

An Analysis of China's Educational Reform of University from "Tsien Hsueshen's Question"

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ABSTRACT: The paper gives an analysis of educational reform in China. The expansion of colleges and universities brings various kinds of drawbacks, such as pushing too fast, bureaucrat management and deviation from realities. Consequently, our universities fail to produce excellent talents. The paper proposes that universities should take the quality education as the goal, and transform from government civil service to faculty governance. The purpose of educating outstanding talents for the society will be achieved.

KEYWORD: Tsien Hsueshen's question; talents; educational reform

The late renowned scientist Tsien Hsueshen once asked the incumbent Premier Wen Jiabao in 2005, "Why do our universities always fail to produce outstanding talents?" Then more than once the scientist raised the same question in a variety of occasions. This is the famous "Tsien Hsueshen's question".

Since the founding of new China, our college education has undergone many reforms, and also taken many tortuous paths. In 1952, the departments in universities were first adjusted all over the country. It has been the first university educational reform since the founding of new China. During the decade from 1966 to 1976, college education in our country has received the unprecedented political impact. Since the restoration of college entrance examination in 1978, university education has made considerable development. With the strengthening of reformation in educational system, our universities are extensively implementing well-rounded education. A more in-depth reform was going on about educational system. At present, China has entered a period of rapid economic development. The major task for the university is how to adapt to the needs of the society and cultivate more outstanding talents for the society.

1 WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION?

1.1 *The masters gave some famous treatise on the purpose of university education.*

As regards the purpose of university education, previous scholars discussed a lot. The emphasis is

different, but all included people's insistence in and aspiration for freedom.

Cai Yuanpei thought, "A university is a place for studying advanced knowledge." And he also advocated "free thought" and "all-inclusion in academic research" (Shuping). It is visible that Mr. Cai Yuanpei advocated that a university should be a research type university. What matters most is academic freedom

Mei Yiqi, the president of Tsinghua University from 1931 to 1948, once said, "A university doesn't have the meaning of a building, but the masters instead. The purpose of a university is the liberal education, which advocates sound personality, academic freedom for discussion, and it is managed by professors."

The German philosopher Schleiermacher said, "The purpose of a university does not intend to teach the students some knowledge, but to develop students' scientific spirit, whereas this spirit cannot come from force, but can only be produced in freedom" (Hongjie).

Derrida believed, "Universities are different from all other types of research institutions. It is in principle a place where truth, human nature, human beings and human history, etc. should be independently and unconditionally proposed, that is, the place where unconditional resistance and different views should be nourished" (Xiaozhen).

1.2 *China's "national plan for medium-and long-term educational reform and development" gives a prospect of higher educational purpose.*

The CPC Central Committee, the State Council,

issued the “national plan for medium-and long-term educational reform and development” (2010-2020) on higher education. The following objectives are included in the plan: to improve the quality of higher education, to improve the quality of personnel training, to improve the level of scientific research, to strengthen the ability of social service, and to optimize the structure and running characteristics. We can see from the plan that higher education is a top priority in China.

The purpose of higher education proposed in educational plan is more based on professional considerations, which stresses the effective connections between higher education and social need, and focuses on the optimization and characteristics of higher education itself. The plan doesn't take academic freedom, moral construction and the self perfection as the goal, but it makes a strategic summarization to the problems existing in China's higher education which needs to be overcome within a short term.

1.3 *The purpose of a university is to educate a whole person with a spirit of freedom.*

A university is the basis of higher education. Its first and foremost task is to cultivate a whole person, which refers to the “outstanding talents” what Tsien Hsueshen once mentioned. The “outstanding talents” must have the following basic qualities: strong body, sound personality, excellent learning ability, innovative spirit and ability. An outstanding talent is not only a master, but also a person of self perfection in morality, and never a so-called “experts”.

A university is a higher educational establishment, which is essentially different from a training institution. Training institutions focus on the training of people's familiarity with skills and technology, while university education reflects a kind of spirit, whose task is to cultivate more outstanding talents.

The spirit of freedom is the soul of a university. Without the spirit of freedom, university will become the puppet manipulated by the power. The loss of the spirit of freedom will make a university become the tool of the political propaganda, which no longer bears any difference from the training institutions. The training can produce skilled craftsmen, but never masters.

