

A Study on the Expansion and Its Effects on Higher Education in China

Xu Huibo

Zhejiang Wanli University, Ningbo, Zhejiang, China

Keywords: Higher Education, Expansion, Mainly Effects

Abstract: Since the founding of new China, China's higher education has made historic achievements. China's education reform and development can be roughly divided into four stages: the foundation stage (1949-1984), the reforming stage (1985-1998), the stage of popularization (1999-2013) and the connotation development stage (from 2004 to now). With the deepening of China's higher education reform, it has made great achievements in terms of scale, quality, fairness and international influence. In particular, the 40 years since the reform and opening up is a very extraordinary historical stage in the development of China's higher education cause. Among those changes, there is a significant one, that is, the expansion of higher education in China. With the expansion of China's higher education, higher education began to become privatized, decentralized and internationalized. And as its incessant expansion, it also had some significant influences and challenges. This essay mainly talks about the expansion of Chinese higher education in the past 20 years and figures out the effects on Chinese higher education expansion.

1. Introduction

Looking back over the years, higher education in China has a lot of changes which not only embodied on its inner aspects but also demonstrates in its social functions^[1]. The developing of higher education is connected with the country's economic development and its international influence. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, China's higher education has made historic achievements. In particular, the 40 years since the reform and opening up is a very extraordinary historical stage in the development of China's higher education process^[1]. With the deepening of China's higher education reform, it has made great accomplishments in terms of scale, quality, fairness and international influence. Among those changes, there is a significant one, that is, the expansion of higher education in China.

The expansion of Chinese higher education has a long history. According to Martin Trow's theory, 'Chinese Higher Education had thereby surpassed the 15% threshold for characterization as Mass Higher Education'. From the previous studies, it mainly resulted from the economic growth and raising educational demands in China. And as its incessant expansion, it also had some significant influences and challenges.

2. The Historical Background of the Expansion of HE in China

In recent decades, the higher education system has been greatly expanded, especially in China. The expansion of China's higher education can be traced back many years. China's modern higher education institutions were established in the late 19th century. In the 1930s it quickly experienced a 'golden age' of rapid increasing. It is reported that when the Communist Party of China came to power by 1949, there were 116,504 college students in China studying in 205 modern colleges and universities^[6]. Later, China adopted two large-scale social practices and tried to expand the higher education system. They were 'Great Leap'(1958-1960) and the Cultural Revolution(1966-1976). The 'Great Leap' proposed to complete the task of eliminating illiteracy and popularizing education in primary schools basically in three to five years, and popularize higher education in about 15 years, which led to the upsurge of large-scale education nationwide. As it was eager to succeed, it not only failed in the end, but also caused some damages to the national economy. The original intention of the Cultural Revolution was to ensure the purity of thought in the Party and the pursuit of equality, including the rights to receive education. But it seriously damaged the higher education system. Higher education institutions stopped recruiting students for 6 years and graduate enrollment was suspended for 12 years. Meanwhile, it stopped sending students to study abroad for 6 years and accepting overseas graduate students for 7 years. During that period, the university enrollment reached at its lowest, which only had 47,815 students in 1970. In 1971, there were only 328 higher education institutions in China, which is 106 fewer than in 1965^[5]. At the same time, it also made the quality of higher education greatly reduced. This referred to the teaching instruments and books were destroyed, and the shortage of teaching staff which is caused by the persecutions of most cadres and teachers.

