Massification, Accessibility and Quality of Higher Education in China: Northeast Normal University as a Case

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1. Introduction

- Accessibility had been a deep rooted problem in the Chinese culture and ancient civilization.
- Education was traditionally viewed as a component of superstructure.
- Higher education was viewed to serve the political stability rather than to help the society and economy to develop.
1. Introduction

- Receiving higher education was taken as a privilege.
- Running higher education institutions was assumed to be consumption rather than contribution.

--- the gross enrolment rate in higher education
--- in 1978 (the first year the National Examination Entrance System resumed after 10 years of the Great Cultural Revolution) it was 1.55%, in 1988, 3.7%, and in 1998, 9.76%.

(http://www.moe.gov.cn/edoas/website18/81/info33481.htm).
1. Introduction

- In 1998, the Ministry of Education developed the Plan for Revitalizing Education in the 21st Century.
- The goal is to make senior school education compulsory in urban and more developed areas, and to enlarge the scale of higher education.
- Rapid growth started from 1999
  -- in 2002 the gross enrollment rate reached 15%. Higher education has entered the period of massification.
  -- In 2007 the rate was 23%, and the students population reached 29 million (Chen, 2007; Yuan, 2009).
  -- In 2011, the rate was 26.9% and students population was 31.67 million.
  -- and the rate will reach 36% in 2014 and 40% in 2020.

http://gaokao.eol.cn/lqzc_2916/20120831/t20120831_836909.shtml
1. Introduction

- How does this increase occur in higher education in China?

- What are the problems and how are they resolved in the process of this development?

- Here we will review the reforms in higher education in China in the past decade, especially the changes in conception, policy, and governance relating to access, capacity, equity and quality issues.

(Revised on Prof. Yang Zhong, former president of Northeast Normal University, taking Northeast Normal University as a case)
2. Changes in Conception, Policy and Governance

- From 1998 to 2009, the gross enrolment rate in China higher education rose from 9.7% to 23.3%.
- This change originated from the conceptual change of the orientation of education, which triggered the policy of decentralization of governance in education.

2.1 Reorientation of education

2.2 Decentralization of governance
2.1 Reorientation

Reorientation started from the conception change of education to policy changes.

- In the early 1980s, China’s open-door policies led to an economic liberalization and also
- People’s realization of the important role of education in achieving the national goal of the four modernizations
  (the modernizations of industry, agriculture, national defense and science and technology).
2.1 Reorientation

- Deng Xiaoping (1980 - 1997) proclaimed that education must be reoriented to meet the needs of China’s modernizations, the needs of the world and of the future.
2.1 Reorientation

Education Law of the People’s Republic of China, promulgated in 1985, defines that:

Education is the basis of socialist modernization, and the State shall ensure priority to the development of educational undertakings. The whole society should be concerned with and support the development of educational undertakings.
2.1 Reorientation

*Education is the basis for developing science and technology and preparing talents, playing a leading and comprehensive role in modernization. It must be placed in a strategic position and given priority in development […]*

*Education must adhere to serving the construction of socialist modernization and the people, combine with productive labor and social practice, and prepare socialist builders and successors who have developed morally, intellectually, physically and esthetically.*

*(based on The Report to the 16th Convention of the CPC 2002)*

*The market economy has brought the principle of demand-supply to education.*
2.1 Reorientation

Objectives for Education

--- form a national educational system that promotes life-long learning;
--- to prepare hundreds of millions of qualified people to enhance the labor force, dozens of millions of people with expertise, and a large number of creative talents;
--- to provide knowledge for technological innovations, economic construction and cultural prosperity.
2.1 Reorientation

- The role of education changes from to serve mainly political ideology and social stability to economic development and social progress.
- The conception change of education laid the foundation for policy changes.
2.2 Decentralization

- A highly centralized educational system was established in the 1950s.
- The state government assumed the responsibility for planning, administration, deciding on curricula and textbooks and provided the funding.
- It was realized that the over centralized system stifled the initiatives and enthusiasm of local government and individual institutions.
- In order to rejuvenate China through science and education, it was necessary to decentralize the governance of education.
### 2.2 Decentralization

- The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on the Reform of the Educational System promulgated in 1985, started the process of decentralization.

- In 1993, the Central Committee of CPC and the State Council issued the Program for Education Reform and Development in China.

  *The national policy is to actively encourage and fully support social institutions and citizens to establish schools according to law and to provide right guidelines and strengthen administration.*
2.2 Decentralization

The State Council and local people’s governments at all levels shall guide and administer educational work according to principles of management at different levels with suitable division of responsibilities.

