educational resources in China and studies that explore the use of the resources. However, the scope of these studies is limited, as they focus primarily on the specific dimensions and aspects of the reform, such as pedagogy, teaching technology, or educational management. Little research has been conducted examining the OER movement in terms of its social impacts. Limited examples include the work of Lin (2009), an official in the Ministry of Education (MoE) of the People's Republic of China, who describes the context, objectives, and significance of policies concerning the OER reform and argues that the reform is essential for the further development of higher education in China. Another example is Zhou and Zhang's (2010) assessment of some institutions' performances in this reform. Their study finds that some institutions are deficient in efficiency, equity, accountability, flexibility, and elasticity, which has resulted in the underperformance of their OER programmes. Therefore, Zhou and Zhang argue that institutional innovation and a rechecking system are needed for the sustainable development of an OER programme. Whilst insightful, these studies, I contend, are not sufficient for the conceptualisation and the evaluation of the movement in China, given its recent and rapid progression. Both Lin's, and Zhou and Zhang's studies are limited in that they have not explored the OER programmes at the level of a comprehensive reform; neither have they explored enough the profound changes brought about by such a reform. The current study aims to contribute to research on the Chinese OER movement by conceptualising the movement as an encompassing educational reform that brings wide-ranging changes to China's higher education sector.

## ◆ 1.2 Poststructuralism and Governmentality

This study takes a poststructuralist stance, which is underpinned by a number of key concepts. Poststructuralism contests notions of objectivity and is concerned with the analysis of phenomena as systems, assuming that such

systems have no inherent meaning. It is concerned with the analysis of the discursive formation of discourses of government. Furthermore, it challenges the notion that language is neutral, objective and value-free (Creek, 2000). Poststructuralism is also a reaction against the structuralist claim of a scientific objectivity and universality. Instead, a poststructuralist approach argues that, in order to understand an object, it is necessary to study both the object itself and the systems of knowledge that produce it (Peters & Burbules, 2004). In so doing, poststructuralist approaches explore the relationship between language, meaning, and people's behaviour. In this study, the Chinese OER reform is the object to be investigated, and both the reform itself and the production of the reform will be examined.

A large number of educational studies in China are relatively conservative, as most of them are sponsored or funded by the government. Enquiries into educational issues are often conducted from different theoretical perspectives that are broadly positivist, whereby data are foregrounded as 'true' and 'objective' (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 1). In contrast to this scientific propensity, this study adopts a poststructuralist stance, firstly, for the possibilities offered by its philosophical critique of positivist assumptions and, secondly, for its corrective potential to unpack some unexamined and unreconstructed assumptions about educational reform. Furthermore, a poststructuralist approach is valuable in its ability to suggest alternative perspectives regarding some taken-for-granted practices. A poststructuralist perspective is not a research method, rather, it provides a way of thinking about the world that shapes questions regarding what type of research is relevant, and how some questions are interpreted (Creek, 2000).

Therefore, whilst poststructuralism is considered by some scholars as being "stereotyped as inaccessible and aloof" (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 1), an increasing number of researchers in educational scholarships use poststructuralism to inform their work and offer profound insights into educational issues, as well as to suggest more critical approaches to investigate contemporary educational reforms. In the present study, the Chinese OER movement as an educational reform is investigated and the changes that it prompts to China's education sector are examined through a poststructuralist lens

that is centred on the conceptual tool of governmentality.

*Governmentality* is described as one of the most effective and developed poststructuralist approaches to undertake social inquiries. In broad terms, governmentality is concerned with the creation and constraint of the *subject* as a particular agent and the target of the exercise of power, as well as with the distribution and flow of power. Governmentality assumes the potential and productive nature of power and operates through the bodies of citizens as it shapes and guides the *conduct of conduct*, which means the management or regulation of practices and behaviours. According to the French philosopher, Michel Foucault (1982), government does not simply signify a monolithic state and its political apparatus, but refers to much broader contexts. Government is the “conduct of conduct” (Foucault, 1982, p. 220); that is, it is the government’s calculated means of directing an individual’s or a group’s behaviour or actions. In this study, the term of *government* is used to refer to both the political entities and the directions of behaviour or actions, in a broad sense.