2 WHAT ARE THE PRACTICAL DIFFICULTIES THAT CHINA'S UNIVERSITY EDUCATION CONFRONTS?

2.1 *China's college education is eager for quick success and instant benefits without long-term goals.*

Generally speaking, China's contemporary college

education is utilitarian. In the process of running a school, the leader of a college does not consider sustainable development for the future, but indulges in the short-term effect on the pursuit of fame and fortune. In specific college teaching management, they only keep abreast of the situation, pursue temporary hot items, and blindly increase professionals and enrollment without considering the reality of the college. This practice may have certain effect within a short period of time, but with the cooling of people's passion, it brings the pessimistic future for the development of the professional.

University teachers, who are subject to quantitative evaluation standard, are forced to be absorbed in paper writing, publishing books, spending more time and energy on the quantity in scientific research, and it is difficult to really settle down to devote themselves to learning. The result is that “research results” of every university are “fruitful” in terms of the amount, but the real academic works of value are very rare. The reason is that most of the so-called achievements are made for professional titles, appraisal and the occasional performance. Under the quantitative evaluation standard, it is very difficult to create high-quality works within a short time, not to mention the masterpiece. In order to complete the “quantitative index”, university teachers are tired out by too many papers, and they cannot spend more time on teaching. There are no rigid standards in the current evaluation system to evaluate the teaching effect. This leads to a tendency that some of the university teachers do not pay attention to the teaching. The teaching task is regarded as a mere class, which aims to teach skills, indifferent to students' health, mental growth. In a certain sense, teachers don't fulfill their obligations as educators should do, namely, they fail to impart knowledge and educate people.

Undergraduates mechanically attend classes. Most of the students are more concerned about their scores than acquiring knowledge, because high scores mean scholarship, recommendation, recommended graduate students and more fame. Even some students don't care about the knowledge. Neither do they pay attention to the cultivation of their ability. What they care most is the score. The result is that China's university graduates often have high scores, but low abilities. Under the pressure of employment, some students become the test machines. Because of the loopholes of national education management, various certificate examinations in China emerge in an endless stream like bamboo shoots after a spring rain. University students indulge in tests to get all kinds of certificates, so that they can obtain satisfactory work after graduation, which on the contrary affects the normal learning. The expansion of university enrollment in China is the direct cause for the formation of the university “enlarged class”. A

teacher, faced with hundreds of students, can only take the traditional “spoon feeding” teaching, which is unable to try new teaching methods. Even the interaction between teachers and students is impossible, which will seriously affect the students’ practice and mastering of the subject.

2.2 *The universities are under official governance, which is difficult to create special features.*

There is a close connection between China’s university and administrative organs. In addition to the systematic leadership of the Ministry of Education to the university, each university has an administrative level, for example, a university of vice ministerial level.

It is currently the top national key university in China. That is to say, their principal or general secretary is appointed by the central government rather than the Ministry of Education. All faculty leaders corresponding with these levels became office level, vice level, deputy director etc. Since there is a level, then there is so-called official, and the official has special privilege. A famous scholar has a very academic future. Once he was appointed president or vice president, he immediately becomes an official, which basically also marks the end of his academic career.

The principal office or similar mechanism is the body which manages the university, and the academic committee is only limited to the symbolic exercise of power, such as the student’s degree. In the process of daily management in the university, the professor committee has no any real power indeed.

The top-down official governance system forms administration system in the university, similar to the administrative organ, such as the vice ministerial level president, provost, chief of the general staff, etc.. Within this division, there are two systems in China’s universities—one is administrators for administrative level, and the other is teachers for professional titles. The promotion of any level or title is accompanied by a series of quantitative evaluation standard. Only up to a certain standard, the possibility of further promotion exists. The consequence of official governance is that which should be a palace full of free spirit and profound knowledge turned out to be a place full of secular noise. Especially in previous years, because of university industrialization and commercialization, the university was changed into a shopping mall. The higher education became profitable channel, which seriously deviated from the correct track that a university should go. University bureaucracy generated by the official governance lacks innovative ideas, which results in the fact that all universities are basically the same, unable to form their own special features.

2.3 *The education is separated from practice, which is difficult to meet the needs of the society.*

Our annual university enrollment plan is usually made according to the rate of each professional employment calculated a few years ago, and we rarely consider the needs of future situation in the related industry. Once the needs of society change, university enrollment plan cannot make rapid adjustment to adapt to it because of bureaucratic constraints. The consequence is that too many students swarm to some professionals and talent surplus appears, and some professionals have few admissions for supply.

The content of college education is separated from the practice, which cannot cultivate the professional talents to cater to the social needs. Some teaching content is too old to adapt to the rapid development. Some professional teachers put more emphasis on theory rather than on practice. There is a serious gap between theory and practice. The students can recite the related theories fluently. When faced with the practical problems, they are helpless.

