

From Mao to the Market:
An Analysis of Chinese Higher Education in the
Communist Era

by

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Introduction

In this thesis I will conduct an analysis of China's system of higher education, with particular attention to how the system's recent history is influencing its current evolution.

Personal Background

The nature of this project was inspired by my experience studying and living in China, and in particular by my own experience interacting with Chinese students. I first visited China in the summer of 2005, when I was hired to teach English at a small private language institute (somewhat misleadingly named "Gallop International") located in Xi'an. That summer would serve as a crash course in living abroad, in living in China (a very different experience than time I had spent in less exotic locales such as Mexico or England), and in teaching itself. I spoke no Chinese at the time, and was relatively clueless about both China's history and culture. Luckily, some friendly fellow teachers were kind enough to help me acclimate, and though the summer never seemed entirely real, it ended up being a remarkable experience.

That first summer brought me into constant contact with Chinese students, and while I taught most age groups at some point or another (including a few

stressful classes given to business-oriented adults), the majority of my students ranged from elementary to high school age. I became closer with my students as the summer went on, and remember being shocked to discover the staggering amount of time that most of them felt compelled to devote to their school work and related extra-curriculars. Especially as many of these students were still far removed from the dreaded *gaokao* (college entrance examination), it surprised me to find that their lives would already be so consumed by preparation for such high-stakes testing. Though I understood the desire of my students' parents that their children succeed academically, I found it troubling that the educational system was encouraging what I perceived to be a relatively unhealthy way of life. In my own classroom, I came to draw the line at parents actually standing at our door and staring through its window all throughout class; I thought there was enough pressure on the kids without their having to undergo constant parental surveillance.

In August I finished my summer contract, and, though my various employers (in true Chinese fashion, there were four bosses) attempted to retain me to teach for a full year, I returned to college. I would, however, return to China the next summer, this time as a student learning Chinese in Beijing. My second summer was in many ways more difficult than the first; though I could travel and communicate more easily than I had been able to in Xi'an (where, for example, I ate lunch at the same restaurant for nearly my first month because ordering anywhere else was an exercise in embarrassing futility), the rapid and stressful

pace of our curriculum quickly had me empathizing with my students of the summer before. The relief I felt at the end of the summer further solidified my intuition that not all learning is made equal; there are more and there are less healthy ways of learning.

My third and most recent trip to China took place during the next summer (2007), as I received a grant from the Freeman Asian/Asian American Initiative to conduct research into Chinese higher education. Once again I returned to Beijing, but this time with the perspective of a researcher rather than a student. I spent most of the summer conducting informal interviews with students at China's two premier universities: Beijing and Tsinghua. Though conducting such research proved to be more challenging than I had expected, I came away with a fascinating collage of perspectives and experiences relating to China's system of education. In the end, my interviews proved to be a way of provoking my own thoughts, as well as offering a number of suggestions as to where to go with a future project. In particular, I came to realize how closely recent changes in Chinese higher education have been related to the nation's broader economic changes.

The future project inspired by this research is, of course, this very thesis. Though my personal experience with China and Chinese students will not often emerge explicitly in the following pages, these experiences constitute the backbone of, and inspiration for, this project. My project is further informed by service on Wesleyan University's Educational Policy Committee (EPC), of which I

was the student chair for three years. As an EPC member, I spent a considerable amount of time discussing, researching and creating educational regulations for the university, and so became familiar with many of the issues facing contemporary American colleges. While not all of this experience is directly applicable to my study of Chinese higher education, it has certainly influenced and informed my perspective on the state of China's universities.

Methodological Considerations

I suggest that any effort to understand China's current system of higher education must take into account the system's past. As such, the first half of this thesis will take the form of a broad historical narrative tracing the changes in China's system of higher education since the advent of the Communist government. The history presented here will represent a macro, or "bird's-eye" view of education during this period. The advantages of such an approach are twofold: first, more ground can be covered by using this method than a more detail-oriented approach, and second, such an approach is ideal for highlighting the general themes of a system's evolution. My ultimate goal is to use the information assembled here to inform an analysis of current trends among China's universities, and to make recommendations about the system's future direction. Given such a project, this macro approach should be appropriate.

The history presented in the first half of this thesis will help to establish several truths which are crucial to my broader project: first, this history will help

to clarify that while my views on education are heavily influenced by Western educational theory, this is in fact true of China as well. As such, it is not unreasonable to evaluate China's educational system on what might be thought of as "conventionally Western" educational standards (this concern will be dealt with in more detail shortly). Secondly, this history will serve to demonstrate that changes in China's system of higher education over the last sixty years have been inextricably linked to larger national issues. Lastly, this history will show that during the era of Reform and Opening (1978-present), changes to China's university system have been primarily driven by economic (rather than, say, ideological) considerations.

Here it will be helpful to elaborate for a moment on exactly what I mean when I refer to "a university" or a "system of universities" as discreet entities. To refer to universities as acting in a particular way requires a fair amount of generalization, just as any historical account of a nation "making a decision" would. As a conglomerate of students, faculty, staff and administration, a university is a complex entity, and this complexity only increases when multiple universities are referred to collectively. Nevertheless, any broad study of a nation's educational system requires that one employ similarly broad generalizations, and this strategy often involves imparting a notion of agency to one or more institutions (or for that matter, to the nation itself) that is, at best, a mostly-accurate lens through which to understand history.

Theoretical Framework

The general structure of this thesis will center on what I identify as the “essential functions of the university.” They are three:

1. To produce and disseminate new knowledge and theory.
2. To prepare students to lead healthy, fulfilling and productive lives within society.
3. To be an agent of change in society (which entails working to deal with societal problems and helping to build and maintain a healthy society).

Prior to offering a detailed explanation of these functions, it will be helpful to deal with a broader issue which may arise in response to the naming of these particular functions; namely, anyone familiar with Western educational theory will be quick to recognize that each of these three functions has deep roots in the Western educational tradition. Is it not then somewhat unfair (and perhaps even imperialistic) to judge China’s system of higher education by such standards? This is a fair question, and an important one, and answering it will require a brief exploration of the emergence of the concept of the university.

While it is of course difficult to pinpoint the exact moment at which the modern concept of the university was born, scholarly consensus on the subject is that this event was represented by the emergence of the Universities of Paris and Bologna as early as the 13th century¹. Though many changes have occurred as this

¹ Kenneth Minogue, The Concept of a University (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2005) 1.

model evolved and was exported to new countries, most writers on education agree that the basic model of Paris and Bologna has dominated higher education even up to the present day, and that contemporary universities, whether in the United States, Europe, Asia or elsewhere, are all descendents of this same general model. This does not mean that universities in these various locales are identically structured, or that the differences between one system of higher education and another are trivial. What is important to note, however, is that Chinese universities share a common ancestor with their Western peers.²

Furthermore, as will become clear throughout this thesis, over the last hundred years China's system of higher education has gone through a number of periods in which it was changed to emulate other nations' educational systems. For this reason it makes little sense to talk about Chinese universities as if they belonged to a fundamentally distinct category of higher education that is based entirely on Chinese concepts of education. Thus the earlier question about the imperialist overtones of evaluating the Chinese system of higher education by Western standards involves some misunderstanding of history; in fact, the current system of Chinese higher education operates on this same, essentially Western, structure, and has been deeply influenced by it since the beginning of the 19th century. This is not to say that Chinese higher education is identical to that of the West, or that it should blindly follow the lead of Western educational

² Philip Altbach, Comparative Higher Education: Knowledge, the University, and Development (Westport: Ablex, 1998) 4.

systems. But what it does mean is that no truly distinctive form of “Chinese” higher education currently exists to be threatened by some sort of “western imperialist” notion of educational philosophy. The era when that might have been true is long past. In short, there should not be any fundamental problem with evaluating Chinese higher education by the standards which I propose, although whether or not these particular standards are worthy is yet to be seen.

All three of the “essential university functions” which I identify can to some extent be traced back to the Universities of Paris and Bologna, but they may be best represented by their association with later developments to this general model of higher education. The first function which I identify, “to produce and disseminate new knowledge and theory,” is especially characteristic of the German research universities which emerged in the mid-19th century. Under this conception, the university is essentially a “knowledge factory” in which student life and development are given less emphasis than the production of new information and theory. While I do not support the pursuit of research to the exclusion of all else, I do maintain that the creation of new knowledge should constitute one of the main goals of any university, and that the presence of active research in a university can have pedagogical benefits.³

The second function which I identify as essential to the university is “to prepare students to lead healthy, fulfilling and productive lives within society.”

³ Altbach 5.

This “role” is tricky insofar as it actually seems to be two separate (and often, competing) roles welded together, and indeed, there is an age-old conflict between conceiving of education primarily as vocational and viewing it as a sort of broader “education for life.” But I argue that, if approached correctly (and with a view towards the long-term), these goals are in fact not mutually exclusive, and this subject will be dealt with in detail later on.

For now, it will be enough to say that the attempt to balance these two goals is best represented by the American universities of the 19th century and beyond, which have focused on human development on one hand (as represented by the liberal arts tradition) and on vocational training on the other (as represented by the emergence of land grant universities in the wake of WWII, and more recently by the establishment of for-profit universities like the University of Phoenix).⁴ This is not a situation where (as in the German research universities mentioned above), one type of American university can be said to have exemplified this entire role. But it is, I would argue, a situation which demonstrates that the tension involved in balancing these two goals is one of the fundamental strains of the American educational community’s dialogue.

The final university role which I identify as essential is “to be an agent of change in society.” This third role may seem significantly more ambiguous than the previous two, and indeed, there are several ways in which it could be

⁴ Marcus Peter Ford, Beyond the Modern University: Toward a Constructive Postmodern University (Westport: Praeger, 2002) 29.

interpreted. On the most straightforward reading, this role might imply that universities need to accumulate and wield political influence. What I'm advocating, however, is a more nuanced interpretation of this role, one which I identify with the educational philosophy of John Dewey. In his essay "My Pedagogical Creed," Dewey describes his vision of education:

I believe that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform.

I believe that all reforms which rest simply upon the enactment of law, or the threatening of certain penalties, or upon changes in mechanical or outward arrangements, are transitory and futile.

I believe that education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction.

I believe that it is the business of every one interested in education to insist upon the school as the primary and most effective interest of social progress and reform in order that society may be awakened to realize what the school stands for, and aroused to the necessity of endowing the educator with sufficient equipment properly to perform his task.⁵

This is the interpretation of what it means to be an "agent of change" that I identify as being one of the essential roles of the university. Whether or not a university is an autonomous entity wielding political influence is to some extent beside the point; what really matters is whether or not a nation's university system is capable of changing the nation itself "from the ground up," so to speak. There is, however, some degree of autonomy necessary if universities are to fulfill this function. That is, for universities to have the capacity to transform the society in which they function, they must be capable of holding and communicating *their own values* (though as the pragmatic Dewey would be quick to point out, these

⁵ John Dewey, My Pedagogic Creed (New York: E.L. Kellogg & Co., 1897).

values should not be conceived of as “transcendent” in any way). The ability of universities to act as agents of change is contingent on their *not* being mandated to subscribe to the value structures which currently dominant in the nation itself. Only then can they exercise the same sort of critical thinking and analysis which they attempt to evoke in their students.

As has already been noted, this third essential function of the university is less straightforward than the previous two, which perhaps should not be surprising, given that it is less well-grounded in the historical tradition of universities. Indeed, a university that truly committed itself to this function would likely look significantly different than most modern universities, whether in the United States, China, or elsewhere. But as later chapters will make clear, the need for universities to embrace this function has become particularly urgent in the modern era, and there is reason to believe this trend will continue.

While these three university functions by no means constitute all the goals of a university, I argue that they represent the most important of its functions, and that if a university were to engage in nothing that was not summed up in these three roles (along, perhaps with occasional fund-raising), it would still likely be a successful institution by any measure. With that said, and as my discussion of the German and American universities implied, there is further work to be done in balancing these three university roles, and the tensions involved in this process will recur throughout this thesis. For now, explicit reference to these three

functions will be set aside, as the next two chapters will offer an account of the historical evolution of China's system of higher education during the Communist era.

Chapter One

A Brief History of Chinese Higher Education from 1949-1977

The general evolution of China's universities in the early twentieth century was one in which they increasingly emulated their western counterparts; between 1910 and 1949 traditional academies, or *shuyuan*, became increasingly obsolete and academic reformers (such as Beijing University's Cai Yuanpei) led significant efforts to import what were essentially German and French conceptions of the university (complete with burgeoning ideals of academic freedom).¹ However the tumultuous periods of the Second World War and Chinese Civil War created significant disruptions for higher education, even forcing some universities to undertake large-scale evacuations to the country's interior.² A further issue for higher education during this period was that it remained the province of a select few. At the time of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s victory over the Guomindang (GMD) in 1949, tertiary education in China consisted of 205 public, private and missionary universities with a total enrollment of around 117,000 students, approximately .002% of the population.³

¹ Ruth Hayhoe, *China's Universities 1895-1995: A Century of Cultural Conflict* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996) 45.

² Douglas Stiffler, "Resistance to the Sovietization of Higher Education in China," *Universities Under Dictatorship*, ed. John Connelly and Michael Gruttner (University Park: Pennsylvania University, 2005) 219.

³ Weifang Min, "Chinese Higher Education," *Asian Universities: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Philip G. Altbach and Toru Umakoshi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2004) 59.

Although Chinese universities during the civil war period were nominally connected to the established Nationalist government, the Communist party developed strong support among university students. In fact, anti-American (and by extension, anti-GMD) protests on university campuses during 1946-47 were a significant factor in the erosion of public support for the Nationalists.⁴ By the time of the eventual victory of the CCP in 1949 it was clear that general student sympathy lay with Mao Zedong and the Communist leadership (although faculty were more ambivalent), and in the period of uncertainty following the regime change it appeared that the CCP was hesitant to interfere with the affairs of universities. Author Douglass Stiffler explains: “The CCP leadership saw the universities both as important bases of support and as creatures of the national and petite bourgeoisie and determined not to disturb them too much in the immediate aftermath of the CCP victory. Winning over the urban middle classes, of whom the intellectuals formed a key part, would be required in order to successfully establish an urban-based regime.”⁵

Stiffler goes on to describe the lengths to which the CCP went to solidify support among the university population, noting that Mao himself gave orders to shield Yenching and Tsinghua Universities from any harm during the military takeover of Beijing. Instead, during the takeover students and faculty were typically called to a meeting with Communist cadres, informed about the changes taking place, and asked for suggestions. Aside from the abolition of courses in

⁴ Stiffler 223.

⁵ Stiffler 221.

Guomindang ideology and the substitution of courses in Communist thought, initial changes by the CCP to the university system were few.⁶ This period of laissez-faire regulation, however, would be brief, only lasting until 1950.

Communist Consolidation and Soviet Influence

The next stage in the development of China's system of higher education would be marked by Soviet influence and massive reform. The year 1950 was a turning point of sorts for China, as the Soviet Union came to replace the United States as China's primary foreign ideal.⁷ This shift was encapsulated in Mao Zedong's dictum that China would "lean to one side," or embrace Soviet ideals and pledge its support to the Soviet Union. Theodore Hsi-En Chen's description of this shift notes that "the emphasis on Soviet cultural supremacy was accompanied by the repudiation of all Western influence and of China's past educational heritage; the former was condemned as bourgeois poison, the latter as feudalism."⁸ This aggressive stance by the CCP was essentially a mandate for significant educational reform, and indeed, a massive reorganization along Soviet lines would begin in 1950.

In June of 1950 the First All-China Conference on Higher Education was held in Beijing. Themes emerging from the conference included: the necessity for education to serve the state, the need for more centralized control over

⁶ Stiffler 225.

⁷ Theodore Hsi-En Chen, "Educational Development in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1981," China: Seventy Years After the 1911 Hsin-Hai Revolution, ed. Hungdah Chiu and Shao-Chuan Leng (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1984) 365.