Education at the second school or lower levels shall be administered by local people’s governments under the leadership of the state council. Higher education shall be administered by the State Council and the people’s governments of the provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities under the guidance of the Central Government.

(Article 14 of the Education Law states 2006)
2.2 Decentralization

With regard to provision for higher education, the Higher Education Law of The People’s Republic of China states:

*In light of the need of economic and social development, the State formulates plans of development of higher education, runs higher education institutions and promotes higher education in various ways.*

*The State encourages all sectors of society, including enterprises, public organizations or groups as well as individual citizens, to run higher education institutions in accordance with law and to participate in and support the reform and development of higher education.*
The quotes express the strategies of the government in developing higher education.

The gist of this is twofold:

--- the transition from control to guidance in governance;

--- the change from government funding as the sole input to plural sources of funding.

The policy changes have given impetus to the development of education, particularly to the realization of the goal of massification.
3. Measures to Widen Access to Higher Education

3.1 Structural reform
3.2 Plurality in ownership and sources of funding
3.3 Tuition charge
3.1 Structural reform

- Under the planned economy system, many HEIs of single disciplines or with very limited academic range were funded by various departments of the central government. In 1990’s, there were 571 HEIs affiliated with central ministries and commissions.

- The disadvantages of this are inefficiency and nonalignment with the students’ needs.

- Between 1994 and 1998, the General Office of the State Council held four meetings on reforming the higher education administrative system.

- By seizing the opportunity of government organizational reform, we have, since 1998, readjusted administration over the 93 regular universities, 72 adult education universities…(Li 2004:76).
3.2 Plurality in Ownership and Sources of Funding

- Decentralization has resulted in the emergence of plurality in institutional ownership and sources of funding.
- At present, nearly 1,000 universities or colleges are privately owned, 249 affiliated with public universities (named independent colleges) with 680,000 students funded privately.
- This is an innovative means to combine the advantage of public universities with that of private enterprises in running institutions of higher learning.
- In 2003, the Ministry of Education issued a document in support of this new type of ownership as an innovative and effective mode to speeding up the growth of higher education and to better higher education resources.
3.3 Tuition Charge

Up till 1994, students were government funded and graduates were assigned jobs in line with the unified state plan. According to the Education Law,

What is provided in college is by no means compulsory education. We cannot afford to offer free college education. Government had covered too much for universities for too long, which had always affected state input into basic education in general and compulsory education in particular. We cannot afford to make all education compulsory all the way from primary and secondary school right through to college free of charge. Not in China. Not even a developed country which can afford to put a student through college free of charge (Li, 2004:106)

The reform plan was endorsed by the State Council and carried out first on a trial basis among 50 HEIs, then 240 HEIs, and finally nationwide. At present the average tuition a regular college student pays annually is a quarter of the total yearly cost of his or her education. (ibid)
4. Northeast Normal University as a Case

4.1 Expanding capacity in alignment with needs

4.2 How to supply expansion
4.1 Expanding capacity in alignment with needs

Northeast Normal University (NENU), one of the six important teacher training institutions, is under the direct administration of the Ministry of Education. It was set up in 1946. In the past six decades, the university has been expanding its capacity in alignment with the needs of economic growth and social development. The enrolment has been doubled in the last ten years. Now the university is composed of 23 colleges, offering 68 undergraduate programs, 34 graduate program, with over 25,218 fulltime students (among whom 15,000 are undergraduates and 10,000 graduates) and 7,000 students of continuing education.

http://www.nenu.edu.cn/nenulist.php?cid=1&id=1
4.1 Expanding capacity in alignment with needs

Following the decision of the central government to enlarge enrolment in 1999, NENU started to build a new campus in 2000. It was completed within three years. The Jingyue campus, which occupies 700,000 m$^2$ with a floor area of 260,000 m$^2$, now houses over 10,000 fulltime students, half of the student population of the university.
4.1 Expanding capacity in alignment with needs

Along with the construction of the new campus, a renovation project was also completed within three years. The teaching and learning conditions as well as accommodations have been greatly improved. The university was the first in the mainland to provide an office for each professor. All the teaching and learning facilities have exceeded the standards set by the ministry of education.

