Chapter 15

The Trends and Challenges of Higher Education in China

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case focuses on the challenges and trends of Chinese higher education. It analyzes the challenges that the Chinese higher education faces and discusses a couple of issues of internationalization of higher education, and finally, the case points out the future trends that Chinese higher education might encounter.

BACKGROUND

Since the foundation of People's Republic of China, gradually the Chinese government has established three national education strategies: Priority Development, Revitalization China in Term of Science and Education, and Reinvigoration China through Human Resource. China has shaped the socialist education system with characteristics of increasing scale, quality improvement, reasonable structure, and effectiveness enhancement. During the process of reform and development initiating in1980s, the deepening education structural reform has provided powerful impetus to the vitality of

Chinese education. After years of exploration and practice, China has established its compulsory education system led by the State Council, planned and implemented by the provincial government, especially the local government. Such a system strengthens the government's duty, and plays a key role to push forward the compulsory education. With the advancement of building socialist democracy and legal system, China has set up preliminary education law and regularity system that composed of the central and local education law, administrative rules, which paved the way for the civil education right, the basic educational institute, and the improvement of reform and development (Yang, 2001).[1] In 2008, nation-wide institutions of higher education numbered

Table 1. The number of students at different educational level (in, 0,000)

Type of education	1949	1978	2008
primary school	2439	14624	10332
middle school	83	4995	5628
high school	44	1804	4546
University	12	228	2907

(Source: The number of students in different educational level in 1949, 1978, and 2008, available at http://www.moe.gov.cn/edoas/website18/41/info1251089001570241.htm)

2,663, including 2,263 regular higher education institutions, and 400 institutions of higher adult education. Among regular institutions of higher education, 1,079 were four-year undergraduate institutions, and 1,184 were polytechnic colleges. There were altogether 796 master's-degree-granting institutions in China, including 479 colleges and universities and 317 research institutes.[2]

China has just celebrated 60th anniversary in October, 2009 and looking back, the Chinese education has made a great progress along with the achievements in other industries. During the past 60 years, especially last three decades, the Chinese government has been improving educational level for general public and hence promoting the cultural and scientific quality for Chinese nation (Liu, 2009). By establishing the socialist education framework, Chinese education has fulfilled two historic stride leaps, namely, the universal of the nine-year compulsory education, and the mass higher education which contribute more to accelerating development of vocational education by insisting on the public welfare and equal access to education (Postiglione, 2005). The number of students in primary school, middle school, high school, and the universities respectively booms as shown in Table 1 below. The enrolment for

institutions of higher education and the number of students attending school continued to increase.

Now, China is holding the largest education in the world with the aim to turn it into leading human resource nationally.

SETTING THE STAGE

The Achievements of Chinese Higher Education

Fostering Millions of Trained Talents

Since the national liberation in 1949, the Chinese education has trained billions of highly qualified labors, millions of specialized professionals and a host of outstanding innovative talents. In 1949, there were only 120 thousand undergraduate students altogether in China. Since then, the higher education has experienced tremendous development as illustrated in Table 2. The numbers nearly doubled since 1995 due to the college expansion plan in 1999.[3] In 2008 the total number of students in all kinds of higher education institutions reached 29,070,000 which is 243 times of students in 1949. The total number of students enrolled for regular

Table 2. The number of undergraduate students (1949-2008) (in, 0,000)

Year	1949	1965	1978	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2008
Students	12	109	228	272	352	382	577	1230	2300	2907

(**Source**: The number of undergraduate students, available at http://www.moe.gov.cn/edoas/website18/37/info1252641418587437.htm)

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