Deng Xiaoping made the the resumption of National College Entrance Examination in 1977, which marked the recovery of Chinese higher education. It was not only a milestone in the process of promoting higher education in China, and also a preface to the reform of higher education in China. Deng stressed that higher education plays an important role in China's development into an economic power. Since then, many projects and reforms which are related to HE occurred. The numbers of different types of HEIs increased dramatically. In 1998, the Ministry of Education (MOE) put forward that the gross enrollment rate of HE in China would reach 15% by 2010. The proposal of this plan marked the HE in China entered its popularization stage. In 1999, The State Council passed the Education Revitalization Plan for the 21st Century which was drafted by the MOE. This plan included many strategies in order to establish various universities and colleges. The reforms from 1980s to 2000s has made great achievements. One of them is that China entered its mass expansion stage. The gross enrollment rate of Chinese HE reached 16% in 2002. And one year later, the enrollment ratio of Higher Education reached 17% ^[4]. Along with the continuous expansion of college enrolment, an increasing number of young Chinese have been admitted into colleges. According to the data from China State Statistical Bureau (2011), the number of freshmen in universities and colleges was increased from 0.4 million in 1978 to 6.6 million in 2010.

3. The Effects of the Expansion of HE in China

3.1 Decentralized of HEIs in China

Decentralization is a major policy trend for the developing of higher education in most countries among the whole world, so does China. Hanson^[3] defined the term 'decentralization' as 'the transfer of decision-making authority, responsibility, and tasks from higher to lower organizational levels or between organizations' . The decentralization of the management power of HE is conducive to changing the situation that the management system of higher education which is too

centralized. In the early years, the Chinese government regulated the higher education system and used a centralized educational system. HEIs almost had no autonomy in all the levels and aspects, including the enrollment, administration, the acquisition of teaching materials, the settings of courses and so on. This kind of rigid centralization system led to a shortage of well-educated labors, which hindered the development of China's economy. Obviously, it was not suitable for the market economy. The Chinese government soon realized that and tried to make changes.

Since the significant policy 'Decision on Reform of Education System' was passed in 1985, decentralization has been a key policy of HE system in China. The Chinese government stopped managing the issues of HEIs directly and devoted to shift the administration power of HE from central government to provincial governments^[1]. At the same time, it also gave back some degrees' autonomy to HEIs themselves. It aimed to change central government from a service provider into a regulator and a supervisor. It also enabled the educational institutions to develop individually and independently. The State Council promulgated The Program for China's Educational Reform and Development in 1993 that 'the government actively encourages and fully supports social institutions and citizens to establish schools according to law and to provide correct guidelines and strengthen administration.' By 1999, when colleges and universities expanded their enrollment, the decentralized management pattern of higher education in China has been basically formed, and the proportion of local colleges and universities and their on-campus students in the whole system was close to or even more than 70% ^[12].

With the implementation of decentralization reform, on the one hand, the central government has more and more responsibilities for the macro-control of higher education development. On the other hand, provincial governments have gained some powers, for example, they can approve the establishment and management of higher education institutions, and coordinate the administrative jurisdiction of colleges and universities at all levels. Higher education institutions have more autonomy in system operation according to their own development situations and their own judgments on the HE development process. Under the decentralized management pattern, local governments have greater rights in overall development planning and the enthusiasm of school also has improved significantly than before. In particular, the development level of higher education in economically developed provinces cannot match its economic status. Those places have higher enthusiasm, better ability and conditions for running schools. In addition to the strength of the government, it also contains potential for private HEIs to be released.

3.2 Privatized of HEIs in China

In order to meet the needs of higher education expansion, the government must increase fiscal input, and at the same time it should also save resources. When public schools exceeded their education fiscal policy targets but still failed to meet people's demand for higher education, other approaches should be considered. In this case, the development of private education is the policy choice of government.

Private higher education is regarded as an important factor in the higher education system. Privation of higher education became a fundamental change in China, it started from zero but was treated as an increasingly key factor in the process of the expansion of Chinese higher education. Private higher education is also called minban higher education in Chinese, and there is no clear definition of it can be explained in Chinese. The development of private HE in China can be tracked back to 1978 when it can the permission from the Chinese government. At that year, the eleventh Communist Party Committee issued the opening-up policy and allowed to develop private HEIs. Before 1980s, China didn't have any private universities and colleges. In 1982, the Zhonghua Shehui University (the China Social University) was set up in Beijing which marked the end of

China's 36-year-closure of private higher education. At the same year, the National People's Congress issued the New Constitution which stipulated as following: 'the state encourages collective economic organizations, governmental enterprises and other social groups to initiate and administer various kinds of legal educational activities'^[9]. After that, over one hundred minban HEIs were established and developed in China.

