

Annual Report

on China Graduate Education

(2013)



Association of Chinese Graduate Schools

高等教育出版社

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Abstract

Annual Report on China Graduate Education(2013)(hereinafter abbreviated as the Annual Report), compiled by *Association of Chinese Graduate Schools*, is conducted to review the latest developments and trends concerning graduates' educational policies and practices in China. The Annual Report highlighted several hot issues, such as the third round disciplinary evaluation in China, the utility and management of scientific research funds and how it to benefits postgraduate students, status of postgraduate supervisor team, postgraduate supervisors' workload and pressure, supervisors' misconducts from postgraduates' viewpoint and postgraduate supervisors' self-assessment on their supervision. It has given an in-depth discussion of the above-mentioned themes, and then put forward pertinent measures and constructive suggestions. To some extent, the Annual Report can be regarded as a useful reference book for officials from educational administrative departments, deans of graduate schools, and staff of graduate education management, graduate supervisors as well as those theoretical researchers.

图书在版编目 (C I P) 数据

中国研究生教育年度报告 = Annual Report on
China Graduate Education. 2013: 英文 / 中国研究生
院院长联席会编著. --北京: 高等教育出版社, 2014. 12
ISBN 978-7-04-043326-5

I. ①中… II. ①中… III. ①研究生教育-研究报告
-中国-2013-英文 IV. ①G643

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2015) 第 176989 号

策划编辑 徐 可
插图绘制 郝 林

责任编辑 徐 可
责任校对 窦丽娜

封面设计 张 楠
责任印制 毛斯璐

版式设计 马敬茹

出版发行 高等教育出版社
社 址 北京市西城区德外大街 4 号
邮政编码 100120
印 刷 北京中科印刷有限公司
开 本 787mm×1092mm 1/16
本册印张 2.75
本册字数 50 千字
购书热线 010-58581118

咨询电话 400-810-0598
网 址 <http://www.hep.edu.cn>
<http://www.hep.com.cn>
网上订购 <http://www.landaco.com>
<http://www.landaco.com.cn>
版 次 2014 年 12 月第 1 版
印 次 2014 年 12 月第 1 次印刷
总 定 价 79.00 元

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Introduction

The central theme for graduate education in 2013 is quality. This year, the Ministry of Education, the National Development and Reform Commission, and the Ministry of Finance jointly issued [2013] No. 1 document-*Opinions on Deepening the Reform on Graduate Education*, which put forward a series of specific requirements and measures on “reforming the enrollment system”, “innovating the talent cultivation mode”, “improving the mechanism of rights and responsibilities for supervisors”, “promoting opening up and cooperation” and “Guaranteeing the implementation of policies and conditions”, etc. This movement clearly demonstrated the core mission and target in current graduate education, which is improving quality by reforming. The document was jointly issued by several national departments, a display of the unprecedented importance attached to the role and function of graduate education by the government in achieving the national strategic goal of reinvigorating China through talents, and of the government’s determination to improve the quality of graduate education in China.

Based on the spirit of document *Opinion*, the Association of Chinese Graduate Schools (ACGS) solicited opinions from its member units and set up topics for the annual report, with the aim of carrying out proof-sufficient researches on realistic problems which are closely related to national needs, and of contributing ideas to the reform and development of Chinese graduate education. Firstly, the annual report systematically analyzes the overall situation of the third round discipline evaluation which aroused wide concern in high school this year, enabling the member units to fully understand their own development on each discipline. Meanwhile, by introducing discipline evaluations from foreign countries, the report

also intends to provide valuable references to the next round of discipline evaluation in China.

Secondly, taking into account the requirements on improving the mechanism of rights and responsibilities for supervisors, the annual report highlights topics related to supervisors and conducts several researches in this field. With sufficient data, the report describes, diagnoses and analyzes the structural characteristics as well as the existing problems of the graduate supervisors in a comprehensive and systematic manner. Through conducting survey, the report gets an overview of the supervisors' workload and how they distribute their effort, with the hope of fully understanding their living conditions in a more thorough and objective way, and providing suggestions to related policies and institutional support. By investigating the graduates and supervisors respectively, the report concludes undesirable instructional situations and behaviors, aiming to clarify supervisors' rights and responsibilities and to push forward the construction of regulations and institutions on instruction. In addition, by surveying supervisors, the report hopes to gain a broader understanding of the problems of public concern in research fund management and usage, as well as of the benefits that graduates gain, so as to lay foundation for the reform on research fund management.