With the completion of the two projects, the capacity of the university was dramatically expanded. The yearly intake of students has doubled since 2000, compared with that of 1998. In 2005, the undergraduate programs were accredited by the Ministry of Education and awarded as A level of teaching and learning.
4.2 How to supply the expansion

As mentioned above, the government decided at the turn of the century to enlarge the scale of higher education. And the goal was achieved 8 years ahead of the schedule. How was it possible to speed up the construction of infrastructure within such a short period? The policy of decentralization allowed three approaches which helped to solve the problem of supply.
4.2 How to supply the expansion

Local government support. Many Chinese universities of long standing are located in inner cities. When they decided to take in more students the first problem encountered was a shortage of buildings and land. The municipal governments gave special consideration to universities when they planned to build new campuses. Among the nearly 100 universities of the “211 Project”, about fifty of them have built a new campus in suburban areas. Northeast Normal University as a case epitomizes this approach to expansion. In 2000, NENU purchased 70 acres of land to build the new campus. The municipal government permitted a low price in accordance with an agreement with the Ministry of Education to collaboratively construct NENU as a key university.
4.2 How to supply the expansion

To establish a win-win partnership with non-government sectors. In the process of marketization, some entrepreneurs look to the logistics of universities for opportunities of expansion. Again to take NENU for example, in building the new campus, the university formed a partnership with a local company which agreed to build the student living area. The university was responsible for constructing the teaching area. With the joint effort, the first phase of the project was completed within six months. The campus was put to use within the same year, housing over 4000 freshmen in the fall semester.
4.2 How to supply the expansion

**Bank loans.** As there is increasing demand for opportunities to attend university, and students pay for part of the cost of their education, bank managers see it less risky to provide loans to universities. So the majority of universities which have expanded in the past decade have used bank loans to build new campuses or to better facilities.
5. How to guarantee equality in the process of marketization

5.1 New Challenges

5.2 New Measures
5. How to guarantee equality in the process of marketization

By “marketization” in Chinese higher education, we mean a “process whereby education becomes a commodity provided by competitive suppliers, educational services are priced and access to them depends on consumer calculations and ability to pay” (Yin and White 1994:217). While this has become reality since 1990s, education is still seen as a public cause. The central government still provides the bulk of funding to state-run universities, and the local governments support those run by provinces and municipalities. Income from tuition is only a smaller part of the cost. Even so, some students whose parents are farmers in remote areas or laid-off workers cannot afford to pay.
5. How to guarantee equality in the process of marketization

The Ministry of Education orders that *no recruited students should be left out due to inability to pay the tuition*. Universities provide support through various ways, including *bank loans, part-time jobs and scholarships for top students*. In the past few years NENU has waived one year’s tuition for those freshmen whose mark in the entrance exam exceeds 600. In the year 2002, a national sum of 7.023 billion *yuan* was provided as loans or stipends for underprivileged students (The Ministry of Education 2004:52).
5. How to guarantee equality in the process of marketization

5.1 New challenges

Reorientation of education and new policies have brought about changes in scale, which are significant in reaction to the needs of economic development and social progress. In the process of change, however, there have emerged new problems that require immediate attention.
5. How to guarantee equality in the process of marketization

5.1 New challenges

Firstly, vocational education lags behind the socio-economic development. Results of investigations show that there are a serious shortage of “silver-collars” in China. As the IT industry, the automobile industry and the service industry are developing rapidly, the preparation of technicians and nurses is far behind the demand. Take the doctor-nurse ratio for example. The world average is 1:2.7, while in China it is 1:0.61. It is estimated that 150,000 nurses need to be trained each year, if the ratio reaches 1:1 by the year 2015 (The Ministry of Education 2004).
5. How to guarantee equality in the process of marketization

5.1 New challenges

Secondly, regional gaps become wider. The policy of decentralization has brought into full play the initiatives of economically advantageous provinces and municipalities in developing education. The other side of the coin is the enlarging gaps between regions and between institutions. Therefore the issue came into focus that how to provide equal opportunities for teenagers to enter well established institutions. Due to various factors, better higher education resources are located mainly in a few metropolitan areas, where the enrolment rate is much higher than other parts. This situation conflicts with the deep-rooted egalitarian ideology.
5. How to guarantee equality in the process of marketization

5.1 New challenges

Thirdly, there is an increasing tension for graduates to find jobs. There are intertwined factors that caused the difficulty. One of them is the traditional conception of employment on the part of graduates and their parents. They prefer to work in urban areas where living and payment are much better than in rural areas. Another is the different views of education held by educators and employers. Many employers demand graduates with hands-on capacities who are ready to work in a way they desire for. But universities advocate an integrative model of education that helps the students to develop morally, intellectually and physically. Universities are endeavoring to enhance the practice part of the curriculum. But it is still not feasible for many institutions to provide opportunities for each student to practice what he/she is learning.
5. How to guarantee equality in the process of marketization

5.2 New measures

- Aiding institutions in remote areas

The central government endeavors to solve the problem through various measures, including a national plan for aiding the institutions in Xinjiang and Tibet by well-established universities, but the gaps will still remain for some time.
5. How to guarantee equality in the process of marketization

5.2 New measures

Increase the enrollment quota for vocational higher schools

In order to meet the needs, the Ministry of Education issued documents to relevant departments to accelerate the development of vocational higher education. By the year of 2007 the intake of freshmen of vocational colleges constituted almost 50% of the total enrolment in higher learning institutions.

