



Analysis of Differences Between China's Gaokao System and the U.S. College Admissions System and Suggestions for Improvement

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Abstract. Differences in higher education admission systems are due to differences in national context. Globally, there are two types of systems: merit-based and holistic admissions. Countries such as the UK, South Korea and China tend to place greater emphasis on the score of an exam when making admissions decisions whereas other countries such as Sweden, Denmark and Germany prioritize non-cognitive skills, like Japan and the US, some countries emphasize a balanced assessment using different methods such as exam score, recommendation letters, extracurricular activities, and interview for university admission. China and the US have the greatest differences and, therefore, represent this type of circumstance most completely. In order to facilitate better comprehension, this paper first outlines the reasons behind the different circumstances and methods utilized for admissions in China and the US; secondly, analyzes drawbacks within each side; finally, offering localized solutions through absorption of respective strengths from each approach to that end.

Keywords: American Universities, Chinese Universities, Higher Education, Institutional Change.

1 Introduction

The top objective of China's higher education admissions test system is for every type of student to receive a fair chance for their resources allocation; that is why fairness in receiving education and cultivating talents for the national needs underpinned by schooling education through the test setting based on high school graduates' quality. Since its start, Gaokao (National College Entrance Examination) conducts several reforms and innovations.

2 Historical Reasons and Practical Obstacles for the Current Admissions Systems in China and the U.S.

In 1952, right after the founding of the People's Republic of China, a national unified examination system that only relied on examination scores to identify the talents was

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launched. As it only received evaluations of test scores, the fairness issue happened under strong protests against it from both public sentiments and politics. In 1966, such system was abolished, and the recommendation and selection for talents which could cultivate talents from the mass through political criteria took over for nearly one decade [1]; however, this way is also unable to realize recruitment in an objective way because there is no exam based on the quota of admitted students that schools have needed. So, for further rebuilding up the pool of eligible students who are college admission candidates, the standardized exams need to be reinstated back as an essential part of the allocation of educational resources.

At the same time, China adjusted and improved its admission system based on its past experiences; in addition to valuing college entrance examination scores, it also began considering more comprehensive quality assessments during the admission process, moving from selectivity to massification in the admission system [2]. In terms of priorities, the change in focus shifted away from the political arena towards individual competency, reducing the importance of class identity. It set the scene for admissions based on educational background and provided a favorable employment platform for those with high quality educational background. The enormous number of individuals who participated in the Gaokao was thus a result of factors which were policies within the system and prevailing societal conditions. Most families emphasized giving preference to the attainment of education based on their children's scores in the Gaokao, for the purpose of increasing their economic status and moving to higher social status groups. High scores in Gaokao meant more than good grades, therefore allocating more educational resources to the high scoring candidate became an obsession and led to the popular belief that one is determined by an exam.

In 1999, China began the 3 + X exam pattern for Gaokao, which is part of the current Gaokao examination: Students have to take three compulsory courses (Chinese, mathematics, and English) and more than one optional subject they can choose according to their own major interest and ability [3]. This change increased the personalization and diversification in examinations, but the scheme required candidates to choose subjects based on their candidates' schools' tendency and did not satisfy all students' needs. They can express their aspirations regarding their target universities and majors, yet under great pressure from their families and schools, most Chinese students focused very much on test results rather than on career options for the future and hence left their choices of subjects entirely to schools and families, resulting in relatively inflexible choices. Therefore, to resolve issues around educational equality, the Ministry of Education have recently overhauled the admission process. In September 2014, the education commission established "two benchmarks and one reference", an examination system based on Gaokao (Nationwide Unified Examination for High School Graduates) scores, high school academic proficiency tests, and a comprehensive quality assessment. Despite continued attempts to diversify how admission decisions are made, however, Gaokao scores are still very much a driving factor in most admissions decisions.