Wei and Zhang^[10] pointed out that the first national conference which was related to the topic of minban higher education was held in Wuhan, Hubei in 1989. On that conference, over seventy private HEIs participated and they put forward a request for the central education ministry to take a more liberal approach to private minban education. In 1992, Deng Xiaoping visited the south of China and HE privation for diploma began to appear, so that a number of minban higher education institutions were set up. And from 1997 to 2003, the Minban HE developed rapidly because of the publication of The Regulation for Private Higher Education by the State Council. This period was called the initial development period^[2]. As of 2000, about one million students entered the private higher education institutions among the whole country^[13]. Compared to 1,549 public HEIs in 2006, there were 594 private HEIs at the same time^[8]. The development of private higher education encourages all levels of society to raise funds for higher education institutions, explores all possible ways to get money for education development, and thus increases the number of higher education institutions which helps a lot for the expansion of HE.

3.3 The Internationalization of HEIs in China

The strategies of making progress on China's international development involve two parts, which are called 'Yinjinlai' (introducing in) and 'Zouchuqu(bringing out)' .

On one hand, China encourages the provision of higher education institutions from foreign countries (especially those highly reputable institutions) to cooperate with local educational institutions. That is called Sino-Foreign cooperation institutions (SFCIs) . Since 1978, education and other fields have been gradually opened to the outside world, and the Sino-Foreign cooperative education policy has entered the embryonic stage of exploration. By the end of 2002, 712 SFCIs has been set up, more than 10 times the number at the end of 1994. By December 31, 2007, the number of international cooperative school running projects approved by the Ministry of Education (MoE) reached about 1,465. There were 165 education cooperative school running projects, and about 1,300 schools and programs in other forms, covering 28 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities across the country, 11 times more than in 1995. At present, the Sino-foreign cooperation in higher education has entered the standards development period, and the its development speed and scale are rising steadily. Meanwhile, worried about cultural contamination phenomena which might exist in the SFCIs , the Chinese government prefers to set up the 4+0 collaborative program rather than the 2+2 or 3+1 model, that is, they are more willing to let students to complete their all four years of study in China.

On the other hand, China encourages students to study abroad. To some extent, this is partly because the supply of higher education sometimes cannot meet the demand of higher education under the rapid expansion of HE in China. As more and more families can afford the costs of fees, they choose to send their children to other countries to accept higher education. This kind of students are called 'educational migration'. From 1978 to 2013, there were 3,058,600 Chinese students who had the experiences of studying abroad. This group of students believe that this kind of experience can bring them language and culture skills, even can get a better job when they go back to China^[7]. And the government believes that this measure can train some talents which have international versions and cross-culture abilities for our country. At the same time, the government also concerns about those students prefer to stay in other countries after they finish their studies

there. As for Chinese HE expansion needs a lot of such kind of graduates, so the government provides some attractive treatments for them in order to draw them back to China.

4. The Quality Problem that Exists in the Expansion of HE in China

Higher education can be seen as a service industry, so it needs to ensure the quality of service as same as the other types of service provider. Organizations must put customers first and make a reasonable judgment on how their customers' needs and expectations are met to provide the high-quality services. They must also continue to improve towards the goals that they need to achieve. With the expansion of higher education in China, the government decentralized some powers of managing and running HEIs to local governments, and it also admitted and encouraged to establish some private HEIs. This led to the raising concern about the quality issues in such institutions. To a certain extent, public opinions show obvious doubts about the quality of education after the expansion of higher education, and some people began to believe that the quality of education after the expansion of higher education has decreased. Actually there are different opinions on the quality of the expansion of higher education in academic area at present, for example, some scholars argue that there is a serious quality problem of education, while others advocate that there is no quality problem at all. In fact, education quality of some schools does decline slightly due to a variety of reasons. For example, some colleges and universities have different degrees of quality problems in terms of students, teachers, educational conditions, educational characteristics and professional settings, which directly affect the quality assurance of the whole higher education. This essay concludes four of them as followings.