⁸ Chen 366.

education, increased emphasis on science and technology and the creation of new types of specialized schools.⁹ Already by 1950 the Communist government had essentially consolidated control over the university system, a speedy initiative which Stiffler attributes to the CCP's conviction that "only the institutions of higher education could be counted on to produce cadres capable of building a powerful state and an industrialized nation. Without cadres, the CCP government would be weak and the nation poor."¹⁰ Especially in the context of the later anti-intellectualism and thought reform of the CCP, it is worth noting that the party's original intentions towards universities and faculty members appear to have been relatively benign. An excerpt from the 1950 Conference should help to illustrate the CCP's initial stance towards higher education:

Our objective of higher education is to cultivate and train, by methods that combine theory and practice, the kind of high-level personnel for national reconstruction who possess the qualities of being culturally advanced, masterful of the attainment of modern science and technology, and being wholeheartedly dedicated to the ideology of service to the people. In order to achieve this objective, our higher education must provide a revolutionary political education, eradicate feudalistic, comprador, and fascist thoughts, and develop the ideology of service to the people... Our higher education must be intimately coordinated with our nation's economic, political, and defense needs; above all, it must serve the needs of economic development... Inasmuch as our higher education has as its goal the training of high-level personnel for national reconstruction, our institutions of higher education must therefore systematically develop a scientific educational theory that is united with practice, and must, on such a basis, carry on specialized scientific and technological education. Moreover, our institutions of higher education must from now on throw their doors wide open for members of the peasant and working classes, so as to produce for our nation a large group of intellectuals of peasant-worker background.¹¹

Soon after its consolidation of China's universities, the Communist government nationalized the entire system of educational institutions, including

⁹ Stiffler 228.

¹⁰ Stiffler 228.

¹¹ *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily), June 14, 1950 as quoted in: Chang-Tu Hu, "Higher Education in Mainland China," Comparative Education Review Feb. 1961.

those schools that had formerly been run by foreign missionaries (although some missionary schools continued to exist until as late as 1952).¹² What followed was a period of far-reaching reform of education along Soviet lines, a reorganization that author Weifang Min describes as being “based on the belief of the leadership that the higher education system, as one part of the super-structure of society, should be integrated with the economic base of the country. Since China was engaged in building a socialist, centrally planned economy, it would need to change its higher education system accordingly.”¹³ Although there are some indications that the Soviet-style reform was viewed negatively by many university faculty members, China’s entrance into the Korean War in October of 1950 ushered in a campaign of thought reform which muted public dissent by intellectuals.¹⁴

As early as the 1950 First All-China Conference on Higher Education, the CCP was relying heavily upon the advice of Soviet education experts (*sulian zhuanjia*). The first of these experts, A-er-xin-jie-fu (the Chinese approximation of the Soviet advisor’s name), spent most of 1950 giving counsel to China’s Ministry of Higher Education. Stiffler writes that Soviet advisors like A-er-xin-jie-fu “emphasized the comprehensive, planned, and eminently *rational* nature of this [the Soviet] system, with 436 specialties all with education plans, approved by the Ministry, and specifying the precise number of hours to be devoted to each subject, exams

¹² Min 59.

¹³ Min 59.

¹⁴ Stiffler 228.

to be taken, theses to be written.” Thus the Soviet system was contrasted with the “presumed chaotic variations of capitalist educational regimes” which lacked such central planning.¹⁵ With these arguments as justification, national unified instructional plans were soon implemented at all institutions of higher education. So equipped, schools were to better serve the manpower needs of the new socialist economy.¹⁶ The official government justification for this emulation of the Soviets is well-expressed in an article in the *Guangming Daily*:

The content of Soviet teaching material is characterized by its strictly scientific system; it is complete and is guided by the viewpoint of dialectic materialism... In the current process of revising and adopting teaching plans, it has become clear that those outlines drawn up on the basis of Soviet blueprints have had the full support of delegates, whereas those deviating from the Soviet example have given rise to serious dissension. The reason is simple. It is because Soviet outlines have come from scores of years of labor and have proved their superiority through practice. What reason is there for us to depart from Soviet blueprints?¹⁷

Part of the restructuring of the higher education landscape was motivated by a desire for regional balance with regard to the distribution of top-tier universities. Acting on the advice of Soviet advisors, CCP education officials determined that only one or two comprehensive (generalist) universities were to be maintained in each of China’s six military-administrative regions—a strategy that Soviet advisors assured the CCP had been effective in the Soviet Union.¹⁸ Generalist approaches to education (typically emphasized in the social sciences) were increasingly viewed as bourgeois excess, and many of the most significant Soviet-inspired reforms involved a shifting of priorities from general education to specialized

¹⁵ Stiffler 239.

¹⁶ Min 59.

¹⁷ Arthur H. Steiner, “The Curriculum in Chinese Socialist Education,” *Pacific Affairs* Sep. 1958.

¹⁸ Stiffler 237.

vocational training. Students were encouraged to study technical subjects rather than the liberal arts, a shift that John Fairbank describes as “from a program that produced broad-gauged people for top government jobs to a more practical one that produced technicians... This may be seen as an attempt to cut the linkage between the liberal education and public policy.”¹⁹

Other significant components of the Soviet-inspired educational reform included the separation of teaching from research and a (related) general trend towards departmentalization. Research was put under the supervision of the newly established Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), which consisted of hundreds of research institutes existing separately from the system of higher education. During the same time period, universities were brought under the jurisdiction of their corresponding government ministries (i.e. Beijing Agricultural University was to be overseen by the Ministry of Agriculture).²⁰ “By the end of this period of readjustment,” writes author Ruth Hayhoe, “the total number of institutions had been reduced from 227 to 181, with most institutions now being specialized in function, and administered by the national ministry appropriate to their knowledge area.”²¹

In the years following the initial Soviet-inspired restructuring of 1950-52, Mao and the other CCP leaders devoted significant efforts to establishing a system of

¹⁹ John Fairbank and Merle Goldman, China: A New History (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2006) 362.

²⁰ Min 60.

²¹ Hayhoe 81.

mass education. As previously noted, the percent of China's population for whom higher education was a possibility was still minute at the time of the CCP's rise to power, a situation that Mao would determine to change. In the early 1950s the government's efforts to make education more widely available centered on the establishment of "people's schools" (*minban*), which were to be established in every village and serve as pipelines to higher levels of education. This initiative, however, proved to be quixotic, and its unintended consequences would set the stage for significant turmoil for educators and students alike.

In China: A New History, John Fairbank describes the problems arising from the CCP's early attempts at mass education: "The CCP aspired to create intellectuals out of workers and peasants without delay, but professors found that the best students still came from families with educational backgrounds and that workers and peasants with only a few years of schooling were simply not capable of university work."²² Given this situation, it should not be surprising that, given his populist tendencies, Mao Zedong would be upset with the existing educational establishment (presumably the alternative option, which would involve a less than positive assessment of the capabilities of "peasant/scholars," would have been problematic for him to embrace). It then seems reasonable to conclude that this failed initiative was a significant factor in the CCP's shift in dealings with the intellectual establishment (from a relatively benign stance in the early 1950s to a hostile one in the 1960s).

²² Fairbank 363.

The First Five-Year Plan, 1953-1957

In order to understand China's Soviet-inspired educational reform, it is necessary to frame it within the context of China's larger social, political and economic reforms. China embarked upon the "First Five-Year Plan" in 1953, an initiative which was designed to serve the nation's goal of a rapid increase in technological and engineering talent in order to bolster its economy. Within a broad economic context, the First Five-Year Plan was quite successful, although its results in the realm of agriculture were less impressive. Fairbank explains: "National income grew at an average rate of 8.9 percent. Agricultural output was said to have expanded about 3.8 percent as against a population growth of about 2.4 percent... In general, it was said that urban wages rose by almost a third and peasant income about a fifth."²³ The plan's success encouraged the government to embark upon a Second Five-Year plan, similar to the first but with less reliance on Soviet aid and reduced emphasis on the collectivization of agriculture, which had not produced encouraging results. The Second Five-Year Plan, however, was never truly implemented; political events occurring at the end of the First Five-Year Plan would influence the CCP leaders to move in a more radical direction.

Hundred Flowers Campaign, 1956-1957

By the mid-1950s the relationship between China's communist government and the nation's intelligentsia had evidently not progressed to the extent that

²³ Fairbank 358.

Mao had hoped. His conviction remained that the support of the intellectual establishment was vital to the success of the CCP's reforms (Fairbank quotes him as saying "We can't get along without them."), but he felt frustrated by a lack of engagement on the part of the intellectuals. By and large, Mao maintained, intellectuals were not opposed to Marxism. Out of China's 5 million "intellectuals" (those with a minimum of a high school education), Mao speculated that no more than 3 percent were actually hostile to Marxism. It then followed that eliciting increased discussion and engagement among the intellectual establishment would provide general support for CCP policies. As such, in May of 1956 Mao initiated what would be known as the "Hundred Flowers Campaign," in which thinkers were invited to voice constructive criticism of the communist system.²⁴

The initial response to the CCP's invitation of criticism was hardly overwhelming; as Fairbank notes, "China's intellectuals well knew that if you stick your neck out you may lose your head." But a year of repeated invitations for critical commentary eventually began to elicit responses, and by May of 1957 the floodgates had opened. The widespread and hostile criticism of the CCP's nature and practices that emerged was not the "nonantagonistic contradiction"²⁵ that Mao had hoped for... clearly China's intellectuals were far more hostile to the CCP than the Great Helmsman had predicted. In particular, intellectuals were critical of early educational reforms: the unquestioning imitation of the Soviet Union, the

²⁴ Fairbank 364.

²⁵ Fairbank 364.

narrowness of curriculums, and the neglect of social sciences.²⁶ The following are two examples of such criticisms published in a Beijing newspaper:

Many shortcomings have become evident in our higher education during the past few years, for which the Party units within the Ministry of Higher Education must assume principal responsibility.... It is imperative that, at the time of reform, the very roots of bureaucratism, sectionalism, and subjectivism be dug out and eradicated.

Higher education has had a long history in China; it also has many things that are basically sound. In recent years, however, the Ministry of Higher Education has completely negated this heritage. This is indeed unheard of. Every country has its good traditions and every people treasure their traditions. But in our case, everything has had to start all over since 1952.²⁷

Within five weeks of the beginning of the deluge of criticism in 1957, the Hundred Flowers Campaign was ended.²⁸

The Anti-Rightist Campaign, 1957-1958

The flood of anti-party criticism elicited by the Hundred Flowers Campaign quickly incited a similarly massive backlash against China's intellectual establishment. Within the same month that the Hundred Flowers Campaign was ended, the "Anti-Rightist Campaign" was begun with the dual purpose of rectifying the thoughts of intellectuals and chastising party members who did not conduct themselves appropriately. During the campaign between 300,000 and 700,000 skilled workers were given the title of "rightist" and removed from their jobs. The movement was in part fueled by a new wave of party members who had gained prominence in the CCP, a group which Fairbank describes as being "suffused with both xenophobia and anti-intellectualism." They were

²⁶ Hayhoe 90.

²⁷ *Guangming Ribao* (Guangming Daily), Sep. 19, 1954 as quoted in: Chang-Tu Hu, "Higher Education in Mainland China," Comparative Education Review Feb. 1961.

²⁸ Fairbank 364.

“contemptuous of learning ... with only a minimal grasp of China’s problems of modernization and how to meet them.”²⁹ The effects of the Anti-Rightist Campaign would be felt for years to come; as Ruth Hayhoe writes, “the collective knowledge and wisdom of the whole generation of distinguished scholars nurtured within the Nationalist universities was to be lost for two decades... condemned to exile.”³⁰

The Great Leap Forward, 1958-1960

The decision of the CCP leadership to embark upon the Great Leap Forward (GLF) rather than a less ambitious (and less zealous) Second Five-Year Plan may be viewed as a symbolic point of departure for China’s next two decades. Although the First Five-Year Plan had resulted in positive economic and industrial growth, by 1957 there was a widespread realization on the part of CCP leadership that further emulation of Stalinist industrial growth was not in China’s best interest, particularly in reference to agriculture. Instead, China would engage in a massive initiative of rural collectivization and reorganization of peasant energy, “a mighty paroxysm of round-the-clock labor.”³¹ Decentralized and zealous mobilization became the country’s new ruling paradigm; rather than motivate peasants by offering material incentives, Mao would inspire them with ideology.

²⁹ Fairbank 366.

³⁰ Hayhoe 92.

³¹ Fairbank 371.

Changes to China's system of higher education during the period of the Great Leap Forward began with a 1958 conference on education convened by the Central Committee of the CCP. The result of this conference was a Directive on Education which "set forth three cardinal principles of education: (1) education must serve proletarian politics, (2) it must be combined with productive labor, and (3) it must be under the direction of the Communist party."³² Although in these principles can be seen the beginnings of the ideology that would characterize the massively destructive Cultural Revolution of 1967-1977, in fact the era of the GLF would be one of rapid growth for China's system of higher education. Between 1957 and 1960 the number of institutions of higher education in China grew from 229 to 1,289 and student enrollment climbed from 441,000 to 961,000. Part of this growth may be credited to a large-scale decentralization of education undertaken in 1958, during which the Ministry of Higher Education was abolished and many institutions were returned to provincial-level control. Locally-supported institutions grew up at a rapid pace, often offering less formal types of education to adults and students not destined to become cadres.³³

This incredible growth, however, was not sustainable, and by the early 1960s China's recently enlarged system of higher education was facing serious issues of educational quality and efficiency. These problems were compounded by those facing the nation at large - 1958 had been a good year for crop harvests, but the poor weather of 1959 combined with overly demanding expectations and

³² Chen 372.

³³ Hayhoe 93.

mismanagement by CCP leaders and rural managers to initiate a massive national famine during which an estimated 30 million peasants would die.³⁴

As always, the development of China's system of higher education was closely linked to larger national issues; in the wake of the failure of the GLF, the government reconsolidated the university system so that by 1965, it had shrunk back to 434 universities enrolling 674,400 students.³⁵ Despite the retrenchment of China's number of universities from 1960-1963, the period beginning in 1958 with the Great Leap Forward and ending in 1966 with the advent of the Cultural Revolution is generally described as a period of positive evolution for Chinese higher education. Much of the educational change during this period was in reaction to China's prior love affair with the Soviet Union, which by 1960 had transformed into a relationship of hostility. While this combative relationship may have presented significant problems to China generally, in the realm of education it may have actually been a serendipitous shift in national policy. That is, hostility between these two nations gave Chinese educators license to begin rolling back Soviet-style reforms in a politically acceptable manner.

In her history of Chinese higher education, Ruth Hayhoe describes a certain pendulum-like swing which she argues characterizes much of the evolution of China's university system. At one end of the pendulum's arc is a populist, informal and broad conception of education, while at the other lies a conception which is centered on formal structure, excellence and expertise. In this model, the Soviet-

³⁴ Fairbank 373, 410.

³⁵ Hayhoe 97.

style reorganization of the 1950's represented a very significant shift towards the latter conception; higher education was to be rigorously structured, formal, and conducive to producing experts in specific fields. This basic model of education existed without any significant challenges until the Sino-Soviet split of the late 1950's, which opened the door for the gradual establishment of more comprehensive universities, non-formal adult education, and locally supported schools. Soon after, the failure of the Great Leap Forward resulted in a shift towards more pragmatic government policy that further loosened the strictures on education; in 1960 a new policy document known as the "Sixty Articles" was distributed, which limited the amount of time that students and faculty members were expected to engage in "productive labor" and political work. Instead, the importance of basic research was to be emphasized.³⁶ For all intents and purposes, Chinese higher education in the mid-1960's appeared to be preparing for a minor renaissance. That renaissance, however, was to put on hold for another decade.

