

# Introduction: Modernization of Higher Education in China

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Cited as:

Yan, F., & Cai, Y. (2019). Modernization of Higher Education in China, An Introduction. In M. A. Peters (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory* (pp. 1-4). Singapore: Springer Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-532-7\\_597-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-532-7_597-1)

## Historical Trajectory of Modernization

In late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when the last Qing Dynasty would approach to its end, China began its modernization process. But the process is not voluntary and active but forced and passive (Hsu, 2008). Imperial invasions in the First Opium War (1840-1842) and the Second Opium War (1856) made Chinese people realized that China was not the world's center as it assumed, and Western countries were much stronger and powerful than China in many aspects. The new world's logic is that might is right. The world evolves as Darwin predicts, and stagnation makes a country in a beaten position. If China would not change, it would perish. Under the peril crisis, China began to change itself. The government was advised by intellectuals to initiate Self-Strengthen Movement (*zhiqiang yundong*) or Westernization Movement (*yangwu yundong*) by importing mining, railway, manufacturing and military technology from Western countries. However, the failure in the Sino-Japanese War (*jiawu zhangzheng*) in 1894-1895, China was conscious that Japan's success in the war was not only attributed to advanced technology but also to social and political institutions. Therefore, China started a new and broad reform movement called the Constitutional Reform and Modernization (*weixin bianfa*). Consequently, new schools of thoughts were introduced, including Marxism, liberalism, anarchism etc. This movement is labeled the Eastward Transmission of Western Learning (*xixue dongjian*). As a part of modernization, China created its first modern universities in 1890s by imitating western counterparts (Jin, 2000). Processors of Tianjin University, Peking University are two of them.

In 1905, China abolished its Civil Examination (*keju kaoshi*) and old academy of classical learning system (*shuyuan*) respectively, and built and disseminated modern schooling system in Western styles. The new schooling system is beneficial to Western-styled knowledge based on discipline, but is not conducive to Chinese classical knowledge (*Jing Shi Zi Ji*). In 1911, the old dynasty was

replaced by a new Republic sovereignty. China got significant progresses in all areas of life during Republican era (1912-1949) except Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945). In Republican era, China developed its modern higher education system which is composed of public universities, private universities and missionary universities. After the Republican era, Chinese Communist Party defeated the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang), took power and founded the People's Republic of China in 1949. China joined the Soviet Union as a member of socialist group and opposed capitalist system led by America and West Europe. Furthermore, China adopted the Russian model of centralized planning system in economic, political and social affairs (Hayhoe, 1996). Since then for a while, China's government swung to leftist policy, and class struggle was prioritized and economic production was in stagnation. Man-made disasters occurred again and again due to the mistaken policies especially in the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Since 1977, China has negated the previous leftist policies and entered into a new period in which open-up and reform policies were implemented and modernization became the first national priority. Modernization of industry, agriculture, defense, science and technology have been emphasized continuously. Like any other countries, modernization in China is explicitly manifested in industrialization and urbanization. It also reflects in political, social and cultural systems (Rozman, 2010). In 2016, the agriculture, industry and service sectors account for 8.6%, 39.8% and 51.6% respectively, and urban population accounts for 57.35% of total population. <sup>1</sup>This is the status quo. In governmental policies, the science and technology are recognized as the first important productive force, and human resources and education were perceived the foundation of modernization. Moreover, market system was officially recognized as an orthodox way of socialist modernization in 1992. China has made remarkable progress in economic growth and social development in past decades. The success is attributed to leading role of Chinese government and Confucius culture (Tan and Wang, 2011). According to recent policy stipulated by the Chinese Communist Party in 19<sup>th</sup> Congress in 2017, China intends to achieve modernization goal in 2035 and to become a strong modernized state in 2050. China also wants to be active in international events, share its experience and make great contributions to the world's human community.

### **Modernization of Higher Education System**

Modernizations of state and modernization of higher education are intertwined. Modernization of higher education is both a prerequisite and a consequence of modernization of a state. A modernized state needs modernized persons. In retrospect, higher education system has provided sufficient manpower for its economic growth and social development. What are modernized persons? In 1902, Liang Qichao, a well-known Chinese intellectual, gave definition of a modernized person. He clarified that a modernized person is a free person instead of slavery, progressive rather than conservative, ambitious rather than unambitious, open minded rather than closed minded, and scientific rather than fantasy (Luo, 2008).