In contrast, American universities were initially established by the British, primarily as religious institutions aimed at maintaining British royal authority in the colonies and preventing colonial independence. Specifically, Harvard University origi-

nated as "Cambridge College" founded by the British in the colonies in 1636 and re-named in 1639 to honor Reverend John Harvard, who donated £395 and 300 books. Similarly, J • Dummer secured donations sponsored by Yale University transmitted religion and knowledge [4], like College of William and Mary founded in 1693 on behalf of British monarchs, were still under British influence in American higher education. It was not until the U. S. gained independence in 1783 that the primary responsibility of American universities shifted from conveying religious beliefs to conducting academic research and skills training [5].

Moreover, it is the funding models that provide American universities with such independence. In brief, they come from three sources: small private contributions, public-private partnerships, and professional fundraising. Private small contributions, given by individual citizens to support local higher education, are a key component of U. S. culture, which is fostered by the long-standing history of educational decentralization. Communities should use churches or private donations to financially assist the development of the states' public universities. Public-private partnerships is another form of institutional perfection under this category; it is the cooperation of private funds or donors in the charity's activities organized by local governments or state universities. Professional fundraising involves bigger names such as millionaires who make great contributions to the universities for them to establish stable grounds for their development. Most of the funds to be provided for US university activities do not come from the Federal or State Governments, therefore, allowing a greater deal of freedom and variety regarding students who may be eligible for admission.

3 Drawbacks of the Chinese Gaokao and U.S. Admissions Systems and Suggestions for Improvement

Though China's Gaokao fosters fair competition between students with different family statuses based on their merit, it may overlook the disadvantages that individuals encounter because of the huge differences in educational resources. What kind of "fair competition" is based on truly fair and balanced basic education? And as is widely known, there is still a large gap between the needs of top-quality educational resources and the limited supply of such resources in China. This leads the government to over-invest in those places that yield greater returns from their talent cultivation efforts. Areas that have ample and sufficient resources end up generating high-quality candidates already. Thus, basing a student's eligibility for university only upon their Gaokao test score, without factoring in the differences between various regions and different circumstances facing urban vs. rural students makes no sense. They do not entirely correct this fault of equalizing education. Take Beijing, for example, it spends about 6.8 times more money than Henan in providing public financial expenditure per student [6-10]. With special admission policies favoring remote areas, this can solve part of the problem but cannot tackle the main reason. Also, taking domestic issues into account, as the domestic bureaucracy is so opaque, different levels of governments cannot collaborate efficiently. the government is restricted by the threat of abuse of such loopholes in special entrance rules, and hence it cannot issue more positive policies so that resources

are distributed more equitably. In fact, in order to counter that problem, the Chinese government can push its principle of fully transparent control to allow ordinary citizens to be aware of where any policy loophole is, enforce much harder punishments to any attempt of exploiting policy flaws and their benefit, and continue to tweak policy details without difficulty.

4 Conclusion

Just like the Gaokao sidesteps score-only selection based on a single criterion, the fact that the U. S. admissions system has a more nebulous set of evaluation metrics and benchmarks leaves an opening for bargaining. Furthermore, while the US is outcome-focused – they focus on the individual – its admission practice is still standards-based, with SAT/ACT scores still playing a role. The cost of these high-stakes exams can easily price out qualified students from families without considerable savings. The focus should be on how they are educated by higher education. For this, it's important to reduce universities' financial reliance on donations and fundraisers. Because American universities heavily rely on fundraisers and alumni donations to operate, some institutions may place extra attention on admitting and catering to wealthy students that don't meet requirements, like giving priority to legacy admits (children of alumni) or relying on dean's interest lists. Hence, if the government contributes partially to university funding, the situation will be alleviated significantly. The funding provided by the government can lighten financial burdens on colleges, and so they don't need to enroll some unqualified students for economic reasons and open places to those really talented, diligent students who want to attend university. Besides, the United States government should refer to other country's experience of giving good opportunities to various people without money abilities through reform of the examination system, offering them more help and subsidies so that less fortunate families can also enjoy more chances to improve their social statuses through education.

At last, this essay mainly involves two aspects: firstly, the historical causes of current higher education admission systems between China and the United States; secondly, the deficiencies of these two systems and how to make improvements and optimizations by virtue of strengths.

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