The Cultural Revolution

In China the year 1966 saw the outbreak of a national movement which would become almost biblical in scope: the Cultural Revolution (CR). Nominally only three years long, in fact the CR would not truly end until 1976, by which time it would have dramatically changed the face of China. Chinese higher education

³⁶ Hayhoe 98.

would be particularly affected by the movement, because of the close relationship between education and ideology. Author Julia Kwong explains: “The aim was to replace, in the jargon of the hegemonic ideology in China, the feudal-capitalist values and norms of the precommunist period with proletarian ones. Feudal-capitalist values and norms took different forms and were articulated in different ways in different social contexts; the school, as the transmitter of knowledge, values, and definitions of reality to the next generation, was a principal battleground in determining whether the new ideology could be successfully sown in society.”³⁷

While there may not be a definitive moment marking the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, one candidate for such a genesis is the hanging of a poster by a professor named Nie Yuanzi and six other members of the philosophy department of Beijing University. The poster offered a critique of Lu Ping, Beijing University’s president, several other university officials, who were accused of having bourgeois influences.³⁸ Soon after its display, the poster was ordered by Mao to be publicized-- to be used to mobilize his supporters to root out such corruption. While the political machinations surrounding this incident appear to have been complex, for our purposes it will be enough to simply illustrate the centrality of higher education in the larger conflicts of the CR.

³⁷ Julia Kwong, *Cultural Revolution in China’s Schools, May 1966-April 1969* (Stanford: Hoover Press, 1988) xii.

³⁸ Kwong 4.

Mao's inciting of the Cultural Revolution was also a reaction to the perpetual growth and increasing complexity of the CCP's bureaucracy. He feared that the communist spirit which had characterized the CCP's Yan'an period was becoming polluted and stagnant; the bureaucrats of the CCP looked increasingly like imperialists of old. Ever the populist, Mao feared that the increasingly powerful communist cadres constituted a threat to the common villager. As such, Mao began to purge not only intellectuals and "rightists," but also formerly prominent members of the Communist party. By the time the CR had run its course, the purge rate for party officials would run at about 60%.³⁹

While the Cultural Revolution eventually affected almost every aspect of Chinese life, here it will be important to focus primarily on its effects on the system of higher education. From 1966 to 1968 the CR was dominated by a group of youths known as the "Red Guards," who saw themselves as personal warriors for Mao. These youths had generally been students prior to the outbreak of the CR, but their transformation into mobile zealots essentially halted higher-level schooling for the period in which the guards were active. Many of these youths signed on to the cause following six massive youth rallies held in the middle of 1966 in Beijing, rallies organized by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and an organization known as the "Cultural Revolution Group." Fairbank estimates that

³⁹ Fairbank 387.

about 10 million youths attended these rallies and volunteered to become Red Guards.⁴⁰

Ultimately, the Cultural Revolution caused university and college enrollments to halt over a four-year period, and graduate enrollments to stop for closer to twelve years. The college entrance exam was also discontinued, and college enrollment (when colleges were open) depended primarily on family status and connections to communist cadres. Though the CR was intended to dispense with the traditional model by which higher education was reserved for an elite few, in fact it simply created a new elite; studies have shown that university enrollment during this period was almost exclusively reserved for those with cadres in their family or with other strong political connections.⁴¹ Interestingly enough, though college-level enrollment fell sharply during the CR, a relatively new, informal or *minban* system of secondary schooling grew tremendously. While in many ways descended from the earlier *minban* system, these informal academies came to take on a distinctly new form during the Cultural Revolution. Educational benefits from this system, however, appear to have been relatively scant; students were given a healthy dose of ideology, but only very basic theoretical training in the sciences, and hardly any knowledge of social science or the humanities.⁴² Essentially, traditional forms of secondary and tertiary education were put on hold for the greater part of a decade. It would not be until the death of Mao

⁴⁰ Fairbank 392.

⁴¹ Hayhoe 100.

⁴² Chen 374.

Zedong in 1976 and the subsequent emergence of more pragmatic CCP leaders that China's system of higher education could begin to advance itself once more.

Chapter Two

The Post-Mao Era (1978-Present): Reform and Opening

The previous chapter detailing the evolution of Chinese higher education between 1949 and 1977 should have, at the very least, offered evidence that change in the educational system during this period was inextricably linked to larger national issues. For this reason it is important to frame continued discussion of the history of Chinese higher education within a broad context of societal and economic change. This second chapter will offer a sketch of the economic changes initiated in the beginning of the Post-Mao era. Understanding the economic reform of this period is particularly vital to understanding future educational reforms, as economic development would emerge as the dominant governing paradigm of China in the era of Deng Xiaoping.

China's Economic State at the End of Mao's Era

China's system of higher education had been severely damaged by the events of the Cultural Revolution, but it was by no means the only system in China to suffer during that ten-year period; China's economy also appeared to be in dire straits. Widespread destruction of property, poor diplomatic ties to other nations and unending class struggle were poor ingredients for a healthy economy, and by

the late 1970's China's was stagnant.¹ In order to understand why Deng Xiaoping and his allies were given such license to reform China's economy in the late 1970s and onwards, it is important to understand the manner in which the prior economic system was failing.

In an essay featured in Transition Towards Post-Deng China, author Guoli Liu describes the "Chinese command economy" which had existed since the Communist Party's consolidation of power in the early 1950s. Among the features he identifies in such an economy are:

- (1) A single ruling party dominated the state and other social organizations.
- (2) The state and collectives controlled the allocation and distribution of most economic resources.
- (3) Prices for goods and services were fixed by the government.
- (4) People's work, income, and residence were controlled by the state through work units and the people's communes.

Liu goes on to describe a number of problems that resulted from such a system, which include that "government fixed prices did not reflect the true value of goods and services," and that "persistent low prices of agriculture produces and high prices for industrial goods were aimed at increasing state funding for industrialization. Such low agricultural prices, however, provided no incentives for peasants to produce more and better goods."²

The lack of incentives to motivate individuals and companies to increase the quality of production is of course one of the most enduring criticisms of socialism

¹ Fairbank 407.

² Guoli Liu, "Redefining the Role of the State in Economic Transition," Transition Towards Post-Deng China, ed. Xiaobo Hu and Gang Lin (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2001) 84.

generally, but such criticisms would seem to be particularly apt in the case of China's Mao-era economy, the best metaphor for which might be the "iron rice bowl" job, so named because workers with this type of employment were guaranteed job security and continued wages, regardless of their level of production. Author Charlotte Ikels explains further: "Workers were assigned to jobs with de facto life tenure, low wages, and few prospects for advancement. Their on-the-job performance would neither raise nor lower their income and would certainly not cost them their job."³ In an economy where such positions were common (all government workers held such status, and practically everyone worked for the government), it should come as little surprise that levels of production and efficiency would be less than admirable.

An additional problem for the Chinese economy existed in the form of unemployment levels, which were troublingly high in the late 1970s. This was mainly due to two factors: (1) increased enrollment in secondary schools during the Cultural Revolution combined with increasing population levels to create a logjam of high school graduates, and (2) millions of youths sent down to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution returned to the cities to seek employment. In total, more than 15 million urban Chinese were unemployed, many of whom were undisciplined former Red Guards.⁴ Clearly this level of

³ Charlotte Ikels, *The Return of the God of Wealth: The Transition to a Market Economy in Urban China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) 56.

⁴ Ikels 178.

unemployment would need to be addressed for any comprehensive economic reform to be successful.

Reform and Opening: China's Changing Economy

The transition from the leadership of Mao Zedong to that of Deng Xiaoping is typically characterized as a shift towards a pragmatic approach that valued economic growth over ideology or visions of class struggle. With the country still reeling from the events of the Cultural Revolution, most Chinese citizens, and even CCP leaders, were in support of Deng's attempts to roll back Maoist policies. China's next stage would be known as one of "Reform and Opening" (Deng's words), a shift to which was formally initiated with the 1978 Third Plenum. Author Merle Goldman offers examples of new government slogans which emerged to characterize the new era: "emancipate the mind," "seek truth from facts," and "practice is the sole criterion of truth."⁵ The sentiments expressed in such slogans must have seemed particularly welcome to the higher education community, which had spent the last decade under the guidance of a very different set of sayings: "learn a specialty and you'll forget the dictatorship," "with knowledge in hand the person is gone" and "once the satellite is in the sky, the red flag falls to the ground."⁶

⁵ Fairbank 407.

⁶ Shirin Rai, Resistance and Reaction: University Politics in Post-Mao China, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991) 42.

The economic changes formally initiated in the 1978 Third Plenum may be broken down into three general categories: agricultural, industrial and trade reform.

Agricultural Reform

China's reforming government of the late 1970s acknowledged that, despite Mao's populism, the economic status of rural Chinese had not improved significantly since the Communist party had taken power. This lack of improvement can in part be attributed to the upheavals of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, but these events were by no means the only inhibitors of agricultural growth. In fact, the agricultural sector had been intentionally subordinated to another economic sector for most of the communist period; prices for agricultural products had been fixed at low rates by the government, which preferred to invest in and subsidize heavy industry. Furthermore, strict regulations existed which barred the sale of certain agricultural products (like cereals), thereby significantly limiting the amount of agricultural specialization.⁷ The CCP leadership's recognition of the need for improvement in the agricultural sector prompted a decision in the late 1970s to substantially raise the prices of agricultural products relative to those of heavy industry, and to dramatically increase state investment in agriculture generally

⁷ Nicholas R. Lardy, "Recasting of the Economic System: Structural Reform of Agriculture and Industry," China in the Era of Deng Xiaoping, ed. Michael Ying-Mao Kau and Susan H. Marsh (New York: East Gate, 1993) 106.

from 11% to 18% of total state investments. In addition, structural changes were initiated to encourage growth in agricultural production.

The most significant structural agricultural reform initiated in 1978 was one of decollectivization; the old system of tightly regulated communes was dismantled, and what was known as the “household responsibility system” became the dominant framework. This system had been introduced briefly in the wake of the disastrous Great Leap Forward in 1962, but had been done away with at Mao’s behest. Essentially, the system functioned by establishing grain quotas for rural families, but then allowing them to sell any excess grain (or later, more profitable products) in newly-established rural markets.⁸ Although these burgeoning rural markets were still tightly regulated in the very early 1980s, the ability of peasants to make extra money in such markets was a significant step towards remedying the problem of poorly-aligned incentive structures which had plagued the earlier agricultural system. The ability of peasants to raise their standard of living was also strengthened by the government’s increased support for growing and selling more specialized products. In fact, not only were restrictions against selling goods like cereals eased during this time period, but the government also made commitments to *supply* grains to non-grain producers in order to encourage specialization.⁹

The net result of these reforms was to make China’s countryside the area of the most dramatic economic improvement during the early 1980s; between 1980

⁸ Ikels 58.

⁹ Lardy 106.

and 1986 the gross output of rural society more than doubled, which is even more significant given that during this period the rural population actually declined.¹⁰ The value of overall farm production from 1978 to 1984 grew at almost three times the rate that it had from 1957 to 1978.¹¹ Author Nicholas Lardy points out that this degree of success was clearly unanticipated by the CCP leadership, as by 1984 agricultural output in almost all fields had already surpassed the CCP's goals for the year 1985. In fact, the agricultural reforms were so successful that the CCP leadership began scaling back their support for agriculture generally; by 1984 the government's investment in agriculture hovered around 5% of total state expenditures, far lower than it had been in 1978.¹²

Industrial Reform

In contrast to agricultural reforms, the industrial reforms begun in the late 1970s appear to have been relatively unsuccessful. The World Bank estimates that from 1978 to 1983, manufacturing productivity in the state-owned sector actually *declined* at a rate of 1.2%.¹³ One significant reason for this lack of industrial growth was that, unlike in agriculture, in the realm of industry the government did little to fix the poorly balanced incentive structure which had traditionally existed under the communist government. Most industrial firms continued to be bankrolled by the central government, and (except in the case of early private

¹⁰ Fairbank 411.

¹¹ Lardy 106.

¹² Lardy 106.

¹³ Lardy 108.

businesses created by entrepreneurs) neither the workers nor the firms themselves stood to gain significantly from increased profits, or to suffer from decreased revenue. Annual losses were common among state-owned enterprises (SOE's), but such losses were always absorbed the system of state-owned banks (SOB's).

Competition among manufacturing firms during this period continued to be restrained by the government's upholding of segmented markets. That is, companies could only sell and market their products within a limited region. As a result, SOE's of this period were limited in scale, and their production was often devoted to general goods for local use. Specialization in production and competition between firms are two important ingredients to a healthy economy, and both were impeded by the existence of segmented markets. One further characteristic of an efficient market is that firms in fields where productivity isn't high enough to cover marginal costs may exit that field (at times by declaring bankruptcy). But this was not the case in China, where inefficient producers were hardly ever allowed to exit their fields (a bankruptcy law would not be passed until 1987).¹⁴ Essentially, this general structure constrained the SOEs' ability to run efficiently and maximize profits.

Ironically, another factor which contributed to agricultural rather than industrial growth during this time period was that the CCP had traditionally put far more support into the industrial sector. Because industry had been heavily

¹⁴ Lardy 114.

subsidized during Mao's era, it was far less responsive to the changing prices and demands of the 1980s than the agricultural sector. Furthermore, state-owned enterprises were still operating on a basic price structure which had been initiated in the reforms of the 1950s -- a distorted price structure which meant that SOE's frequently could not cover their operating costs and had to rely heavily on government subsidies.¹⁵ Without any changes to this system to allow such enterprises more freedom and accountability (which would not arrive until the late 1980s and 1990s), significant increases in production were unlikely.

Trade Reform

Although China would not officially embrace a policy of "Opening" until 1978, in truth it had begun to escalate levels of foreign trade as early as 1970. In fact, from 1970-1978 China's import and export levels grew at the rapid pace of around 20% per year. Then again, such growth must be viewed within the context of China's prior period of isolationism; from 1957-1970 the rate of growth of China's imports and exports each hovered at around 3% per year. The impressively rapid growth of China's number of imports and exports during the 1970-1978 period might raise doubts about the nation's ability to continue progressing at such a rate, and indeed, from 1978-1987 rates of growth fell to closer to 14%. But this is not the full story; a comparison of growth of trade in *constant prices* between these two periods shows that the rate of import growth during both was

¹⁵ Lardy 109.

relatively similar, and that the growth rate of exports was actually much higher from 1978-1987 than from 1970-1978.¹⁶

One significant factor in China's foreign trade growth during the post-Mao period was the advent of the "special economic zones" (SEZ's). Four prototype SEZ's were set up in 1979, and were intended to attract foreign investments.¹⁷ John Fairbank explains that in order to fulfill this purpose, "the government offered special tax benefits, relaxed regulations, and presented fewer bureaucratic obstacles than elsewhere in the country." Once such foreign investments were received, the zones were to "bring in new technologies and promote exports."¹⁸ Besides serving these specific functions, author Kungchia Yeh writes that the SEZ's would "serve as a case study of how entrepreneurs might operate in a quasi-socialist setting."¹⁹ The SEZ's did not meet with immediate success, but continued government support led to promising returns by the mid 1980s, and in 1984 and 1985 almost 20 new SEZ's would be created, mostly in coastal cities. Increasingly, other East Asian nations moved their industries to China because of its low cost of labor.

With this basic description of the economic changes during the era of Reform and Opening established, it will now be possible to return to a description of the changes in higher education during this same period. While the ways in which

¹⁶ Lardy 126.

¹⁷ Lardy 134.

¹⁸ Fairbank 413.

¹⁹ Lardy 134.

these economic changes inform later educational changes may not immediately become clear, later chapters will show that this era represented a new union of education and economic development, and that changes in national economic philosophy would come to be reflected in the educational establishment as well.

The State of Chinese Higher Education in 1976

Although many Chinese universities began readmitting students in the early 1970s, the previous chapter has shown that during this period students were admitted on the basis of political, rather than academic qualifications. Furthermore, universities still existed in a fog of fear and suspicion which prevented them from reacting against the Cultural Revolution's destructive vision for education.²⁰ University life and work during this time period continued to be dominated by the ideology of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, and the pervasive atmosphere of suspicion compelled students and faculty members to monitor and report on each other's behavior. In sum, the university atmosphere of the early to middle 1970s was not one conducive to intellectual development or exploration.