This year, 2014, the total enrollment is 6,980,000, and 3,350,000 for vocational schools, almost half of the population.
6. How to ensure quality in the process of massification

Important Measures

- 6.1 The control of the student quota
- 6.2 The implementation of the university accreditation system

Other Measures

- 6.3 The government funding teacher training programs
- 6.4 Internationalization as a strategy to improve teaching quality
6. How to ensure quality in the process of massification

- In the past decade, China’s intake of students in higher education increased dramatically.
- In 2000, the student population was 9 million in 1,041 regular HEIs and 771 adult higher education institutions, 2.4 times more than that in 1990.
- In 2007, 29 million (Chen, 2007; Yuan, 2009) and in 2011, 31.67 million.
- In 2005, however, the Ministry of Education raised the quality issue by pointing out a general guideline for higher education, *deepening the reform, safeguarding the result, raising quality and holding the pace of development.*

**Two important measures** have been taken to guarantee the quality of higher education in the process of decentralization and massification.
6. How to ensure quality in the process of massification

- **6.1 The control of the student quota.** All the universities under the direct administration of the ministry must apply yearly for approval of the number of students to be taken in.

- Local institutions apply to the provincial government for the quota, and the total of the province must be approved by the State government.

- This has effectively held the pace of growth.

- The increase of the gross enrolment rate should be in accordance with the rate of increase of the GDP.
6. How to ensure quality in the process of massification

6.2 The implementation of the university accreditation system. In 2000, the Ministry appointed a specialist group to work out a program for evaluating the capacity of undergraduate education of a university and the actual level of teaching.

- It consists of 7 first-rank checking items, 19 2nd-rank items and 44 points of observation.
- The program covers all aspects of undergraduate education, including infrastructure, facilities, teaching staff, administration, teacher performance, student discipline, student abilities, etc.
- By June 2008, the accreditation came to an end.
6. How to ensure quality in the process of massification

- Other measures:

6.3 The government funding teacher training programs to improve teaching quality on all levels of education, especially to narrow the gap between schools in urban and rural areas.

In 2007, the Chinese government decided to start free teacher training programs in six key teachers’ universities. NENU is one of the six universities, offering 15 free teacher training programs of various disciplines, such as science and humanities, like Chemistry, physics, Chinese, education, music and art, etc.
6. How to ensure quality in the process of massification

6.3 The government funding teacher training programs

Over 34,000 students were enrolled in the first three Years (Song, 2010). Right now the number should have been more than doubled. These students are provided with free tuition, free accommodation and certain amount of living allowances. Upon graduation, they should in principle go back to where they are from. However, they will be allowed to work anywhere else unless they find a position in primary or secondary schools.

The teaching contract is for ten years, with at least two year working experience in rural areas.
6. How to ensure quality in the process of massification

6.3 The government funding teacher training programs

These students will be provided with opportunities of continuing graduate education while in service. Two groups of in-service graduate students have been enrolled in NENU. They will be on campus during summer and winter vocations and study other courses and complete assignments on line.

Those who violate the contract will pay back the education expenses. And their credibility will be seriously undermined.
6. How to ensure quality in the process of massification

6.3 The government funding teacher training programs

Innovative teacher training programs have been established, exploring new mechanisms for training teachers. NENU has established a “U-G-S” model (or three-partnership model, the University + Local Government + Middle & Primary Schools).

Apprentice training bases have been established with local junior and senior schools, where students can have a 4-month internship.
6. How to ensure quality in the process of massification

6.3 The government funding teacher training programs

- Three batches of government funding students have graduated so far.
- Around 1500 government funding students graduated from NENU each year, and the employment rate is 100%.
- Take 2011, Foreign Languages School enrolled 149 students, among whom 106 are English majors, 24 Japanese majors, and 9 Russian majors.