With such a broad conceptualisation of government, Foucault defined the term governmentality as the *art of government*, with three interrelated tiers. Firstly, governmentality is the consequence of a particular form of power. That is, governmentality is a result of exercises of power, such as authoritarian power or pastoral power. Secondly, governmentality is the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, as well as by the calculations and tactics, such as auditing and benchmarking which allow the exercise of the various types of power. Such forms of power have intended subjects together with forms of knowledge and apparatuses to facilitate their exercise. Thirdly, governmentality, for Foucault, is the result of transformations within states, such as the transformation of justice during the Middle Ages into an administrative apparatus during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Foucault, 2000b). Foucault defined this form of governmentality as the process through which a form of government with specific ends, means to these ends, and a particular type of knowledge to achieve these ends evolved from a medieval state of justice to a modern administrative state with complex bureaucracies. With specific reference to the current study, China’s OER reform can be viewed as

such a transformation in its education sector.

Miller and Rose (2008; 1992) developed Foucault's concept of governmentality by teasing out two aspects: *rationalities* of government and *technologies* of government. They claim that an analysis of activities of government must be based on the assessment of "the complex of mundane programmes, calculations, techniques, apparatuses, documents, and procedures through which authorities seek to embody and give effect to government ambitions" (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 75). Rationalities of government, or governmental rationalities, refer to the styles of thinking or methods of rendering reality thinkable in a manner that provides convenience for technological intervention, which, in the current study, are the policies and directives developed by government to address and implement the OER reform. Governmental technologies are the methods of acting on the conduct of individuals through technical interventions, so as to transform that conduct for the convenience of governing (Miller & Rose, 2008; Rose & Miller, 2010). In this study, such technologies refer to the strategies and mechanisms that mobilise, motivate, and manage the participants in the OER reform. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, governmentality can be conceptualised as an integration of the knowledge about governing, as well as the mechanisms and strategies used to realise such governing. Moreover, the governmentality framework is used to offer a critique of the OER reform and, in this study, the critique is offered in line with Foucault's understanding, that is, a critique in governmentality analysis is not for prescription, but for clarifying and revealing the exercise of power relations and the constitution of subjects at different levels (Foucault, 1991b, p. 78).

### ◆ 1.3 A Governmentality Movement from West to East

A major challenge in adopting the concepts embedded in earlier work on governmentality is that many of the terms and concepts originate in so-called "Western nations". This scholarship conceptualises China's contemporary higher education policies as responses to Western influences (R. Yang, 2011). For the purpose of the current study, the Western world is used as a political term representing some discourses or practices from cultures or countries outside

of China that have influenced the Chinese OER reform. From a poststructuralist perspective, the West is a discourse invented and constructed by political authorities to promote their values and beliefs, such as neoliberal policies. However, the Western world is “geographically unstable, arbitrary, and shifting”, as its categorisation is based on the criteria of “race, linguistic background, and socio-economic status” (Bhattacharya, 2011, pp. 182 –183). Currently, key members of the Western world include countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia and the European Union. Some contend that Western societies are differentiated from the rest of the world by politicians, educators, and the media through assumptions about their superior status in terms of civilisation and that, by contrast, the Eastern or oriental world is often associated with barbarity and inferiority. Similarly, the Orient is envisaged as being the recipient of values and policies disseminated by the West and it is a discourse constituted by the administrative power of the West to “govern over the Orient” (Said, 2003, p. 95).

In some Western scholarship, China has been constructed as a traditional Eastern country that receives much influence from the Western world. In terms of governmentality research, a key topic about Western society itself, or its influence on the rest of the world, including China, is *neoliberalism* or *neoliberal government*. According to Nikolas Rose (Rose, 1996b), a key figure in governmentality studies, neoliberalism is comprised of three essential foci: governing from a distance, calculability, and the promotion of self-activating, disciplined and individuated subjects. Olssen (2003) deconstructs this notion further by explaining that neoliberal policies are composed of the discourses and practices of a modern political economy that seeks to obtain indirect control of economic activities through regulating the free market. Rose’s and Olssen’s definitions suggest that neoliberal governmental rationalities emphasise minimal government intervention in public spheres, such as business, education, and health, and neoliberalism advocates for *governance without government*, in which individuals are constituted as subjects who are responsible for their behaviours and conduct their activities for their own benefits (Mok, 2004). These explanations of neoliberalism are important, because some scholars argue that China is undergoing a neoliberalising process; they contend that China is

learning from Western neoliberal policies extensively.

However, such claims about the neoliberalisation of China are contested. Nonini (2008) argues that “contemporary China is not becoming ‘neoliberal’ in either a strong or a weak sense, nor is it undergoing a process of neoliberalisation”. Instead, Nonini insists that China has emerged as an oligarchic, corporate state with a party whose legitimacy is sometimes challenged by disenfranchised classes, but is still in control through its efforts of modernisation (Nonini, 2008). A number of scholars argue that the government in China is more authoritarian than neoliberal. Here, authoritarianism refers to totalitarian governance and non-democratic regimes. In a traditional view of an authoritarian government, the citizenry is required to hold strict adherence to the views of government; criticism is not allowed and censorship of speech and the press is the norm (Sullivan, Johnson, Calkins & Terry, 2009). In China, authoritarianism is manifested mainly in the process of decision making and the procedures for the decisions to be operated in reality; that is, key decisions in China are mostly made by the top political leaders and quickly enforced nationwide (Ma, 2009).