The death of Mao Zedong in 1976 was a momentous event for the Chinese. Rarely in history has any single figure held the vast influence that Mao commanded in the more than two decades that he dominated the largest nation on earth, and despite the disastrous effects of the Great Leap Forward and

²⁰ There were some exceptions however. For instance, Ruth Hayhoe offers the Huazhong University of Science, led by university vice-president Zhu Jiusi, as an example of a university which made bold and progressive moves during this period.

Cultural Revolution, many Chinese had still venerated him as a modern-day emperor (the official party line on Mao's legacy would be expressed by Deng Xiaoping, who stated that Mao had been "70% right and 30% wrong."). Mao's death set off a flurry of political infighting over the future control of the Communist party, the outcome of which would be closely linked to the doling out of blame for the terrors of the Cultural Revolution. For our purposes, it will be enough to note that Deng Xiaoping, the pragmatic Long March survivor with strong military ties, would emerge as the strongest political figure in the Post-Mao period, while the group known as the "Gang of Four" (Mao's widow and several associates) would receive the blame for the destruction of the last decade.

Chinese politics have a long tradition of functioning through symbolism and the subtle changing of political currents, and the Chinese themselves are adept at interpreting these signs. It should then come as little surprise that the educational community saw the prosecution of the Gang of Four as an event with far-reaching consequences, and as a license to make changes. Author Suzanne Pepper explains: "The implications of the arrest of the Gang of Four were registered at once and professional educators knew what they had to do. They appeared to move almost instinctively in the fall of 1976, to begin purging the system of its 'irregular' features. The first to go that autumn were manual labor and 'open-door' education for university students. ... Changes in this sector did not need to await the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee in December 1978, which officially inaugurated Deng Xiaoping's reform administration. By that time,

almost all the decisions necessary to recreate the regular educational system in its pre-1966 form had already been announced and implementation was well underway.”²¹

In her fascinating memoir Red China Blues, Jan Wong, a Canadian of Chinese descent, describes having studied at Beijing University during the latter half of the Cultural Revolution. A self-described Maoist at the time, Wong enthusiastically embraced the rhetoric and physical-labor-as-education of the Cultural Revolution (in an act that would later haunt her, Wong even went so far as to report against a fellow student). In 1977, Wong found herself part of Beijing University’s first class to graduate after the Gang of Four lost their power struggle, at which time it became clear to her that she had understood very little of what had really been going on at the university:

We were the first class to graduate after the purge [of the Gang of Four]. The propaganda machine accused my classmates of having used personal connections to get into university. The once-glorious label ‘worker-peasant-soldier student’ became a badge of shame. Toward the end of term, we gathered for a speech by a school official. ‘We hope you will make a contribution wherever you are sent,’ he said. ‘What happened at Beijing University was not your fault. We were all caught in the forces of history.’ Graduation day that July was the most depressing moment of our university experience. It was unmarked by a ceremony of any kind. It was as if we were a collective embarrassment, as if the university just wanted to get rid of us, to put its crazy Cultural Revolution phase behind. Already the school was focusing on the incoming batch of freshmen students, the first class in a decade to take proper entrance exams.²²

Clearly, China’s universities were not reluctant to put the events of the Cultural Revolution behind them, but doing so would be no easy task.

²¹ Suzanne Pepper, “Educational Reforms in the 1980s: A Retrospective on the Maoist Era,” China in the Era of Deng Xiaoping, ed. Michael Ying-Mao Kau and Susan H. Marsh (New York: East Gate, 1993) 238.

²² Jan Wong, Red China Blues (New York: Anchor Books, 1996) 182.

Enrollments in higher education were lower than they had been a decade earlier at the outbreak of the CR, and very little advanced education (or quality secondary education) had been available during the last ten years. One step towards reestablishing an effective university system came with the reintroduction of the university entrance exam in 1977, but of course neither this, nor any other quick fix, could make up for a decade of education lost by an entire generation, or for the suffering and persecution of intellectuals who had been educated in the pre-communist universities. The higher education system would have a difficult road ahead, but its efforts to reestablish itself would be assisted by what might appear to have been an unlikely ally (given the events of the last two decades): government-initiated reform.

Reform, Opening and Higher Education (1978-1984)

In the late 1970s Deng Xiaoping made it clear that he supported renewed investment in higher education in order to spur economic development, and this decision would play a significant role in defining Chinese higher education for the decades to come.²³ This shift was given formal acknowledgement with a 1978 major national education conference, which “abandoned the Cultural Revolution goals of class struggle and adopted modernization as the main goal for educational development.”²⁴ The higher education system which was re-

²³ Ka-Ho Mok, “Local Response to a Global Agenda: Changing State-Education Relations in Mainland China,” *Social Change in Contemporary China*, ed. Wenfang Tang and Burkart Holzner (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2007) 160.

²⁴ Hayhoe 118.

established in the late 1970s essentially represented a reversion to the 1950s Sino-Soviet model. As such, it was characterized by the typical Soviet features such as highly-centralized government control over education, a separation of teaching and research, segmentation and compartmentalization of knowledge and academic disciplines, rigid curricula, and a centralized job-assignment system (i.e. the school and the CCP determined the occupations of graduates).

This re-emerging system of higher education was faced with two intimidating tasks: to quickly create a crop of highly skilled scientists, technicians and cadres, as well as to educate the millions of Chinese whose educations had been disrupted by the Cultural Revolution. The existence of this first task entailed an acknowledgement of China's dearth of skilled labor, at least as compared to more developed countries. Suzanne Pepper writes that as of the late 1970s, "the United States had 1.2 million scientists and technicians; the Soviet Union had 900,000; but China had only 200,000, few of whom could still work. China had to catch up with international standards." Deng Xiaoping presumably shared this sentiment, as he shifted the main focus of formal Chinese higher education away from issues of parity and class struggle and towards the creation of centers of excellence. These "keypoint schools" were to receive increased funding, to enroll the nation's best students, and to function as the engine driving Chinese higher

education forward.²⁵ The task of re-educating a larger group of Chinese however, could not be accomplished by these keypoint schools alone. Instead, this task would be carried out by an emerging, non-formal, track of higher education.

The non-formal education system which developed in the early 1980s was in some sense descended from the Cultural Revolution's *minban* institutions, although without much of the ideological content. Instead, these institutions mainly served to train cadres who had been promoted during the Cultural Revolution, and who were later threatened with the loss of their positions if they did not achieve at least a short-cycle higher education.²⁶ As such, these non-formal schools typically offered 2-3 year vocational training programs which were heavily enrolled by adult cadres. By 1985, enrollment in this system stood at a high of 1.7 million, although this number began to decrease as fewer cadres remained in need of this type of education. In the years after 1985 the institutions in this non-formal system needed to begin to look elsewhere for students, eventually becoming a sort of "second track" of higher education for those students who failed to be accepted into the formal system.

Unified curricula were established in China's formal system of higher education around 1980, although in theory there was still supposed to be some flexibility from school to school. The rigidity of unified curricula would not have seemed out of place considering the general structure of the higher education

²⁵ Suzanne Pepper, China's Education Reform in the 1980s (Berkeley: University of California, 1990) 69.

²⁶ Hayhoe 120.

system; academic disciplines were sharply defined and separated, students had little choice in setting their courses of study, and strict regulations existed as to what manner of education each institution could offer (i.e. study of the arts was still restricted to comprehensive universities). Essentially, the system was one of rigid structure and centralized control; an identity which would become increasingly problematic as China's economic reforms progressed.

It is important to note, however, that this situation was not a static one. Indeed, there was a great deal of debate and discussion within the academic community about structural and theoretical educational issues. In particular, many educators suggested that China look to the West for ideas about how to reform, ideas which typically encouraged more freedom for educators, more flexible curricula, and giving students more choice to determine the nature of their education. Suzanne Pepper writes that many educators were influenced by time spent abroad, including Zhou Peiyuan, who argued that China's system was "too centralized and its curricula too dated, while courses were too narrowly defined and too rigidly presented." But while these sentiments certainly existed among China's educators, the sorts of reforms which they suggested would have to wait until later in the decade, when, as we will see, they were perceived to be aligned with further economic development.²⁷

²⁷ Pepper China's 135.

Further Reform and Movement Away from Soviet-style System **(1985-1989)**

While the late 1970s and early 1980s saw dramatic changes to China's system of higher education, many of these changes represented a reversion to an earlier structure of education, and so it would be somewhat misleading to lump all of these changes into the general category of "reform." The second half of the decade, however, *was indeed* a time of reform, insofar as many of the changes which then occurred represented a dramatically new direction for higher education. As we will come to see, the general outlook on higher education which was established in the late 1980s continues to be influential in the present day. Within the changes of this half-decade may be seen the seeds of changes to come.

While Deng Xiaoping and other CCP leaders had expressed support for the growth of higher education in the early 1980s, they came to realize that the resources of the central government were simply not adequate to finance the level of growth which they had hoped for. This realization was at odds with their initiatives of the early 1980s, which had typically mandated tight governmental control over the higher education system. As such, in 1985 the CCP issued the "Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on the Reform of the Educational System," a decision which called for decentralized control over education, more powers to schools themselves, and more diversification of educational services (i.e. nonstate educational services).²⁸ This

²⁸ Mok 160.

decision was a significant departure from past policy, and it marked a shift to a new type of state-education relationship; instead of directly controlling education, the state would exercise indirect control through the use of funding and legislation. In return, the universities themselves would be increasingly responsible for generating their own funding.

The year 1985 also saw the beginnings of a number of other important changes to higher education, including changes to research policies and curricula. While the early 1980s had continued the separation of teaching from research, there had been a rising awareness among educators and government leaders that this policy was unwise, both in terms of pedagogy and overall research output. This resulted in the slow reintegration of research into standard universities, and by 1985 this change had been given formal recognition in CCP reform documents. Similarly, universities began to receive more freedom to determine their own curriculum after the 1985 reforms. But as Suzanne Pepper notes, while schools were supposedly given “the power to readjust the objectives of various disciplines, formulate teaching plans and programs, and compile teaching material,” this did not suggest how they might resolve any contradiction between their own curriculum and the centrally-advocated one. That is to say, setting one’s own curriculum is a rather problematic exercise if one’s students will still be evaluated based on centrally-determined standards.²⁹

²⁹ Pepper [China’s](#) 138.

Many of the educational changes which occurred over the latter half of the 1980s may be seen as directly related to the evolving needs of China's economy, which was quickly taking on the characteristics of a capitalist-style free market. Of particular importance were changes to the graduate job assignment system and the evolution of programs of study to better prepare graduates for later vocations. Up until the mid-1980s, graduates had been assigned jobs by the decisions of school and party leaders, but this relatively rigid system was quickly becoming unwieldy as the controls on China's economy loosened. Where once a graduate might have been assigned to a particular job and expected to hold it for decades, new vocational opportunities and increased social mobility meant that such an expectation was rapidly becoming naïve. As such, CCP and educational leaders determined in the mid 1980s that the job assignment system was to be slowly phased out, and that many graduates would be expected to find employment on their own. This decision was greeted by a great deal of anxiety among Chinese students, many of whom suspected that such a deregulated system would lead to rampant abuse of social ties in order to secure employment. Still, the phasing out of the job assignment system continued, and by 1990 most graduates were seeking their own employment.³⁰

Changes to the job assignment system came hand-in-hand with other efforts to improve the “employability” of university graduates. These efforts came in response to concerns that many students were being trained in excessively

³⁰ Hayhoe 120.

narrow fields, and were subsequently finding themselves unprepared for the different jobs which they might eventually hold. Indeed, a look at the number of programs of study in the early 1980s bears this concern out; the Soviet legacy of hyper-specialization had persisted, such that there were more than 1,400 narrow specialties throughout the system of higher education. Weifang Min notes that such overspecialization “resulted in a wastage of skills and expertise,” and that a late 1980s survey of one hundred thousand college graduates “showed that more than 40 percent of them held jobs unrelated to their professional training.” Chinese educators and leaders realized that their graduates were being poorly served by such a system, and so made significant efforts to broaden fields of study and offer interdisciplinary majors. By 2003, the number of specialties in higher education had been reduced to around 200, which seems like a successful consolidation by any measure.³¹

The decision of CCP leadership to decentralize control over higher education was accompanied by a call for educational institutions to take more responsibility for the work of financing education. Universities were encouraged to “create an income” (*chuangshou*), which led to a number of further significant developments. Universities began to seek income-generating opportunities, either by creating spin-off companies, by seeking private funding, or by using existing human or technological resources to make money (i.e. by contracting out use of their scientific equipment). This situation was a problematic one for many

³¹ Min 67.

universities; decreased government funding coincided with rapid inflation to erode faculty salaries, and universities struggled to maintain some level of profitability. These problems were becoming increasingly evident by the end of the 1980s, Ruth Hayhoe writes, when “in place of the early enthusiasm for kinds of curricular innovation and integration that were based on scholarly considerations, a commercialization of the curriculum set in, with universities desperately seeking approval for new programs that would be likely to attract large numbers of self-paying students and so enhance university income. Whether they had the appropriate resources or not, most universities tried to set up programs in areas such as international trade, management, and foreign languages, which looked economically promising in the short-term.”³² Essentially, universities were made more dependent upon student and market demand, and this change would continue to have significant repercussions for higher education in the coming decades.

Brief Conservatism in the Wake of Tiananmen (1989-1993)

While they are often portrayed primarily as protests against the lack of political reform, many authors suggest that the Tiananmen Square demonstrations of 1989 had as much to do with the faltering of economic reforms and lack of jobs for college graduates as they did with the pro-democracy movement. Whether this is true is debatable, but it is certainly the case that the

³² Hayhoe 126.

Chinese government felt threatened by universities and university students in the wake of these protests, and so adopted a more conservative approach to the expansion of higher education in the following years. This conservatism was given expression in the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1991-1995), which announced a strict limit on enrollment in higher education and which allowed fewer students in the social sciences.

These restrictions, however, proved to be brief. Deng Xiaoping's famous tour of the experimental and increasingly free market-oriented province of Shenzhen in 1992 led to an increased commitment to economic reforms and privatization. This in turn led to further growth of higher education, which the CCP felt would be necessary if this newly privatizing economy was to be properly staffed. As such, a 1993 document called the "Program for Education Reform and Development in China" reinforced the movement towards decentralization of control over higher education, and also called for increased future enrollments. Further, a new program known as the "2/1/1 Engineering Initiative" was established to promote competition among universities. Essentially, this initiative promised to allocate funding to the top 100 universities in China, a promise which galvanized many institutions to try to improve their standing by merging with other institutions. Though it may not have been the original intent of the initiative (and to be sure, universities were also moved to improve themselves in other ways), these merges effectively undid much of the division and segmentation that had occurred during the 1950s Soviet-style reform. Where once many schools with separate specialties

had been mandated, increasingly there was incentive to turn into a comprehensive powerhouse of a university.³³

Resumed Growth, Diversification and Marketization (1993-Present)

The years since 1993 have seen the Chinese system of higher education continue to progress along the general path which was established in the late 1980s; the relationships between universities, student demand and the market have been strengthened, while the central Chinese government has been increasingly willing to adopt a *laissez-faire* approach to managing universities. This trend, of course, mirrors that of the country at large, as the CCP has been content to loosen the reins on the Chinese economy in order to promote entrepreneurship and overall economic growth. As Deng Xiaoping had made it clear that changes to the educational system had to proceed with an eye towards economic development, it should be little surprise that similar policies have been pursued in reference to both higher education and broad economic policy.

Many of the government-initiated changes which occurred during the late 1980s and early 1990s are described on the current Ministry of Education's website. Though brief, these descriptions are revealing of the government's perspective during this period, and it will be helpful to present a few here (note: I

³³ Min 68.

have made minor grammatical corrections and clarifications to quotes from the MOE website. Unaltered versions of these quotes may be found following my works cited section):

China's economic system used to be very highly centralized. To adapt to that, the former higher education system was also centralized, with education provided by the central and local governments respectively and directly under their administration. The disadvantages of this system were that the state undertook too many responsibilities and the schools lacked the flexibility and autonomy to provide education according to the needs of the society, with central departments and local governments providing education separately, the structure of education was irrational and segmented. There were too many single disciplinary HEIs (higher education institutes) and professional HEIs, With the establishment of disciplines which overlapped, the efficiency of some HEIs fell very low, which in return hampered the improvement of education quality. Therefore, the structural reform of higher education has become a key for other higher education reform.