A modernized person can only be educated in a modern school and a modern university. What does modernization of higher education mean? It means a process in which higher education develops in

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<sup>1</sup> Website of China's National Statistical Bureau: [http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201702/t20170228\\_1467424.html](http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201702/t20170228_1467424.html). Retrieved on 31<sup>st</sup> Oct. 2017.

both quantity and quality. It also means that an effective and efficient institutional framework is established to guarantee the developmental process. In other words, three level are reflected in modernization, i.e. technic, institutional and behavioral (Toynlee, 1964, Jin, 2013). It is evident that China has made significant progress in higher education in the past decades. Here follows a few evidences. It obtains the largest higher education system in the world, and the grass access ratio to higher education has reached more than 40%.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the progress was made in unparalleled short period of time. In addition, China has established complete and comprehensive academic disciplines and programs. More and more faculty get doctoral degrees, and they become increasingly productive measured by papers and patents. Large amount of Chinese students and scholars went to Western countries for their trainings and education. In recent years, many Chinese scholars are lured back to Chinese academic system by governmental incentive programs, such as One Thousand Talents Program. This open-door policy benefits Chinese higher education greatly. The returnees have brought back cutting-edge scientific, technological, professional knowledges, disseminated and applied them effectively. Gradually improved models of finance secure funding and inputs to HEIs. Consequently, dozens of Chinese leading universities are prioritized by “211 Project”, “985 Project” and “Double World-class Scheme” respectively, and this has narrowed down the gap with international leading universities.

### **Approaches of Modernization and Characteristics**

It is interesting to observe that countries in different regions take diverse approaches to achieve their modernizations. There are plural models of modernization, and two typical models---spontaneous and gradual (*xianfa neisheng*), evoked and dramatic or later exogenous type (*houfa waisheng*)---can be differentiated (Xu and Chen, 2006; Rozman, 2010). History accounts. The point will be elaborated below. Since 18<sup>th</sup> century, Western countries has initiated their modernization process and taken so-called spontaneous and gradual approaches. To the contrary, the rest of world began their modernization after their Western countries and took evoked and dramatic approaches (Luo, 2008). In most cases, the latter became the colonies of the Western countries, and their modernizations have been achieved by external forces. This different chronical order in modernization leads to West-China and other later nations a leader-follower, prototype-imitator relationship. In terms of Max Weber, China tried to rationalize its system by formal rules and regulations.

Because China’s unique traditional autocracy and the influence of Russian model, the development of economy and higher education in China has top-down characteristic (Tan and Wang, 2011). From the early 20<sup>th</sup> century on, China has made efforts to catching up Western countries, and great-leap-forward in 1950s is an ironic case. We can assume that values and believes from Western World will be in conflict with China’s traditional ones. Henry Kissiniger (2015) estimated that China would value its cultural traditions in modernization but actual consequence of learning from the West. In terms of technic, institutional and behavioral levels (Toynlee, 1964, Jin, 2013), the later countries like China intends to prioritize technical level and ignores institutional and behavioral levels. This

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.moe.edu.cn/jyb\\_sjzl/sjzl\\_ftjggb/201707/t20170710\\_309042.html](http://www.moe.edu.cn/jyb_sjzl/sjzl_ftjggb/201707/t20170710_309042.html). Retrieved on 30 September 2017.

is a research proposition which can be explored in all chapters as follows.

In this short monography, we invite experts at home and abroad to write pieces on Chinese universities, which cover history, system and structure, finance, governance and management, teaching and learning, regional engagement, academic profession, students' experience and graduate employment, internationalization, and Chinese higher education model respectively. All pieces will deal with modernization issues intendedly or unintendedly, internally or externally. One pain for China is that while China intends to modernize itself but has to cure diseases resulted from modernization, such as pollution, environment and ecological problems, cultural conflicts. China celebrates its achievements and has to address challenges in coming postmodern societies in the meantime.

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