To improve the quality of graduate education not only requires strengthening the top-level design of the macro policies and systems, which provides guidelines and creates the environment and conditions for the training units to conduct independent exploration and innovation, but also needs the training units to enhance their quality and sense of responsibility, based on the overall process of personnel training, to be fully devoted to each step, and to perform every task well and meticulously. Only in this way can the short-board effect be eliminated, and the internal quality control and assurance system for the whole process be formed. Under the guidance of the *Opinions* and the specific requirements of the training process of graduate students, the ACGS as an

organization with 57 key units that cultivate graduate students, will undoubtedly play a leading role in actively carrying out intensive reforms on every aspect by means of strengthening the communication and cooperation among member units, so as to gain experience for improving the quality of graduate education in a comprehensive manner. In the process of reform, the ACGS will listen carefully to voices from all member units, make full use of the annual report platform to strengthen communication with related government departments, and play an intermediary role in improving the graduate education system in our country, as well as in pushing forward the scientization of policies in graduate education.

Deepening the Comprehensive Reform on Graduate Education through Institutional Innovation

Year 2013 is the first year of fully carrying out the guiding principles laid out at the 18th CPC National Congress, also a crucial year to steadily push forward the *Outline of National Medium and Long Term Program for Education Reform and Development (2010—2020)* (hereinafter referred to as the *Outline*), and a significant year for transitions to be made during the nation's "12th Five-Year Plan" period. How to transform the spirit conveyed in the government's policy such as "deepening the comprehensive reform in the education field" and "promoting the development of higher education in depth" into specific and achievable tasks has become the top priority for graduate education in 2013. Earlier this year, the Ministry of Education, the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Finance jointly issued [2013] No. 1 document-*Opinions on Deepening the Reform on Graduate Education* (hereinafter referred to as the *Opinions*), which pointed out clearly the significance of graduate education in our country's economic and social development. "It is the most important approach to cultivating high-level talents and a fundamental part of the international innovation system." Besides, *Opinions* also put forward general requirements for a new round of graduate education reform, namely, to optimize education structure, establishing an enrollment system matching with the training goal; to encourage the development of individuality, building up a cultivation mechanism which concentrates on students' comprehensive growth and development; to improve guiding ability of the supervisors, strengthening the mechanisms of rights and responsibilities with supervisors taking main responsibility; to reform the evaluation mechanism, establishing a quality assurance system with the training unit as its main body; to expand

opening-up to the outside world, carrying out development strategies for win-win cooperation; and to increase support, optimizing the multi-channel investment system with the governmental investment as the main source, with the goal of realizing fundamental changes in the development modes, education structure, training methods and evaluation mechanisms through the reform. The release of *Opinions* raised the curtain for the 2013 graduate education reform, and also set the tone for the subsequent implementation of related activities and solutions.

I . New Measures for the 2013 Graduate Education Reform and Development in China

1. Accelerating the Reform on the Training Pattern of the Graduate Students Pursuing Professional Degrees

After 20 years of development, professional degree graduate education in China has made remarkable achievements and progress, providing 89,479 qualified graduates for various industries in 2012. However, despite the massive expansion of professional degree graduate education, its corresponding system construction lags behind, such as poor correlation between admission criteria and professional requirements, obscure distinction among curriculum design, training methods, and graduate education for students pursuing academic degrees, as well as gaps between the degree and professional qualifications, which leads to the lack of its own feature and advantage, thus hindering its further development.

Adhering to the principle of “starting with a pilot project before broadening the implementation of it to a wider scope”, the Ministry of Education issued a notice jointly drafted by the Ministry of Health and Family Planning Commission on approving the first batch of pilot universities to carry out reforms on teaching mode of graduate students pursuing professional degrees in clinical medicine. According to the notice, Peking University, together with other 63 universities is on the list. Graduate

students pursuing professional degrees in clinical medicine are chosen as the subject of the study with the aim of exploring the possibility of building up a “5 + 3” talent training model (5-year undergraduate education in medical school plus 3-year standardized training as residents), thus bridging the gap between graduate education and standardized resident training, and cultivating a number of clinical residents with high theoretical level as well as abundant practical experience.

In order to deepen the reform on the training mode of graduate students pursuing professional degrees, the Ministry of Education, together with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security jointly released *Opinions on Deepening the Reform on the Training Mode of Graduate Students Pursuing Professional Degrees*, which puts forward the goal of this reform, namely, to build up an occupational-demand-oriented training mode with Chinese characteristics which emphasizes on students’ ability to practice through combining theoretical study with occupational training, one that can adapt to the needs of social and economic development. *Opinions* also highlights the significance of students’ ability to practice in the aspects of enrollment, training method, teaching, practice base, dissertation, occupational qualifications, teaching staff, quality assurance and other related sections.