The overall objectives of higher education reform are to smooth the relationship among government, society and HEIs, setting up and perfecting a new system in which the state is responsible for the overall planning and macro management while the HEIs follow the laws and enjoy the autonomy to provide education according to needs of the society.

After several years' endeavors, the structural reform of higher education has gained heartening achievements. In the field of education reform, the old system in which the state undertook the establishment of all HEIs has been broken, and a new system in which the government takes main responsibility, along with the active participation of society and individuals has been taking shape. The development of HEIs run by social forces are fully encouraged and supported.³⁴

By the 1990s, an increasingly distant relationship with the central government meant that China's universities had to become more self-reliant in terms of funding. Attempts to satisfy this need have manifested themselves in many different ways, from general cost-cutting, to attempts at customer-oriented education, and to the advent of tuition and fees at Chinese universities, which had not historically charged students. The first tuition fees were established in the 1980s, but such arrangements were at first rare and of dubious political status.

³⁴ Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, "Higher Education in China." Ministry of Education, 28 Mar. 2008 http://moe.edu.cn/edoas/website18/en/higher_h.htm.

Tuition charges had become more common, however, by the late 1980s, and this situation formally changed in 1992, when the CCP issued a statement saying that universities would be allowed to enroll up to 25% of their students as “fee-paying.” This decision can be seen as one result of the CCP’s decision to encourage universities to seek non-government funding; if allowing universities to charge some students could improve the broader educational system, then the net effect of such a change was understood to be positive. In the mid 1990s the number of universities involved with fee-paying structures increased considerably, and by 1997 all students were paying tuition fees.³⁵ As of 2003, one-fifth of the average operational budget of Chinese universities came from tuition charges.³⁶ It should be noted, however, that the emergence of tuition fees was accompanied by the establishment of academic scholarships. Although issues of educational equity continue to present challenges for Chinese higher education, it is reassuring to note that the percentage of college students from the poorest 20% of households increased from 2.3% in 1991 to 9.5% by 2000.³⁷

The establishment of university-related businesses and the contracting out of university labor and resources have also developed into staples of many university budgets. By 2003 universities produced an average of 20% of their annual budgets through such initiatives, and the most prestigious universities like Beijing and Tsinghua averaged closer to 50%.³⁸ These initiatives were not without

³⁵ Mok 162.

³⁶ Min 69.

³⁷ Min 79.

³⁸ Min 70.

their problems, however. Ruth Hayhoe writes that in this pursuit of profit, “research was more and more oriented toward pragmatic links with enterprises, so-called ‘horizontal projects,’ that might have little academic value but could turn a quick profit. Sophisticated equipment purchased with World Bank funding in order to make possible high-quality research was often made available to commercial users at high prices in order to pay for its maintenance and bring in further income, leaving scholars who wished to use it for academic purposes waiting for access.”³⁹

Other changes in universities have come in the form of stream-lining and cost-cutting. Increased competition for both students and funding have forced universities to improve the efficiency with which they use their money, although it is not clear that such changes always improved the educational experience itself. For instance, the average student to teacher ratio at Chinese universities as of 1983 was a remarkable 1:3. By 2001 this ratio stood at 1:16. Further, such pressures have led universities to increase in scale; the average enrollment level at universities in the early 1990s was 2000 students, which by 2001 had increased to 4000.⁴⁰ Such changes, however, have no doubt allowed more students to enroll in higher education. Between the early 1980s and 2006, total enrollment in Chinese universities increased from around 1 to nearly 19 million students.⁴¹

³⁹ Hayhoe 126.

⁴⁰ Min 70.

⁴¹ China Data Online, Mar. 22 2008

<http://chinadataonline.org/member/macroy/macroytshow.asp?code=A1404>.

One of the most striking changes to higher education in the 1990s and beyond has been the emergence of private universities, and a related shift towards what can be termed “consumer conscious” education. Despite the rapid expansion of higher education in the late 1980s and early 1990s, strong demand for further enrollment still existed and remained unmet. Realizing that they did not have the resources to meet this demand, CCP leaders decided to tap the resources of the private sector, and so in the early 1990s small private universities began to be established. The legal status of such institutions remained hazy for several years, but enrollment levels soared, and by 1999 CCP General Secretary Jiang Zeming was actively promoting the growth of such schools. This sentiment would be reaffirmed at a 2002 CCP session, during which it was decided that private universities would be recognized as having the same legal status as public schools.⁴²

Early private universities tended to be small and were characterized by a flexible curriculum, but many have since grown in both size and reputation. For instance, despite not being established until 1992, Xi’an International University had developed into ten colleges enrolling 21,000 students by 2003.⁴³ Overall, private universities enrolled about 2.8 million students by 2006, nearly 15% of total enrollment in higher education.⁴⁴ Part of this rapid growth can be attributed to the fact that private universities have been more willing than their public peers to

⁴² Mok 164.

⁴³ Min 71.

⁴⁴ China Facts & Figures, Apr. 25 2008 <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/china/239636.htm>.

cater to student desires and the needs of the market. Author Ka-ho Mok offers Nanhua Industrial and Business College as an example of private institutions. Nanhua, Mok writes, pursues what they call a “five gears strategy”: “First, courses are geared to the market. Second, courses are geared to availability. Third, English courses are geared to international needs. Fourth, education is geared to students’ needs. And, finally, the college is geared toward becoming a renowned school to attract more students.”⁴⁵ While private universities continue to face obstacles which their public peers do not (degrees issued by private universities are typically of less practical value than those of public schools), it seems certain that such schools, and the receptivity to student desires and market needs which they represent, will play an increasingly important role in Chinese higher education.

⁴⁵ Mok 165.

Chapter Three

Contemporary Higher Education in China: Economic Focus Leads to Troubling Trends

Although this chapter will focus primarily on contemporary higher education in China, it will be helpful to begin with an account of some of the broad challenges which currently face the nation. As the latter half of this thesis will seek to demonstrate, China's universities can, and should, play a significant role in addressing larger national issues, and a rough sketch of these issues will be valuable to inform later recommendations for China's universities themselves. This chapter will also mark a shift in this thesis' general format: where the first half of the thesis sought to present an objective history of Chinese higher education, the latter half will take the form of a more subjective critical analysis ("subjective" insofar as my own perspective will emerge more prominently).

China's Value Crisis

In his essay The Post-Communist Personality, Xiaoying Wang argues that a distinct personality type, the *post-communist personality*, is prevalent in China, and that this personality is responsible for many of the nation's current social problems. Wang characterizes this personality as marked by cynicism, consumerism, hedonism and corruption. It has "emerged against a background of nihilism: that is, the devaluation of socialist or communist values, and with it the

loss of a personality structure which those values used to make possible. In the absence of a new constellation of values and everyday self-forming practices, the post-communist personality makes its appearance in the midst of a new economic order, with its ethos of consumerism and unprecedented opportunities for individual wealth and pleasure.”¹

The issue, Wang writes, is that the Chinese people recognize the ideological inconsistency of their government, and disillusionment has set in. The values formerly associated with communism and Marxism (serving the people, collective action, equal distribution of wealth) have become objects “of suspicion and ridicule... synonym[s] for dogmatism, hypocrisy, fantasy and madness, the main ideological culprit of everything that has gone wrong with China since 1949.”² This disillusionment with communist values would be less problematic if the transition to a market economy had also marked a transition to some type of capitalist value system, but the Communist government believes it cannot publicly embrace capitalist values if it is to retain its own legitimacy. Essentially, Wang writes, no one believes much of anything anymore, values went out with Mao, and everyone’s trying to get ahead while observing as few scruples as possible.³

Wang’s account of China’s contemporary value crisis is both insightful and appealingly blunt, but his analysis of it is flawed in one key respect. I argue that he has adopted a narrow conception of what sorts of things qualify as “values,” and

¹ Xiaoying Wang, “The Post-Communist Personality: The Spectre of China’s Capitalist Market Reforms,” *The China Journal* Jan. 2002: 7.

² Wang 12.

that this narrow view prevents his article from fully diagnosing the problem and possible solution that he wishes to identify. Warning flags should go up in readers' minds when Wang writes "thus, all values and aspirations leave the post-communist personality unmoved," and that it is "simply fed up with values."⁴ The problem here is that Wang is working from a preconceived and narrow notion of "values" that goes unexamined in his article and is, I would argue, incorrect. To say that a particular group or type of people are "unmoved by values" is equivalent to saying "I don't understand the concept of value." Values are not the same thing as, say, virtues. Presumably, there could be situations in which referring to a type of people, one might justifiably say "they are virtue-less," because there is no logical necessity for humans to possess what is conventionally identified as virtue. But to say of people that they are "unmoved by values" is sheer foolishness that threatens the strength of Wang's larger analysis. No sentient creature can be unmoved by values, because values are what largely compose motivations, thoughts, desires and needs. The only creature not composed in large part by value judgments is a dead one.

For Wang's analysis of China's value crisis to be developed further, it needs to take into account the actual constellation of values which has influenced China's recent evolution. The communist/Maoist set of values which had lost traction by the time of Reform and Opening did not disappear and leave a vacuum; it was replaced by the values associated with a pragmatist approach operating under

⁴ Wang 14.

the newly-dominant paradigm of economic development.⁵ It is within this latter context that the value crisis which Wang speaks of has occurred, and as such, discussion of China's contemporary situation should pay close attention to this privileging of economic values.

Economic Development as a Dominant Value

Earlier sections of this thesis have attempted to show that during the last 25 years (the post-Mao era), both China generally and the Chinese system of higher education have increasingly been fueled by what are primarily economic considerations. This situation can be explained in part as a reaction against the privileging of ideological values during Mao's era, an approach which is now seen as responsible for many of the significant national problems of that period. But while this new economic orientation has certainly provided great benefits to China, it has also brought its share of problems, many of which seem to be related to the lack of emphasis on values like healthy development, social parity, environmental stewardship and ethical conduct. The fact that such problems exist does not necessarily imply that such privileging of economic values does more harm than good. The existence of these problems does, however, suggest that there may be tradeoffs involved in placing such heavy emphasis on economic growth, and that an investigation of these tradeoffs is worth serious

⁵ Of course, it should be noted that to be able to talk about such broad "value-shifts" requires a great deal of generalization. There were certainly times when pragmatic policy was embraced during Mao's era, and not all idealistic communist sentiment died with him either. But conducting such large-scale conceptual analysis requires the use of a broad brush.

consideration. At the very least, such an investigation could yield suggestions about how to better mitigate these problems. It is also possible that such an investigation will reveal the need for a broader conceptual value-shift.

Prior to a discussion of these contemporary problems, it will be important to note that although economic progress is here identified as China's primary motivating value, China's CCP leaders would be quick to dispute this claim. In fact, they would argue, Deng Xiaoping's call to economic modernization was accompanied also by a call to value "human improvement," and that only when pursued simultaneously could these approaches achieve the ultimate goal: "a rich and strong country." This was indeed Deng's message, and this policy has since been affirmed by (among others) CCP official Hu Yaobang, who in a 1982 report to the CCP's 12th National Congress wrote:

In the process of transforming the objective world, people also transform their subjective world, and the production of spiritual values and the spiritual life of society also develop. The latter achievement is what we call the spiritual civilization, as manifested in a higher educational, scientific and cultural level and in higher ideological, political and moral standards. The transformation of society or the progress of a social system will ultimately find expression in both material and spiritual civilization... Socialism is advancing steadily towards the goal of its higher phase-communism. This advance depends not only on the increase of material wealth but also on the steady growth of people's communist consciousness and revolutionary spirit.⁶

The sentiment which Hu expresses here is certainly not absent from the Chinese government, and the many campaigns to promote "harmonious society" and moral conduct in recent years demonstrate that the CCP has not abandoned

⁶ Hu Yaobang as quoted in: Borge Bakken, The Exemplary Society: Human Improvement, Social Control and the Dangers of Modernity in China (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 54.

these goals. But while I do not contest that the CCP as representatives of China continue to hold such values, I would argue that a brief glance at China's recent history reveals that values associated with economic growth have had far more clout than any consideration of communist ideology or morality. While these two general types of values may indeed both be directed towards creating "a rich and strong country," this stance does not imply that there is not a pecking order between the two. For this reason, I argue that it is indeed correct to conceive of economic development as the driving motivation of Chinese national policy during the modern era. Now it will be useful to move to a discussion of the problems which have been associated with this general approach.

Xiaoying Wang's article has already offered a good introduction to some of the societal problems facing contemporary China, including cynical, hedonistic dispositions, which I suggest are especially common among China's youths. While the exact prevalence of such feelings of discontent is of course difficult to measure, Wang's general argument is well supported by other literature on the topic. For instance, in his analysis of the mindset of Chinese university students in the post-Tiananmen years, author Che-po Chan discusses the phenomenon of "classroom desk literature," in which students write their feelings on classroom desks. Chan quotes a 1996 study on the practice, which concluded that 30% of such writings "reflected students' disappointment, frustration, and confusion... [often expressing a] strong wish to go abroad as an escape." A further 20% of

such writings were “attacks on social evils... [including] discontent about degenerated ‘party work style’...” Conversely, only a small percentage of this literature contained positive themes, most of which were related to young love. The overwhelmingly negative content of such writings is persuasive evidence of the sort malaise which Wang describes, and my own experiences talking with Chinese students have revealed a similar sense of pessimism.⁷

A further problem which Wang suggests is the perceived corruption among government officials, and this too seems to be a source of anxiety for the Chinese. Indeed, a 1996 survey of students at ten Shanghai universities found that, out of nine possible threats to social stability (including inflation, the growing gap between rich and poor, etc.), the vast majority of students felt that “degenerated party work style and widespread corruption” constituted the most serious threat to Chinese society.⁸ While this fact merely demonstrates the *perception* of corruption, the accuracy of this perception is corroborated by the CCP’s periodic anti-corruption campaigns. In any case, it seems reasonable to conclude that the problems which Wang identifies are indeed issues of concern for contemporary Chinese society, and it is difficult to imagine that these problems are unrelated to China’s continued veneration of economic development. When wealth is the primary goal, abuses of power in the pursuit of wealth should not be surprising,

⁷ Che-Po Chan, “The Political Pragmatism of Chinese University Students at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century,” *China and Democracy: The Prospect for a Democratic China*, ed. Suisheng Zhao (New York: Routledge, 2000) 212.

⁸ Chan 216.

nor should feelings of disillusionment and cynicism among those who don't have such power be unexpected.

A problem which Wang does not touch on, but which still seems inextricably linked to China's drive to develop, is that of environmental destruction. Though this is a crucially important issue, it will only receive brief discussion here, in part because it is not central to this thesis, and also simply because the severity of China's environmental problems is so well-documented. The astonishing speed at which China has grown its economy over the last 25 years is rivaled only by the rate at which its land, water and air have been befouled; it is telling that the word "crisis" is often invoked to characterize China's contemporary environmental situation.⁹ CCP leaders in Beijing have made commitments to mitigate China's environmental problems in recent years, but it seems clear both that such an effort would require widespread support and sacrifice, and that such commitment has been difficult to drum up thus far. Once again, when individuals have been led to believe that their primary goal should be economic improvement, it should come as little surprise that they would be reluctant to sacrifice for a notion of greater good.

When China's CCP leaders talk about the need to promote a "harmonious society," one of the main issues they mean to address is the widening wealth gap between rich and poor. While the successful agricultural reforms of the early 1980s primarily benefited rural Chinese, the years since then have seen a marked

⁹ Christopher J. Smith, China in the Post-Utopian Age (New York: Westview, 2000) 377.

rise in disparity between rural and urban residents, with Chinese living on the eastern seaboard and in major cities seeing especially substantial gains in prosperity. Merle Goldman writes that in 2001, “the average income in Shanghai was \$1,300; in rural inland Guizhou province it was \$165.”¹⁰ Author Christopher Smith suggests that such direct comparisons of income levels between rich and poor provinces may be misleading, but nevertheless agrees with Shaoguang Wang, who writes that “income inequality... in China... has increased more rapidly and gone further than almost anywhere else. ... So steep a rise... in so short a time is highly unusual in both the historical and comparative perspective...”¹¹ Clearly, Deng’s dictum to “let some get rich first” has been taken seriously.