The concepts of neoliberalism and authoritarianism are significant to this study and are detailed further in Chapter Two. However, three points should be noted about the use of the concepts in this study. Firstly, this study is not designed to confirm or deny that China has a neoliberal or authoritarian ideology that directs its governmental practices. Instead, as a poststructuralist study, this research is not restricted by any existing arguments about China. The governmentality framework is adopted, which is open and enables the exploration of the different forms or power relations. Secondly, when some of the OER reform practices are referred to as having neoliberal or authoritarian features, it is done because such labels can indicate the characteristics of the power relations exercised in the reform. They are not used in terms of their ideological ideals. Moreover, as will be detailed in Chapter Two, the distinction between neoliberal and authoritarian is questionable, as scholars argue that practices widely accepted as neoliberal are actually specific forms of authoritarian governance (Dean, 1999, 2002; Hindess, 1996), but, in this study, the terms of neoliberal and authoritarian are used with clearly

differentiated references. They refer to the mechanisms and strategies that operate through freedom at a distance as neoliberal, and the various forms of direct interventions as authoritarian governance. In this way, this study explores the complex ways in which power relations are exercised in Chinese OER reform. This contributes to understanding the governmentality of the reform, as well as the ways that the reform affects the participants.

In addition, it is important to identify the authorities in a governmentality analysis, as their governmental thoughts underpin governmental rationalities and technologies (Miller & Rose, 2008). In this study of Chinese OER reform, the notion of authorities or political authorities refers to China's central government leaders, who exert the overarching influences that drive reform. Their concerns and directives about educational development are interpreted into policy processes for the reform. The central government leaders in China, as governmental authorities, are both the source and the makers of the policies. The identities of the authorities in Chinese OER reform will be further explored in Chapter Five.

The existing literature demonstrates that educational reform can be taken as a site for governmentality analyses and a number of studies have applied the governmentality framework to examine the nature of educational reforms. Although the majority of the studies are set in Western societies, governmentality is adopted by some researchers in studies of non-Western contexts as well, and China is an increasingly popular focus for such research for its unique political, cultural, and social conditions. For example, Sigley (2006, p. 489) explores Chinese governmentality by examining the political conditions and transitions since the 1970s and argues that China's governmentality is embedded in its unique social, cultural, and historical contexts. He concludes that China is not adopting a neoliberal form of governmentality, as some historians might suggest. Kipnis's (2011) study also explores Chinese governmentality by investigating the detailed governing processes in a particular county in China. His findings support his contention that China's governmentality is neither purely neoliberal, nor totally authoritarian in its accountability regime, rather, it is an integration of different forms of governing. Hoffman (2006) examines the integration of neoliberal



governmentality and Chinese nationalism in the contemporary reforms, which produce a new form of nationalism that intertwines autonomous decisions, social responsibility and patriotism, and economic competitiveness. Hoffman (2006, p. 17) named such an intertwined form of nationalism as “patriotic professionalism”. Hoffman’s findings further suggest that Chinese governmentality cannot be simply categorised as neoliberal or authoritarian. Instead, Chinese governmentality is embedded in its contemporary political, cultural, and social conditions.

However, these studies provide a mere snapshot of the broad, complicated, and rapidly ever-changing, Chinese context. Moreover, as most of these researchers are overseas scholars, their understanding of the Chinese context of governmentality may differ from that of Chinese scholars. Therefore, this study contributes to this literature by further developing the application of the governmentality framework in the Chinese context from the perspective of a Chinese scholar.

## **1.4 This Qualitative Study: A Governmentality Analysis of the Chinese OER Reform**

Given that I am a researcher born and educated in China, this investigation of the OER reform in China is prompted by a desire to understand and reveal more adequately the governmental terrain of this educational reform. Like many researchers, I am both sceptical and concerned about the changes taking place in China’s higher education sector, and I argue for an improved understanding of the educational conditions under which Chinese people are learning. As a scholar, I hope that this study provides deeper insights and a further understanding of the significance of the OER reform in China. Therefore, this study adopts a qualitative research methodology that involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world, which enables the study of things in their natural settings and attempts to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). In other words, my research aim is in line with the purpose of a qualitative study in