2. Strengthening the Mechanisms of Rights and Responsibilities for Supervisors and Enhancing the Professional Competence of the Supervisors

The current evaluation system for supervisors has some shortcomings, namely, supervisors’ qualifications are associated with their professional ranks and titles, the tenure system for supervisors results in a lack of competition. So how to improve the mechanism of rights and responsibilities for supervisors has been an issue of great concern in the training of graduate students. The solutions put forward in the *Opinions* are “to change the practice of assessing each supervisor’s qualifications separately, to improve the supervisors’ awareness of combining the

enrollment process with the training process so as to avoid the formation of a tenure system. The quota on supervisors and their graduate admissions should be based on the annual enrollment plan, taking into account factors like discipline characteristics, supervisors' ethical performance, academic achievement, scientific research tasks and training quality. Efforts should also be made to improve the mutual selection mechanism between graduate students and their supervisors, both of whose choices should be respected. This means supervisor selection system will change in the future, and the qualification system will be replaced by the system of post responsibility.

In addition, the *Opinions* also stresses the necessity for supervisors to strengthen their sense of responsibility and act as role models for students in morality and scientific ethnics. The *Solution to Dissertation Fraud* implemented from Jan. 1, 2013 clearly states that "teachers who fail to perform their responsibilities on academic ethic or norm education, and on guiding thesis writing and reviewing, resulting in students' dissertation fraud, will be given a warning or demerit record; in cases of serious violation, the supervisors will be downgraded or expelled." The decision has changed the situation of supervisors' detachment from students' academic cheating behaviors and clarified their responsibilities and corresponding punishments for the first time, which is of great significance for striking academic fraud and creating a sound academic environment.

In addition to the strict requirements mentioned above, the Ministry of Education also proposed various solutions to improve the supervisors' instructional ability, such as enhancing the pre-job training, clarifying their responsibilities in graduate education, encouraging them to participate in academic exchanges and enterprise practice, etc.

3. Establishing Standards for Conferring Degrees and Strengthening the Quality Supervision System for Graduate Education

The *Regulations on Academic Degrees in People's Republic of China* and

its interim measures for implementation, which have been in effect since the 1980s, are too general about the rules on the standards of conferring master's/doctor's degree, lacking specified and operable standards. Therefore, the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council and the Ministry of Education jointly issued the *Basic Requirements on Master's and Doctor's Degree* (hereinafter referred to as the *Basic Requirements*), which can be viewed as the first "national standards" in the quality of graduate education in China. It took nearly one thousand experts in the Sixth Discipline Evaluation Group of the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council two years to finish the *Basic Requirements*, which clarifies the requirements to get master's or doctor's degree in terms of discipline frontier, social demands, knowledge structure, comprehensive ability and basic standards. It not only provides directions to students and teachers, gives guidelines for training units to design training programs and lay foundations for course planning and degree confer standards setting, but also provides reference for education authorities and external evaluation agencies to carry out quality supervision and assessment. Meanwhile, it is reported that the draw up of the *Basic Requirements* are undergoing active preparation.

At the same time, the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council and the Ministry of Education issued the *Introduction to the First-level Discipline for Degree Granting and Talent Cultivation* according to the newly revised *Catalogue on Degree Granting and Talent Cultivation* (2011), covering 13 discipline categories, among which there are 110 first-level disciplines. The *Introduction* outlines and standardizes every discipline's basic information, content, scope, training objectives and its relevant disciplines, and provides references for training units in discipline building, training program planning, degree conferment, etc.

The current rules and regulations on degree conferment lay a solid foundation for the assessment of degree conferring centers and for the establishment of a dynamic adjustment mechanism for degree conferment.

4. The First Batch of Selected Units on the List of “2011 Plan” Announced, Vigorously Promoting the Establishment of the University Innovation System

“Innovation Ability Promotion Plan for Institutions of Higher Learning” (“2011 plan” for short) is the third national project in higher education besides the “211 Project” and the “985 project”, aiming to improve the innovation ability of talents, discipline, and scientific research. By establishing four kinds of collaborative innovation modes which can satisfy the key demands in scientific frontiers, cultural inheritance & innovation, industries & sectors and regional development, this project aims to deepen the institutional and structural reform on higher education institutions, to transform their innovation modes and to push forward the internal development of higher education. On April 11th, the Ministry of Education announced the first batch of selected units on the list of “2011 Plan” which included 14 collaborative innovation centers screened out of 167 applicants after three rounds of strict evaluation, covering research fields of quantum physics, chemistry & chemical industry, biological medicine, aviation & aerospace, rail transportation, new materials, nanotechnology, modern agriculture and judicial civilization, maritime rights research, etc. These research areas demonstrate the nation’s strategy to integrate superior resources from universities, research institutes, industry enterprises and local governments to meet China’s major demands and improve universities’ capability to serve the country and to compete in the cutting-edge fields in the world. Different from previous practices, the central and local governments’ support shifted from capital investment to the establishment of high-level teams, mechanism for collaboration, mobility mechanism for scholars, training modes and resources sharing, etc. To reinforce the management of the selected units, the Ministry of Education stipulated that the chosen members be evaluated every four years, regarding talent cultivation, resource integration, transformation of scientific and technological achievements, support made to sectors and industries as well as their international influence. Only those who are able