

## Chapter 8

# Transformation of Higher Education in China: A Teaching Methods Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

*Facilitated by the explosion of technologies, globalization is the catalyst for many changes in society and its workings. Higher education is no exception. In the present chapter from a teaching methods perspective, the authors consider China's higher education system and the transformations it is undergoing, largely as a response to globalization. Given that the employment capabilities of graduates are influenced by teaching methods they experienced throughout their education, and in turn, once gaining employment graduates' capabilities make some on the nation, it is appropriate and useful to adopt a teaching methods perspective on educational transformation. Thus, to further understanding of the status of teaching methods in China, the chapter reports on a study comparing Chinese adult education methods with Western educational methods. A conceptual framework of the principles of andragogy is used. The study results, consistent with other literature of adult education in China, indicate that some andragogical elements are used by Chinese educators.*

### INTRODUCTION

Scott (1998) observes “investment in [higher education] can be translated into comparative economic advantage, a belief encouraged by theories of post-industrial society, which suggest that ‘knowledge’ has become the primary resource in advance economies”. Universities are core to contributing to, and shaping, knowledge resources both at national and global levels. Beyond training a new generation of leaders, and producing well-educated members of society, universities make social contribution through commercialization of research, problem solving, provision of public space for knowledge development,

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exchange and application as well as scientific and engineering base for inventions in the private sector (Wu & Zhou, 2012). In recognition of the important role universities play in the knowledge economy China, like most other nations, is recognizing higher education as an important economic asset, and as a vehicle for building a significant presence in a globalized socio-economic environment. Reaching towards a globally competitive higher education system, China is steadily reforming its system of higher education. China's reforms are capturing the interest of the West, the U.S. being no exception. Towards gaining deeper insights into the reforms taking place in Chinese Higher Education with respect to teaching methods, a systematic comparison of adult education methods in China and the U.S. was undertaken. Prior to describing the study and discussing its outcomes, it is useful to begin with a consideration of the China's aspirations for higher education, and followed by discussion of teaching methods from the adult education perspective of pedagogy and andragogy, as is found in the work of adult education theorists such as Knowles. A brief literature review of adult education in China and the U.S. is undertaken prior to describing the study methodology, presenting results and discussing insights gained from the study.

### **China's Aspirations for Higher Education**

The most compelling evidence of China's ambitions for a high quality, globally competitive higher education system is found in the initiation of the 985 project. Coinciding with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Peking University, the project was announced in 1998. The 1998 administration, striving to develop the knowledge base in its people through higher education, set goals to grow China's education system and thus helped to grow China's universities (Douglass, 2012). The results of the administration's efforts indicate positive progress towards meeting the aim of high quality, globally competitive higher education in China. Enrollment increased, and the quality of China's education system improved.

At the inception of the 985 Project, the first nine Chinese Ivy League Universities arose:

1. Fudan University
2. Harbin Institute of Technology
3. Nanjing University
4. Peking University
5. Shanghai Jiao Tong University
6. Tsinghua University
7. University of Science and Technology of China
8. Xi'an Jiao Tong University
9. Zhejiang University

In 2004, the second phase of the project saw the addition of other universities to reach a total of 39. In 2011, the closure of the 985 Project was announced, but efforts to further the goal of high quality, globally competitive higher education continue in the form of project 211 in which there are currently 112 member universities. More recently, on November 5, 2015, the Chinese State Council released a statement "Coordinate Development of World-class Universities and First-class Disciplines Construction Overall Plan" (China sets direction for world class universities, 2015). The statement furthers the goals of the 985 and 211 projects with the World Class 2.0" plan, now referred to as the "Double First Class" plan. An important objective of the plan is to have six universities into the top world universities by 2020 and have some of these institutions ranked in the top 15 by 2030. The Thirteen Five Year Plan

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