- 93% work in junior or senior schools, 7% in higher education institutions, government offices, or enter into graduate programs.
- 90% work in country key junior or senior schools,
- 3% in private schools;
- 95% back to their where they are from
- 5% go to other areas.
6. How to ensure quality in the process of massification

6.4 Internationalization as a strategy to improve teaching quality and to bring forth educational reform.

- *Internationalization* (synonymous with *open* in Chinese) have become the key words in many university missions.

In order to fulfill the mission of being strong, open and harmonious, NENU is working hard to follow the Concept of *Respected Education*, pursuing educational innovation, stressing the distinctive characteristics of management, enhancing qualities of education, making great efforts to build NENU into a first-rate teacher training university in the world.

- Ways of internationalization:
  - exchange programs
  - cooperation programs
6. How to ensure quality in the process of massification

- 6.4 Internationalization

-- In 2013 about 150 students in FLS of NENU joined the international cooperation and exchange programs, taking up at about 10% of the total.
## 6. How to ensure quality in the process of massification

### Students of FLS on Co- and Ex- Programs 2012 to 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Places</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
<th>Programs</th>
<th>Time Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.A</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Cooperation, Duel Degree</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Exchange, Duel Degree</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Exchange</td>
<td>0.5-1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Exchange, Duel degree</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Exchange</td>
<td>0.5-1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Exchange</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Cooperation, Grad Degree</td>
<td>1-1.5 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Exchange</td>
<td>0.5 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Exchange</td>
<td>0.5 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other places</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Individual app, Grad Degree</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 158 (85 undergraduates, 43 college graduates, 30 upon graduation)
6. How to ensure quality in the process of massification

Some thoughts on the quality of international education

- How to evaluate international education?
- What is the role of the market needs in international education?
- How to deal with cultural and institutional differences in international education?
6. How to ensure quality in the process of massification

- How to evaluate international education?
  --International education provides students and parents with choices and freedom for education.
  --Do they really know what to learn and where to learn?
  --Do students who have joined the international programs bring back reasonable or high quality academic transcripts?
  --Is what they have learned from international education relevant to the domestic job market needs?
6. How to ensure quality in the process of massification

- How to evaluate international education?
- In my past 7-year work experience as a vice dean of FLS for internationalization, I find that:
  -- With international education background, students definitely have advantages in looking for jobs.
  -- In some cases, students have brought back credits incoherent with what they are supposed to gain, too many language courses, university required courses, or repetition of the courses they have learned in their home institutions.
  -- Most students (and also parents) are not very sure about if they should study overseas, what to learn and when and where to go.
6. How to ensure quality in the process of massification

- Cultural and institutional differences in international education
- Some case studies
  - Case One
  - Case Two
  - Case Three
  - Case Four
6. How to ensure quality in the process of massification

- The four cases put together presents the following revelations:

  -- English is no longer a big problem for Chinese students studying overseas.

  -- Negotiations are needed between institutions to bridge the gap in educational or institutional systems, such as curriculum design and credit transfer. If there should be a universal syllabus for university required core courses for all partnership universities.

  -- Prepare students for studying overseas does not mean language preparation alone, but includes learning goals, cultural and ideological expectations, study habits, etc.

  ---Effective evaluation systems should be established in order to ensure international education quality.
7. Conclusion

This report has reviewed how massification has been coped with in Chinese higher education. The reform originated from re-conception of education in the context of globalization and the emergence of knowledge economy. Since the adoption of the open-door policy, education has been placed at a strategic position. This conceptual change itself, as the consequence of the open up policy, reflects the impact of globalization on China. The policy has widened the frame of reference in thinking about issues of education on the part of decision makers and administrators.
7. Conclusion

No changes can be successful without consensus. The agreement on the necessity to reorient education has laid the foundation for the strategies to develop higher education in China, including decentralization in governance, expansion of scale, and pluralization of sources of provision. These strategic measures, as important changes themselves, have resulted in better practices in institutions. In other words, changes in higher education are systematic, from the decision level, to the governance level, and then to the operational level. The reform has been designed and planned carefully.
7. Conclusion

The changes are significant progress in that higher education now provides wider and better service for the society and the educated. The widening of access is a historical achievement in China. The rapid increase of gross enrolment means the upgrade of the quality of the labor force and at the same time more opportunities for sons and daughters of citizens to receive higher education. Admittedly, in the process of reform, some new problems arise, such as the uneven expansion in different types of education, the enlarging regional disparities in access and quality in higher education, and the growing tension of graduate employment. However, the government are taking measures to curb the problems and the methods taken are generally effective.
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Thank you!