3 CHINA’S COLLEGE EDUCATION SHOULD TAKE THE CORRECT PATH OF REFORM

3.1 *The college education should set the quality of education as the goal and the free spirit as the concept.*

Quality education is a kind of educational mode which aims to improve all aspects of quality of the educated. It emphasizes on the cultivation of people’s moral quality, various abilities, culture consciousness, and personality, physical and psychological health (Jiangnan). The fundamental purpose of college education is to teach undergraduate students to become a “holistic man”, and it is a manhood education. That is, we should promote personality, emancipate ourselves from mental slavery, and create healthy personality in order to seek the truth and cultivate outstanding talents.

In the process of college educational reform, we should resolutely abandon the quick success and the short-term behavior of chasing fame and fortune. Furthermore, we ought to cancel all quantitative assessment criteria for teachers and students. Instead, we should set the goals that can motivate students to gain knowledge, to seek the truth, to cultivate abilities and sound health and personality. On the other hand, teachers should be encouraged to impart knowledge and educate people as their responsibility, update their knowledge, and improve the teaching effect. In the process of teaching, emphasizing the interaction between teachers and students is the key factor for the success of instruction. The students are seen as the main body

of college education and important participants. The teachers truly become the instructors who can guide students to complete their education.

As to university teachers, we should create a kind of free academic atmosphere, cultivate autonomous learning, and advocate free discussion and debate. We should change the wrong ideas of “higher rank, more knowledge”. In academic research, the truth is regarded as the highest standard, instead of considering the person’s position and identity. Everyone is equal in front of academic research.

3.2 *The current task is to abandon the administrative mode and realize the faculty governance.*

The management of a university should take academic management as the leading factor, and establish the value theory of academic freedom and the mode of professor managing universities. In China at present, the university administrative level should be cancelled. The university is regarded as educational academic institution in accordance with the law of autonomy. The abolition of university administrative level is the pre-requisite to the eradication of administrative mode. The provisions of the administrative level of university have the tendency to be similar to the administrative organ of the bureaucratic system, which will become more and more close to the administrative organs. It is no good at all to the university itself except that it can facilitate the control of university administrative power. Especially with the expansion of university scale, the education and management of affairs are increasing gradually. If we use the similar ways of administrative organs to manage administration of a university, the university will become a rigid and fossilized one without its academic features. Under such a system, the academic freedom will become empty talk. If we do not cancel the administrative level, the university will be alienated to subsidiary bodies of the administrative organ, and the goal of college education cannot really be achieved.

The true meaning of faculty governance is that the professor is the legislator, and professor committee is the highest authority of the university. Simply, the outstanding professors manage the university. They are the soul of a university. If the professor is asked to take the responsibility of a university leader of current system, it will conflict with the nature of faculty governance. Once the professor is appointed as a university leader under the present system, it will indeed lead to a waste of talents. The following results are unavoidable: first, the professor will be systemically reformed to be the new bureaucracy; and it will indicate the end of his academic life; second, the professor can’t adapt to the bureaucratic system, which will cause him to resign. The realization of faculty governance should be based on

the current reform of management system, which will proceed step by step. In the process of daily management and decision making, we should respect the professor and pay attention to the role of the professor. By means of the proper procedure, decision-making and management, the professor will be made to become the lawmakers of the university.

Only by abandoning the university administrative mode and the true realization of faculty governance, will the academic freedom of brilliant flowers bloom in our university campus.

3.3 *The most important to do is to update the knowledge system and put theory into practice.*

In view of the drawbacks of China’s university administration, the traditional system of knowledge update has been restricted in some ways. Our college education cannot adapt to the needs of the society. Some college teachers’ teaching lags far behind the development of reality. They only pay attention to the theory without combination with practice. The students cannot be quickly qualified for their jobs after graduation.

It is time for the reform of the current system of teacher evaluation system and the abolition of quantitative assessment. The teachers’ teaching attitude, content, and effect are taken as important content of assessment. Meanwhile, we should take feasible measures to encourage teachers to engage in academic research and explore the essence of modern college education in combination with the method of teaching, which will encourage teaching and academic innovation. A set of effective procedures will be established with the purpose of promoting theory with practice, training students’ independent learning, and developing students’ creation. We should eradicate the thinking mode of “score first” of traditional appraisal standard as the only manifestation of one’s ability. We should bear in mind that our aim for education is to cultivate outstanding talents.

4 CONCLUSION

College education in China should be aimed to reform the current education system, to cultivate outstanding talents, and to create an atmosphere of academic freedom and environment. Our ultimate goal is to truly create a palace for profound knowledge.

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