The discussion so far has focused on broadly national problems which may be seen as related to China’s privileging of economic development, but as was earlier suggested, economic progress as a dominant value has also had significant influence on Chinese higher education in the modern era. Certainly, not all of this influence has been negative; it seems clear that China’s universities could never have made such progress in the post-Mao era without having responded to Deng Xiaoping’s call to align higher education with the needs of the economy. Nevertheless, this close association of education with economic needs has also produced its own strain of problems, and though its overall effects may originally

¹⁰ Fairbank 436.

¹¹ Smith 221.

have been positive, the future prospects of perpetuating such a relationship are troubling.

Here I will break down some of the contemporary problems facing Chinese higher education into two main categories: (1) problems involved with the marketization of higher education, and (2) issues surrounding the healthy development of students.

Higher Education as a Market

In The Future of Higher Education, authors Frank Newman, Lara Couturier and Jamie Scurry analyze the process by which contemporary American higher education is increasingly being operated and viewed as a “market.” The significance of such a shift is that universities are increasingly influenced by factors like profitability, efficiency, and supply and demand (that is, they become more like the traditional western conception of a purely commercial enterprise). Newman et al are clearly nervous about the potential effects of this shift, and offer a number of constructive suggestions about how it should be reacted to (I will return to these suggestions in my concluding chapter). To illustrate the importance of confronting this issue, Newman et al cite the significant problems caused by the deregulation of the American airline industry in 1978, and by the shift to a market for California electric power in 2000; clearly the simple move to a market system is not a surefire recipe for success.

In their description of American higher education's shift to a market orientation, Newman et al offer five "underlying forces" responsible for this change:

1. The growing competition among traditional nonprofit universities and colleges.
2. The impact of the new providers of higher education, including for-profit degree-granting institutions, virtual programs and institutions, and corporate universities.
3. The impact of digital technology.
4. The globalization of higher education.
5. The growing dependence of political leaders on market forces to structure higher education.

The description of these five forces is followed by a few summarizing comments: "All of these forces are interactive and tend to reinforce each other, but the most powerful and certainly the most striking is the shift of policy makers toward a market-oriented system of higher education and away from a regulated system."¹²

Newman et al are of course discussing American higher education, but a quick look at this list of five "underlying forces" reveals that the phenomena they describe is very similar to the one being experienced in contemporary China. The recent evolution of China's system of higher education is clearly indicative of just such a move towards marketization. Consider, 1) private Chinese universities continue to emerge and are meeting government approval, 2) traditional public universities are increasingly locked in a struggle with one another for students

¹² Frank Newman, et al., The Future of Higher Education: Rhetoric, Reality, and the Risks of the Market (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004) 31.

and funding, 3) the Chinese government continues to decentralize and deregulate control over higher education, while at the same time encouraging universities to find alternative ways of “making an income,” and 4) China’s universities are increasingly “consumer conscious,” that is, many institutions have taken steps to tailor their curricula to meet the desires of students and the perceived needs of the market.

This process of decentralization has been unfolding since at least 1985, the year in which the CCP began to transition from a policy of directly controlling higher education to one in which control was exercised primarily through the use of legislation and funding. Increasingly, schools were urged to seek new sources of income, which often resulted in the establishment of university-connected businesses. Interestingly enough, this general process has a strong (and relatively recent) historical parallel: as was described in chapter one, the 1950s saw a massive CCP campaign to *centralize* power and impose structure upon the nation, and one ramification of this decision was the restructuring of higher education with similar goals of centralized power and regulation. In light of this history, perhaps it should be less than surprising that the decision of China’s modern-era CCP leaders to *decentralize* control of the state and economy would manifest itself within the university system as well.

The existence of this historical parallel is a revealing fact, and one that should be carefully considered by China’s policy-makers as they move forward with the deregulation of higher education. This is not to say that this more recent shift is

likely to produce the same problems as those of the 1950s reorganization; indeed, it is more likely to produce problems of an entirely different sort. Rather, the real moral to this story is that the last time such an initiative was undertaken, it was clearly taken too far, and it took decades for the university system to rid itself of some of the more enduring problems resulting from the Soviet-style reorganization. While there is a sense in which this recent shift may still be seen as a “corrective action” to the over-regulation of the 1950s, it is important to ensure that it doesn’t simply become a headlong rush away from the mistakes of the past, or else it may run headfirst into the perils of the future.

What exactly, might these “perils of the future” be? To begin with, if left unchecked, there is little reason to believe that China’s present societal problems (i.e. environmental destruction, mental health issues, and high suicide rate) will not become problems of the future. I argue that any lessening of the educational system’s power to mitigate these problems is not in the public’s best interest. And yet, such a lessening seems quite possible if the marketization of higher education continues unabated; as Newman et al point out, one of the most apparent dangers of marketization is that universities will lose any incentive to serve public purposes.¹³ That is, in order to survive and prosper universities would be forced to focus all of their energy on making money and competing amongst

¹³ Newman 87.

each other for the best students. Initiatives of research or service which did not appear immediately financially lucrative would risk being left by the wayside.

Furthermore, universities in such a situation would be likely to see their students primarily as customers rather than as human beings in need of healthy development. This could lead to increased “efficiency” in terms of how quickly and thoroughly these “customers” received the university experience, but such a shift also runs the obvious risk of dehumanizing students, a process which can have dangerous results. A brief description of some contemporary university problems will show that such troubling results are not confined to a hypothetical future alone.

Issues of Healthy Development

Cheating on University Examinations

A 2005 poll conducted by *China Youth Study* found that out of 892 Chinese college students surveyed, 83% admitted to having cheated in school, and those students who had cheated were more likely to be above average in academic standing than their non-cheating counterparts.¹⁴ Whether or not this exact percentage is accurate may be debated, but it nevertheless seems clear that cheating is a prevalent problem in Chinese universities (and on university entrance exams as well), as further evidenced by the fact that China’s Ministry of

¹⁴ “83% of College Students in China Cheat on Exams,” *The Epoch Times*, 8 Sep. 2005, 24 Mar. 2008 <http://en.epochtimes.com/news/5-9-8/32106.html>.

Education felt the need to initiate a national campaign in 2006 to curb the practice.¹⁵ While the members of China's educational community presumably oppose such cheating, the fact that as high a percentage as 80% of China's students engage in such behavior should raise questions about the extent to which cheating has received the tacit endorsement of the system as a whole. If students are being led to value ill-gotten gains over genuine accomplishments, this would seem to be a significant developmental problem.

Increasing Levels of Pressure and Stress on Students

Detailed statistics about the stress levels experienced by Chinese students are difficult to both find and evaluate, but the consensus of what literature does exist clearly indicates that contemporary students are often dangerously stressed, and that a great deal of this stress is the result of pressure to perform well academically and attend prestigious universities. A 2006 article by Associated Press writer Christopher Bodeen quotes a government report from the year before as indicating that 58% of Chinese students "felt highly stressed by academic pressures." Bodeen also reports that, while comprehensive statistics on suicide rates among students are not kept by the government, "health care professionals see the problem worsening, even among elementary students." Indeed, given the nature of China's "One Child Policy" adopted in 1979, perhaps it

¹⁵ China, Chinese Government's Official Web Portal, Campaign Launched Against Cheating in College Entrance Exams, 1 June 2006. 14 Feb. 2008 http://english.gov.cn/2006-06/01/content_297725.htm.

should not be surprising that pressure on these only children has reached dangerous levels; when students feel that the future of their family is riding on them alone, and that to test poorly is to fail their parents, should it be unexpected that they would be amenable to cheating?

Mental Health Problems among Students

A further problem, which was alluded to in the previous discussion of stress, is the rising rate of mental health problems among students. While exact data on this issue is again difficult to find, China's Ministry of Health estimates that around 11% of Chinese under 17 are suffering from mental or behavioral problems, and a separate survey of 22 provinces indicated that "16% of college students suffered from anxiety, fear, neurasthenia, or depression."¹⁶ This issue is also highlighted by alarming suicide rates among both young people and Chinese generally; over 250,000 Chinese kill themselves each year (a rate which is around twice the global average), and a 2006 poll conducted by the Society Survey Institute of China reported that out of 1000 urban university students surveyed, *a quarter* admitted to having entertained suicidal thoughts.¹⁷

It would be both unfair and inaccurate to attribute these problems directly to China's universities, but it would be similarly misleading to divorce the university

¹⁶ "Concerns Rise over China's Mental Health Problems," *Radio Free Asia*, 12 Oct. 2004. 11 Mar. 2008 http://www.rfa.org/english/news/social/2004/10/12/china_mentalhealth/.

¹⁷ "Troubled Youth: China's Student Suicide Crises," *Radio Free Asia*, 18 Aug. 2006. 11 Mar. 2008 http://www.rfa.org/english/news/social/2006/08/18/china_youth/.

system entirely from these issues. The fact that some of these issues manifest themselves among pre-university age students does not mean that the university system bears no responsibility for them; at the very least, it seems that universities have exacerbated some of these problems by creating admission standards which lead students to value high test scores (whether genuine or not) over concepts like physical health, mental health and any notion of self-motivated learning. The danger, of course, to “teaching to the test,” is that any values or information not on the test are likely to be de-valued.

When taken as a sum, these individual problems offer a strong indication that the concept of healthy human development has not received enough emphasis in modern Chinese education. China’s Ministry of Higher Education, however, does indeed recognize that there are educational problems related to healthy development. Their take on this issue, however, tends to dwell on the health of the system as a whole, rather than on students specifically. A 2006 document posted on the Ministry of Education’s (MOE’s) website summarizes the recent activity of the MOE, and the section of this document titled “We will improve our capacity for healthy human development” should help to make this fact clear:

We will promote attention to regulations concerning school management with the principles of “rigorous observation of school regulations and development of relevant norms and standards”. We will establish a new mechanism for school management, which guarantees effective regulation, management, and supervision. In addition, we will enhance our capacity for building leading officials and intensify our efforts to prevent corruption by creating a

punishment and prevention system which equally emphasizes education, system building and supervision. We will further improve educational auditing, regulate financial management of all educational institutions, especially universities, and ensure the safety of the funds. We also will correct various bad practices for the healthy development of education.¹⁸

With the possible exception of this section's last line, nowhere is there mention of the sorts of developmental problems which have been highlighted thus far. Instead, the main concern seems to be about issues of funding and corruption-prevention. This is not to say that China's educators, parents, or the MOE itself have not been concerned with the well-being of their students, or that the nation as a whole has consciously decided to neglect the healthy development of its young people. But what has happened, I would argue, is that in following Deng Xiaoping's call to let education serve the economy, China's educational institutions have let themselves subordinate their role as facilitators of healthy development in favor of being producers of the nation's future workers, and thus have reduced their own ability to deal with these development-related problems. If the marketization of higher education in China is allowed to continue unabated, it seems likely that this imbalance will only be exacerbated.

¹⁸ Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, "Educational Development During the 10th 5-Year Plan and Plans for the 11th 5-Year Plan." Ministry of Education, 25 Mar. 2008 <http://moe.edu.cn/edoas/website18/info18515.htm>.

Chapter Four

Critical Analysis and Proposed Reforms

A Step Back and a Look Forward

Prior to this final chapter, it will be helpful to take a step back and put a few things in perspective. My introduction described the “macro” approach that would be followed in this thesis, and also detailed some of the benefits of such an approach. There are, however, weaknesses to such an approach as well, and these weaknesses are worth reiterating here. To begin with, constructing such a broad argument can lead to problems of generalization and lack of attention to detail. I have tried to be mindful of this temptation, and realize that making broad claims like “economic development has been adopted as China’s primary goal” runs the risk of neglecting any number of fascinating and nuanced national trends. Indeed, there are many projects which could yield insight about China’s current situation; mine is only one such attempt, and so must restrict its focus to a few key themes.

This concern leads into another significant one, and one which was also touched on in my introduction: a second problem in adopting such a macro approach to history is that one must ascribe false notions of agency. That is, in a strict sense, it is misleading to ever state that “the university system did...” or that “the CCP decided that so-and-so would happen,” because this is not the way

that the world works. In fact, there are myriad individual people, ideas and factions among any one of China's universities or government departments; no decision emerges with unanimous support from a vacuum. But to do justice to each of these decisions and actions is simply impossible, especially given the project which I am engaged in. In order to draw out the broad trends that I have sought to identify, it has been necessary to act as if things are a little more straightforward than they in fact are, and to assume that motivations and values can be broadly identified as belonging to particular systems and groups of people. So while it may be true that some of the values I identify as being prominent in contemporary China are not, in fact, universally held, I suggest that acting as if this is the case can still yield important insight into the state and the future of the nation.

The previous chapter has detailed some of the more tangible problems that have resulted, or might be expected to result from, China's continued privileging of economic values, and of the (related) ongoing marketization of China's system of higher education. If these problems alone existed, it seems conceivable that the benefits associated with the current marketization of education (competition breeding progress, increased efficiency of expenditures, financially self-sufficient institutions) might outweigh the costs, especially if some of the current problems could be dealt with within a purely-free market framework. Indeed, the coming of a free market can deliver great benefits to a system, and these benefits should

not be rejected out of hand. There are, however, some less tangible dangers associated with the marketization of higher education, and these dangers (and ways to mitigate them) will be described in this concluding chapter.

Ultimately, it will become clear that when Newman et al describe the process of marketization of American higher education as being (to some extent) inevitable, they might as well be speaking about China as well. There is currently no indication that the process of marketization will halt in China, and the rapid pace of globalization appears primed to speed this process further. I concur with Newman et al when they write that the pivotal question to be answered is not “how can this process of marketization be stopped?” but rather, “if a market is to be created, how can we create a *thoughtful market* for higher education?” The pivotal role of education policy-makers in the foreseeable future will be the setting of incentives in order to encourage *the right kind* of development among universities. That is, universities need to be encouraged to enhance their ability to perform *all three* of the essential functions: to perform research, to act as agents of social change, and to prepare students for healthy, fulfilling and productive lives.

Strategic Planning and the Value of an Institution

When attempting to determine the future direction of a system or institution (i.e., when envisioning the future of a university, business, etc.), a common decision-making technique is to assemble a group of informed leaders and

together create some variation of a “strategic plan.” There are, of course, varying degrees of success to the formation of such plans, and it must be admitted that they have a natural gravity towards the banal. The potential advantages of such a process, however, are significant; if well-executed, the formation of such a plan can help an institution to take stock of itself, to re-examine its values, and to chart a course for future development. The success of such a process hinges upon the degree to which a coherent and persuasive shared constellation of values can be formed (or perhaps more accurately, *re-affirmed*). I will call this general model the “agency approach” to institutional (or systemic) planning.

An alternative approach to institutional development is to be less concerned about “what we believe we are,” and more concerned about “what others want us to be.” This implies that, while the same sort of “strategic planning” can be done, the goals and influences of such a process may be considerably different than if done under an “agency” framework. Identity will primarily be sought from without rather than from within, and the success of such planning will be directly dependent upon the degree to which its results meet the approval of others. This may be called the “receptivity approach” to institutional (or systemic) planning.

Now for a few caveats: first, rare is the institution which will admit to operating primarily on this second model, and for understandable reasons. Indeed, there is a sense in which the most successful contemporary businesses are successful exactly *because* they have so skillfully responded to customer demand while still retaining an image of self-defining entrepreneurship (Apple

Computers comes to mind). Second, these approaches are by no means exclusive, nor should they be; an institution which ignored outside opinion would not exist for long, and even one which was driven entirely by the perception and demands of others would still need to engage in “agency-oriented” planning in order to survive. A balance must be struck between these two approaches, and I suggest that the correct balance will vary from one sort of institution to another. *Why* this is requires further explanation.

First, let us consider an example of an institution which I would argue should tend more towards the receptivity approach: a conventional retail business. *Why* this particular example? Because a retail business, all rhetoric aside, has one primary goal - to make money - and its success in reaching this goal is directly correlated to how well it pleases and appeals to others (in this case, customers). A retail business which was more concerned about self-defining than about making sure there was a market for its product could be likened to someone gambling against the house; you might get lucky every now and then, but in the end you lose. For this reason, such an institution would do well to put extra emphasis on the receptivity approach to planning.

On the other hand, consider an institution that would do well to focus more heavily on the agency approach to planning: an organized religion (and here I’m primarily considering the *organized* rather than *religious* sense of “organized religion”). *Why*? Because the agency approach is associated with one of the most important features of organized religion: authority. For a religion to assemble,

sustain and influence followers, there is a certain degree of authority to which it must aspire (there may be exceptions to this rule, perhaps including the Quaker tradition, which claims little transcendent authority, but these are exactly that, exceptions). A religion which appeared too eager to change in response to the desires of others would risk being seen as “selling out,” and, from a religious standpoint, there are few worse accusations than this. Indeed, while it might be possible for an organized religion to emphasize the receptivity approach more than an agency-oriented one, this determination would constitute a significant departure from the traditional conception of religion.

From these examples it should be clear that different institutions need to strike different balances between these two approaches, and that determining this balance necessitates a consideration of the basic intent of the institution itself. Now it will be helpful to return to a consideration of the main topic at hand: the arrival of market-oriented higher education in China has already begun, and as Newman et al note, the proper question at this point is “how can we create a *thoughtful* market?” Answering this question, as with finding a balance between agency and receptivity approaches to the system’s future planning, will return us to an earlier question, “What is the purpose of this system of higher education?”

The Value of the University

Central to this thesis’ argument is the assertion that Chinese higher education’s move to a market system should not be allowed to detract from the

value that universities can have to society and to their students. Unfortunately, the contour of the current trend of marketization threatens to do just that; universities are under increasing pressure to compete with one another and produce income, which does not bode well for their future in abstract research and public service/social criticism. Competition between universities can certainly be beneficial, but only when it provokes them to change in positive ways. As things stand, they are being encouraged primarily to cater to the desires of students and the market. Addressing these desires is not inherently bad (remember, some degree of “receptivity planning” is needed), but such an approach must not be allowed to compromise essential university functions.

The earlier discussion of institutional planning suggested that while a commercial business should lean towards a receptivity approach to planning, the authority inherent in the concept of an organized religion would make it better served by an agency approach. I would suggest that in this respect a university is similar to an organized religion; neither can survive and fulfill their function without adopting a certain degree of authority about knowledge. For a university to primarily adopt a receptivity approach to planning would represent a significant problem indeed. Essentially, this would mean that the university was taking its cues from students and from the market, neither of which purport to be experts about what constitutes a good education. In such a situation, the very value of the university itself should come under serious question.

The recent evolution of marketization in Chinese higher education suggests that this hypothetical situation (when the content and format of learning is determined primarily by non-educators), is neither distant nor improbable. Increasingly, it seems that universities are being viewed primarily as vocational training schools (though perhaps not in the most traditional sense of the term), and are being encouraged to cultivate this perception in order to recruit the best students (“our graduates hold some of the best jobs in the nation...”). The danger is that, if this truly does become the universities’ primary role, this will significantly reduce their capacity to offer social criticism, effect social change, and conduct theoretical research. This would be a troubling change, especially given the needs and problems that have already been identified in contemporary China.

China’s policy makers would do well to consider some form of the earlier discussion on “receptivity” and “agency” approaches to planning, as one of the most important ramifications of this discussion is that different types of institutions need to be handled in different ways. So for instance, it does not necessarily follow that the contemporary move to decentralize and privatize China’s economy should lead to a similar process within Chinese higher education, any more than the 1950s shift to collectivize and centralize China’s resources should have necessitated a similar shift among universities. Shifts within higher education need to be made with a careful eye towards the needs and values of education itself, and any shift which reduces the control which educators have

over the process of education should be viewed with suspicion. The reorganization of the 1950s moved much of this power away from educators and to a centralized group of CCP leaders and Soviet advisors, a change which produced problematic results. It seems likely that a contemporary shifting of power over education from educators and to student/market demand would constitute a re-enactment of this mistake.

The current trend of marketization and related shift towards education-as-vocational-training poses a significant threat to the validity of the concept of a university itself. In a system where universities' actions and programs are primarily determined by immediate student demand and perceived market demands, the university would be intellectually bankrupt. How could a university be qualified to instruct students, if it held no opinion on what might be valuable to instruct? Such a system would represent an entirely backwards approach to education, and would not serve the nation well, especially in the long term. From this we can see that it is indeed vital to create a thoughtful market for education, and one which encourages universities to develop in ways which enhance their overall value to society.

Ironically, it may actually be that the CCP is hesitant to interfere in order to create this different sort of market, due to leering about repeating past failures in imposing structure from above. Nevertheless, it is clear that higher education is one area in which it will be particularly important to make sure that the incentives

to move in helpful directions are well-established. The lesson to learn from the great success of the de-regulation of agriculture in the 1980s was *not* that loosening controls on the market is a guarantee for success, but rather, that the route to productive and healthy systems is to properly align incentive structures in order to encourage development.

A Thoughtful Market for Higher Education

How can this thoughtful market be created? What changes would it entail? Who would enact such change? These are weighty questions, and while I do not presume to be able to answer them completely, I hope that my analysis of Chinese higher education thus far will enable me to offer some brief sketches of what reform could look like. The theme of these reforms will be the setting up of incentive structures within the system of higher education in order to encourage universities, students, and the higher education system itself to develop in positive ways. This should not be a foreign concept to contemporary China, and especially not to the Chinese government, which has spent the last few decades shifting incentive structures in order to promote economic growth. If anyone should be amenable to warnings about a headlong rush towards a free market, it should be the CCP.

A First Step: Admissions Reform

Chapter four noted that, while the university system may not be directly responsible for some of the health-related problems manifesting themselves in pre-college age Chinese students, it would also be a mistake to excuse universities entirely from these issues. Indeed, it seems clear that the university system *can* have a very significant impact on lower-level education; students, parents, secondary and elementary schools *all* take their cues from universities, primarily by adapting to the university admission process. That is, when universities set their admission standards, they make choices which have a significant effect in determining the actions and goals of the students and schools below them. If those admission standards were to change, it is reasonable to expect that these changes would “trickle down” through the lower levels of education.

Current university admission offices value the results of the college entrance exam (*gaokao*) above all else. To realize the truth of this, consider that achieving less than an excellent score on the *gaokao* immediately disqualifies one from attending China’s top-tier institutions. A student’s high school academic record is typically the second most important admission criterion, and this record is also largely dictated by a students’ performance on school examinations. In effect, this general structure mandates that serious and aspiring students spend the bulk of their time preparing for one examination after another, and this situation certainly seems related to the contemporary problems of student stress. This is

not to imply that evaluating students based upon formal examinations is inherently wrong; especially given the vast population of elementary and secondary students in China, it is difficult to envision a system which operated on any other basic framework. Still, the earlier discussion of stress and health problems among students should suggest that such a system has serious drawbacks as well. Increasingly, students are being pressured to not only excel at their day-to-day schoolwork, but also to spend whatever time they have left attending other, extra classes (like private English lessons, music lessons, etc.) in order to become a better candidate for university admissions. Conversations I had with Chinese students and parents during my stint as an English teacher often left me stunned at what little unstructured time was left to even the youngest of students.

So what can be done to improve this situation? I suggest that, without significant changes to the university admissions criteria, neither schools, parents, or students alone will have sufficient incentive to shift their orientation towards a more “healthy development-oriented” approach. As long as a degree from a prestigious university is seen to be a guarantee for later success, and as long as the route to such a degree is through frenetic studying for endless examinations, students will be under incredible pressure to engage in just such frenetic preparation. If this situation is to be changed, I argue that the university system must make a substantive commitment to values of healthy development, and

that this commitment should come in the form of rewarding schools and students that share and pursue similar values.

How might this change work? Clearly, this will be a tricky process, and the suggestions that I offer here are by no means authoritative or comprehensive. I argue that they would, however, represent a step in the right direction. To begin with, universities could pursue this initiative by explicitly de-valuing the sorts of behavior which are most closely associated with this sort of unhealthy approach to education. So for instance, currently students are pressured to excel in as many different subjects as possible, which has understandably led to a culture in which Chinese parents are expected to push their children to train in as many skills as a 24 hour day will permit. If, however, universities were to devalue the type of admission application which was demonstrative of this sort of unhealthy approach, and to instead communicate (perhaps through the use of scholarships) that their main goal was to recruit students who, say, had demonstrated interest in addressing local, national, or global problems, it is reasonable to expect that the behavior of Chinese students and parents would change to reflect this new set of values.

This is not to say that current Chinese universities do not value this sort of civic engagement in their students, or that such engagement should necessarily be the primary criterion for university admission. But it is true, I would argue, that having a broad array of “examinable” skills is currently perceived to be the key to admission at prestigious universities, and that this perception dictates the

behavior of students, parents and schools. Changing this perception would go a long way towards changing behavior as well, and while setting new standards for admission would no doubt be a frustratingly problematic process, the benefits of such a process, if successful, would be significant. Of course, for such a change to be effective, it would need to be fairly widespread, or at the very least, to involve some of China's most prestigious universities. For this reason, it may be necessary to encourage universities to make such changes through the careful allocation of funding. For instance, China's universities have shown themselves to be receptive to changing in order to improve their qualifications to be included in China's "2/1/1" funding initiative. If such values of admission reform were to be included in similar initiatives, it seems reasonable to expect that China's universities would respond.

A further problem that could be dealt with through admissions reform involves what is known as the "brain drain" of educated Chinese moving from rural to urban areas. In my conversations with Chinese students at Beijing University, a common complaint among students from rural areas was that China's prestigious city-based universities heavily favored urban over rural applicants. It seems likely that this situation exacerbates the "brain drain" problem. That is, if educated Chinese parents want to give their children the greatest chance for admission to China's best universities, they have significant reason to move their family to a populous city. It would seem that the responsibility of universities to address social problems should caution them to

limit the extent to which they are complicit in this brain drain, especially given the widening wealth disparity between rural and urban Chinese (which many authors point to as one of contemporary China's most pressing problems). While China's universities cannot single-handedly solve this problem, they can certainly work to ameliorate it. Given the severity of China's wealth disparity, and the potential consequences if this trend is to continue, this might be an issue which deserves legislation from the Ministry of Education.

A Second Step: A Curriculum for a Postmodern World

In his fascinating book Beyond the Modern University, Marcus Peter Ford offers a critical account of the history and status of what he terms the "modern university." The modern university, Ford argues, is characterized by a belief in economism, "the modern faith that infinite economic growth is both possible and desirable," by a fractured worldview embodied in artificially distinct academic disciplines, and by a philosophic materialism which fails to affirm the "meaningfulness of human life, the intrinsic value of the earth and all of its inhabitants, and the relational aspect of life."¹ Ford stresses that, as a professor himself, he is no enemy to the university ("the criticisms I offer... come not from someone who hates the university but from someone who loves it deeply."), but that "the last fifty years have been a time both of remarkable scientific and technological achievement, on the one hand, and unprecedented environmental

¹ Ford 7.

and social destruction on the other,” and that the university “must share some of the blame for the destruction of the natural world and for the increasing disparity between rich and poor nations (and the rich and poor within nations), both because it tends to legitimate the logic of these activities and because it has not, on the whole, articulated a way of thinking about reality in which the destruction of the natural world for the sake of economic gain, especially when that gain benefits only a very few, is wrong.”²

Ford’s perspective is more environment-centered than that of this thesis, but his characterization of the failings of the modern university has significant resonance with my own. In particular, I concur with Ford’s sentiment that a university system run on the principle of economism will struggle to cope (and *has struggled to cope*) with environmental and social problems, and that in fact, such a system tends to legitimize such problems as necessary consequences of economic growth. “According to economism,” Ford writes, “most of the problems of the world can be solved with money, and money, like grace, is infinite. The fact that the world’s economy has expanded sixfold since the end of World War II and that the poor people of the world are not appreciably better off - and many are demonstrably worse off - does not count as evidence against this faith... According to the World Bank, not only has the plight of the poorest of the poor not improved in the past fifty years; the evidence suggests that it will not

² Ford 5.

improve in the next ten years.”³ The past failures of this “modern” worldview expose the need for a conceptual shift, and I, like Ford, suggest that the university is a good place to start.

Earlier I described the perils of allowing immediate student demand and perceived market needs to determine the structure and curriculum of the university. This would represent a backwards approach to education, and one that would de-legitimize the concept of the university itself. Such an approach would also represent an exacerbation of the problems related to economism, as the essential nature of the university would be determined by perceived economic needs (even more so than currently). As such, it is clear that the present conception of the university is in need of reform, both to better deal with current social, environmental and educational problems, and in order to preserve the essential university values in the face of increasing market pressure which threatens to erode them. As the curriculum is the most obvious representation of a university’s priorities, curriculum reform will be an important step towards these goals.

In envisioning the curriculum of a “postmodern university,” Ford suggests that it would be “broadly and deeply practical,” as opposed to the curriculum of the modern university, which alternates between the abstract and the “narrowly practical.” Though this no doubt sounds rather vague and idealistic, it certainly

³ Ford 8.

seems true that the increasing marketization of higher education (whether in China, the United States, or elsewhere) is sharpening the distinction between theoretical and vocational courses of study. And I argue that Ford has hit the nail on the head when he describes the content of many contemporary courses of study as “narrowly practical.” In my conversations with recent Chinese graduates, those in technology-intensive professions often commented that the methods and technology with which they were trained in college had become obsolete by the time they were hired, and that they had needed to do on-the-job retraining. Though the skills they were taught were thought to be “practical” at the time, these same skills had turned “impractical” in just a few short years.

As the rate of technological progress continues to accelerate, and as the number of fields which rely on technological advances continues to grow, it seems certain that experiences like those of these Chinese graduates will only become more common. For further proof of this phenomenon, one need only consider the evolution of the personal computer; what was a relatively rarity in 1995 had become an essential part of almost every business within a mere decade. What university in 1995 could have predicted that skill in using such a machine would be an essential ingredient to the vocational success of its graduates, let alone been prepared to teach such skills? Given the increasingly dynamic and unpredictable job market in China and elsewhere, it is a simple fact that predicting the future vocations of graduates is becoming more difficult than ever, and as such, educating for narrow specializations becomes an increasingly risky

proposition. This knowledge should not come as a surprise to China's educational community, which was led to react to just such a realization in the 1980s by broadening courses of study in order to improve their graduates' level of employability in an increasingly free and dynamic market.

This state of affairs suggests that Ford is correct in pointing out the need for a curriculum that will be "broadly and deeply practical" in today's changing world, but how might such a change be made, and what would this new curriculum look like? I will offer some possible answers here, but want to be clear that no answers which I give could be as valuable as those formulated by Chinese educators and universities themselves. That is to say, addressing this curricular issue is a perfect opportunity for China's educators to engage in agency-oriented planning -- to take stock of their values, and to set a course for the future. A tangible and important problem exists (a significant portion of the typical curriculum is losing its value), and the process of addressing this problem will necessitate a good deal of introspection about what the goals and duties of the university are. As this problem is closely related to issues of student demand, marketization and the future role of universities, it seems conceivable that addressing this problem would lead to decisions concerning the broader theoretical concerns that this thesis has attempted to raise.

But though Chinese educators might be able to offer the most valuable response to this curricular problem, I too have suggestions to make. To begin

with, it seems clear that the university of the future will not be well-served by primarily offering narrow courses of study which correspond to specific vocations. Such an approach would exacerbate the problems related to the marketization of education, and the vocational training offered in such a system seems destined to shrink in value as the job market grows more dynamic. Instead, the manner of education which will continue to gain value is of a broader sort: that which will prepare students for *life* after college, and which will equip them to deal with both their own problems, and that of society more broadly. Admittedly, this is a vague and somewhat amorphous goal, and therefore one that will require more elaboration.

The curricular problems that I have raised above are certainly not unrecognized by contemporary educators, and one response to them has been a move to create lists of what are variously termed as “skills,” “essential skills,” “competencies,” etc. Though specific careers and vocations may change, the thinking goes, these skills will retain their value, and so this general form of “skill-based learning” is the best way to prepare graduates for life after school. I agree that this approach to learning has merit, especially insofar as it signals a recognition of the same problems which I have earlier identified. At the very least, such an approach constitutes an improvement over an un-reflective slide towards narrowly practical vocational training. And yet, it is far from certain that the creation of such lists typically leads to substantive changes to the education

actually being offered, and if they lack any transformative power, such lists are likely to actually worsen the problem by purporting to have solved it.

Instead of advocating some form of skill-based learning (though as I have noted, this approach may indeed be beneficial), I suggest one fundamental principle that I believe would well-serve the university of the future: *the best kind of education is that which encourages and prepares for future learning*. A student can only learn so much in four years. No university education could ever prepare one for all the challenges life will bring, and attempting to predict these challenges beforehand is a nebulous task at best. What a university can do, however, is to put students in the best position possible to address each of these challenges as it comes, and I argue that this is done by encouraging students to never stop learning, questioning and growing as human beings.

Though this recommendation may seem to be hopelessly idealistic, hopelessly clichéd, or some combination of the two, I argue that taking it seriously would have some serious ramifications for the current educational process in China and elsewhere. To begin with, if true, this statement (that the best kind of education is that which encourages and prepares for future learning) suggests that cultivating traits of curiosity, engagement and self-motivation is at least as important as the imparting of specific knowledge, skills or techniques. Put another way, a style of education which focused on these latter tasks at the expense of promoting traits like curiosity would, in the long-term, fail even by its own standards (that is, graduating with a healthy dose of curiosity will lead to

more knowledge gained than if one studied hard for four years but graduated without the urge to learn any more).

This statement also suggests that a heavy reliance on examination-based education might ultimately be problematic, insofar as it would accustom students to having others set their goals and provide their motivations. Whatever knowledge was gained through such a system would have to be weighed against any lessening of a student's future ability to engage in self-motivated learning. If such a system of examinations was also associated with the stress levels present in China's students, it seems fair to worry that the negative connotation such examinations lend to the educational process would bias students against education in general. This worry should lend further weight to my earlier suggestions about the need for admissions reform in university enrollment; changes to the university system's use of examinations may well come too late in the educational process to address this problem

A Third Step: Preparing for Mass Education

The last two decades have made it clear that China's traditional public universities are simply not capable of accommodating the nation's demand for higher education; even after growing their enrollments at breakneck speed and more than quadrupling their student-to-teacher ratio, traditional universities have not been able to keep up with enrollment demand. While the private schools which have emerged to satisfy this need have brought a new set of concerns to

the regulation of Chinese higher education, it seems clear that such schools are destined to play a significant role in China's future. As with the broader issue of marketization of education, I suggest that shepherding, rather than opposing, the growth of such schools will ultimately serve China best. Fortunately, this seems to be the opinion of the Chinese government as well.

Currently, the most prestigious universities in China are traditional public schools like Beijing and Tsinghua University. Especially with the recently unveiled, "World Class University" funding initiative which is intended to further advance such well-known universities, it seems unlikely that the reputation of such schools will falter in the foreseeable future. What is less certain, however, is how less prestigious public universities will be affected by increased competition from private schools. Especially given the high level of consumer-consciousness associated with China's private universities, it seems reasonable to expect that such schools may come to have a leg up on public universities which still dutifully engage in public service and theory-based research and teaching. In such a situation, these less prestigious public universities might well have to abandon such initiatives in order put all of their resources into competing for students and funding. This would be an unfortunate situation both for these universities and for Chinese education as a whole, and for this reason it will be vitally important to hold private schools to high standards of research and public service.

The danger presented here has not gone unrecognized by the Chinese government, and the 2002 decision to grant private schools equal legal status to

their public peers stipulated that the former must have a beneficial effect on Chinese society as a whole. This represents a move in the right direction, but it will take significant attention and follow-up to make sure that this stipulation continues to be observed. There is little indication that China's growing market economy will urge these private universities to move in such a direction, which means that this issue is another example of that which will require the use of legislation. Such legislation, however, must be carefully employed indeed; if China is to continue to increase the percentage of its population enrolled in higher education, it is vitally important that private schools continue to be encouraged to emerge and grow.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have attempted to describe some of the challenges facing China's system of higher education, and as such my analysis of China's contemporary changes has often been critical in tone. These concluding remarks will give me an opportunity to drop this hermeneutics of suspicion (at least briefly), and to adopt a more optimistic view. Indeed, the progress made by Chinese higher education over the last 30 years has been nothing short of astonishing; what in 1976 was a decimated system of 392 universities and colleges enrolling 560,000 students had by 2006 grown into a robust system of 1,867 schools enrolling nearly 19 million students. It seems clear that the economic progress which China has made over this same time period would never have been possible without the new cohort of educated workers produced by China's universities. It is a sad irony that China's educators underwent such persecution during the Cultural Revolution for purportedly lacking national spirit, as it must have taken true spirit indeed to so readily resume educating the same population which had been responsible for such torment. But resume educating they did, and a quarter-century later, China is being discussed as the next world superpower. China's universities and educators have much to be proud of.

These concluding remarks will also offer an opportunity to clarify my views on economic progress. That is, this thesis has often been critical of the pursuit of economic gain, and such a position runs the risk of trivializing the immense benefits that China's economic development has brought to many Chinese citizens' quality of life. While I maintain that the nation's pursuit of economic development since 1978 has resulted in significant contemporary problems, when contrasted to the endless class struggle of Mao's era, a pragmatic national approach geared towards economic growth must have seemed like a return to sanity. Indeed, there is a sense in which it is only *because of* the success of China's developmental efforts that the nation may now turn its attention to social, educational and environmental problems like those described in this thesis; it is difficult to theorize about what constitutes healthy human development when there are hungry mouths to feed.

As chapter four has noted, the problems presented in this thesis have not gone unnoticed by Chinese educators and government officials, and there are some encouraging contemporary efforts to deal with these issues. For instance, many universities have begun to recognize the problems associated with overly-narrow curricula of study, the sort of curricula I have argued should become obsolete in the coming years. One response to this trend has come in the form of Beijing University's "Yuanpei programs," in which students engage in a broad study of arts and sciences rather than enrolling within a particular academic

department. Other universities have pursued similar strategies by introducing interdisciplinary programs of study, although such progressive initiatives continue to be far more common at China's prestigious institutions than at more modest schools.¹

China's Ministry of Education has also made a commitment to address concerns associated with over-testing, and the related lack of emphasis on creativity and healthy development that were raised in the previous chapter. The 2006 MOE document "The Educational Development During the 10th Five-Year Plan and Plans for the 11th Five-Year Plan" makes explicit reference to these concerns and lays out the MOE's goals for the future:

We will continue a student-centered policy to cultivate students with fully-developed moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic capacities for our socialist cause... Additionally, we will adopt measures to reduce the overloaded burden of students by correcting the wrong attitude which only emphasizes acceptance to the next level of education. Meanwhile, we will strengthen and improve physical and aesthetic education by encouraging and organizing students to take part in social activities, volunteer programs and on-campus activities... Moreover, we will reform and improve the examination system to establish a reasonable system which is in accordance with the idea of quality-oriented education.

A later section of the document reads:

Thirdly, we will take concrete measures to improve the quality of higher education. We will continue the "2/1/1 Initiative" and the [World Class Universities Initiative], emphasize technological innovation, cultivate creativity in students and improve our capacity to innovate so that top universities in China may become an important force in the establishment of an innovative nation.²

At the very least, this document makes it clear that many of the problems raised in this thesis are also on the minds of China's educational policy makers.

¹ Min 67.

² Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, "Educational Development During the 10th 5-Year Plan and Plans for the 11th 5-Year Plan." Ministry of Education, 25 Mar. 2008
<http://moe.edu.cn/edoas/website18/info18515.htm>.

Author Weifang Min confirms this observation, and writes that Chinese higher education has recently begun to undergo a “shift in emphasis... from the memorization of factual knowledge to the cultivation of students’ ability in creative and critical thinking, problem solving, information acquisition and generation, and intellectual independence.” This shift, argues Min, is due to the increasingly prevalent feeling that “graduates should not be viewed simply as products but rather as well-educated members of future generations.” Min adds, however, that these sorts of reforms have been slow to gain traction outside of China’s more prestigious universities.³

The sentiments expressed by China’s Ministry of Education are encouraging responses to many of the problems which this thesis has raised, although at this point in time it is impossible to tell whether these relatively recent shifts to emphasize creativity and healthy development will produce valuable results. Ultimately, I suggest that the success of such reforms will depend in large part upon their underlying motivation. That is to say, this thesis has attempted to demonstrate that many of the problems which have plagued Chinese higher education over the last half-century have been the result of educational decisions being made on non-educational grounds. This was true during Mao’s era, when trends in education were often driven by concepts of ideology and class struggle,

³ Min 68.

and during Deng's era, when educational changes were fueled by economic needs.

For these recent initiatives promoting creativity and healthy development to achieve success in the long term, I argue that they must be firmly grounded in, and motivated by, educational theory. If the motivation to make these changes is in fact primarily economic in nature (a situation which would not be surprising, considering the recent history of the university system), that is, if values of creativity and healthy development are only being promoted so as to improve the competitiveness of China's university graduates in an increasingly global marketplace, then I argue that such initiatives will ultimately fall short of satisfactorily addressing the problems that this thesis has raised. If these initiatives are only pursued insofar as they fuel further economic growth, then they will fail to acknowledge that it is this same single-minded pursuit of economic gain which has helped to produce such social and developmental problems in the first place. Only if they represent the educational establishment's challenge to this destructive narrative of perpetual economic growth will such initiatives have the capacity to effect lasting reform.

To conclude: over the last half-century of communist rule, China's university system has undergone dramatic changes which have typically been spurred by broader shifts in national policy. Though it has faced considerable challenges

during this time period, the university system has shown a remarkable resilience and capacity for growth, and there is reason to believe that the contemporary system is stronger than ever before. But new national challenges loom, including the developmental, societal and environmental problems that this thesis has described, and it seems clear that China's universities can play a significant role in addressing these problems. By making a renewed commitment to engage in what this thesis has identified as the "three essential university functions," I argue that China's universities would indeed help to mitigate such problems, and I will conclude by offering brief summations of how this process might work.

By making a renewed commitment to the production of research, both theoretical and practical, China's universities would ensure that their ability to analyze and address national problems will remain undiminished. Furthermore, the inclusion of research in the educational experience has significant pedagogical benefit, as it encourages students to think about knowledge as a dynamic concept that they themselves could one day alter, rather than as a rigid and immutable set of facts. The inclusion of research in universities promotes genuine intellectual exploration and engagement among students, which will be a particularly valuable function as China's educational institutions attempt to encourage students' capacities for creativity and critical thinking. A strengthened relationship between teaching and research would also help to create the sort of post-modern curriculum which was envisioned in chapter four, as extended

experience with the problem-solving involved in research would help to prepare students for a wide range of challenges after graduation.

By affirming their own responsibility to encourage students to lead healthy, fulfilling and productive lives before, during and after college, China's universities would help to mitigate the developmental and health-related problems which are becoming common among Chinese students. As this thesis has attempted to demonstrate, the lifestyle of young students which is encouraged by the contemporary system of higher education has undoubtedly helped to produce these problems, and the previous chapter suggested changes related to admissions reform that could begin to address these issues. Of the specific reforms that I have proposed, this is perhaps the simplest, and yet it may be the most effective as well. By changing admission criteria, universities can send clear signals about what sorts of behavior they value, and I suggest that neither Chinese students nor parents would be slow in responding to such changes.

Finally, by embracing their role as agents of change in society, China's universities can establish a solid theoretical foundation for the sorts of forward-looking engagement with social issues which I have argued should characterize the universities of the future. Whether it is through changing admission standards to promote healthy development among the young, working to address the nation's widening wealth disparity or becoming champions of environmental stewardship, I argue that China's universities can be powerful and transformative agents of influence as China moves into the 21st century. In this thesis I have

argued that in the communist era changes to higher education were first driven primarily by ideological considerations (as represented by the thoughts and influence of Mao Zedong) and later by the pursuit of economic development (as symbolized by the emerging free market). By embracing what I have identified as the essential university functions and making a substantive commitment to becoming agents of social change, I argue that China's universities would inaugurate a progressive new era for higher education: one in which universities transformed the nation itself, and not the other way around.

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Unaltered Versions of Ministry of Education Website Quotes

Chapter 2

Chinese economic system used to be very highly centralized. To adapt to that, the former higher education system was also centralized, with education provided by the central and local governments respectively and directly under their administration. The disadvantages of this system were that the state undertook too many responsibilities and the schools lacked the flexibility and autonomy to provide education according to the needs of the society, with central departments and local governments providing education separately, the structure of education was irrational and segmented. There were too many single disciplinary HEIs and professional HEIs, With the establishment of disciplines over-lapped, the efficiency of some HEIs fell very low which in return hampered the improvement of education quality. Therefore, the structural reform of higher education has become a key for other higher education reforms.

...

The overall objectives of higher education reform are to smooth the relationship among government, society and HEIs, setting up and perfecting a new system in which the state is responsible for the overall planning and macro management while the HEIs follow the laws and enjoy the autonomy to provide education according to needs of the society.

After several years' endeavour, the structural reform of higher education has gained heartening achievements. In the field of education provision reform, the old system in which the state undertook the establishment of all HEIs has been broken, and a new system in which the government take main responsibility with the active participation of society and individuals has been taking shape. The development of HEIs run by social forces are fully encouraged and supported.¹

Chapter 3

We will promote the stipulation of regulations concerning school management with the principles of “rigorous observation of school regulations and development of relevant norms and standards”. We will establish new mechanism for school management, which guarantees effective regulation, management, supervision and thrifty. In addition, we will enhance the capacity building of leading officials and intensify our efforts in corruption prevention by creating a punishment and prevention system which equally emphasizing education, system building and supervision. We will further improve educational auditing, regulate financial management of all educational institutions, especially universities, and ensure the safety of the funds. We also will correct various bad practices for the healthy development of education.²

Conclusion

We will continue a student-centered policy to cultivate constructors and successors with full development morally, intellectually, physically and aesthetically for our socialistic cause. We will also strengthen the moral education for pupils and college students and to explore the most effective methods to make moral education more purposeful, efficient, attractive and appealing. We will take a correct attitude towards education, and promote the reforms on basic education curriculum, training patterns, teaching contents and teaching methods in order to enhance the quality of education. Additionally, we will adopt measures to reduce the overloaded burden of the students by correcting the wrong attitude which only emphasizes on the attendance rates of graduates to the next stage education. Meanwhile, we will strengthen and improve physical and aesthetical education by encouraging and organizing students to take part in all kinds of productions, social activities, volunteer programmes and rich on-campus activities. We will improve the abilities of teachers to implement quality-oriented education.

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¹ Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, “Higher Education in China.” Ministry of Education, 28 Mar. 2008 http://moe.edu.cn/edoas/website18/en/higher_h.htm.

² Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, “Educational Development During the 10th 5-Year Plan and Plans for the 11th 5-Year Plan.” Ministry of Education, 25 Mar. 2008 <http://moe.edu.cn/edoas/website18/info18515.htm>.

Thirdly, we will take concrete measures to improve the quality of higher education. We will continue “211 Project” and “985 Scheme”, emphasize on technology innovation, cultivate talents with creativity and completely improve our capacity of self-innovation so that top universities in China will become an important force for the establishment of an innovative nation.³

³ Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, “Educational Development During the 10th 5-Year Plan and Plans for the 11th 5-Year Plan.” Ministry of Education, 25 Mar. 2008
<http://moe.edu.cn/edoas/website18/info18515.htm>.