Firstly, education expansion brings about a significant increase in the number of students, which has a profound impact on the quality of education. Due to the continuous expansion of enrollment in China, the number of students has increased greatly, the scale of schools has been expanding, and the difficulty of school management and teaching quality control has also been increased. The larger the schools are, the more complex and bureaucratic they are. This makes the HEIs also set relatively lower requirements for students and the assessment of academic performances just stay on formalism levels. As the number of students keeps increasing, HEIs often only pay attention to the assessment of students' scores and credits, but ignore the substantive assessment of students' learning content, such as the students' ability to analyze, synthesize and solve problems.

Secondly, the relative lack and ineffective utilization of teaching faculty is also an important reason for education quality problems. After the expansion of higher education, the resources of university teachers are relatively insufficient, which is mainly reflected in the teacher-student ratio. The high teacher-student ratio in higher education has become the bottleneck restricting the further development of higher education. In particular, the scale expansion of education brings about a severe shortage of teachers and a serious structural shortage. The student-teacher ratio was 1:11 before the enrollment expansion and 1:18 after the enrollment expansion, while it is 1:14 in developed countries. According to the standard of 1:14, China's colleges and universities are still short of nearly 100,000 full-time teachers. As the teacher-student ratio is too high, the class size in some colleges and universities is getting larger and larger, and the number of students even reaches hundreds. As a result, teachers have less and less communication with students, so the teaching quality is obviously reduced.

Thirdly, under the background of education expansion, the cultivation modes of some universities and colleges are single and rigid, which are failing to adapt to the changing situation in time. Most HEIs have not adjusted the training objectives and discipline structure accordingly. The construction of the teaching staff has not been improved and strengthened. Basically, the original training objectives and training mode have been adopted to expand the enrollment of students, and

some additional courses are often provided by existing teachers. As a result, the school training mode is too old and single, making it difficult to guarantee the quality of teaching. Last but not the least, although the scale of higher education continues to expand, from the current situation of China, the material and financial resources of higher education are still mainly borne by the government, and the existing funding level can not fully meet the needs of education development. According to statistics, the tuition and miscellaneous fees paid by each student are only one quarter of their education cost, and the government should subsidize the rest part.

Ensuring quality while expanding scale is a common problem faced by all countries in terms of higher education. In order to maintain the quality under the rapid expansion, the Chinese government has responded accordingly. To create the world-class universities and colleges, China began to implement '211 Project' in 1995 and '985 Project' in 1998. '211 Project' refers to the construction project of about 100 key institutions of higher learning and a batch of key disciplines for the 21st century^[14]. She points out that there were 107 schools and 1,379 key disciplines built up under this project by 2005. And four year later, '985 Project' was issued. Its proposal was 'in order to realize modernization, our country needs a number of first-class universities with advanced world level'. These two projects significantly improved international competitiveness and enhanced capacity for scientific innovation. As they aimed at establishing the top universities in the world, so the government pay more attention on guarantee these HEIs' quality. Higher education quality, especially college teaching quality, must be paid enough attention to, which requires more education investment, a better quality of teachers, more scientific and more targeted teaching evaluation. Apart from this, there are several other approaches that the government has used to maintain the quality of HEIs. The government solves the contradiction between the number of students and the limited teaching resources by integrating teacher resources and actively raising funds. While stabilizing, enriching and improving the existing teaching staff, schools should strengthen inter-school cooperation to realize the sharing of teachers among different universities so as to solve the problem of relatively weak teaching staff.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, throughout the development of China's higher education over the years, education expansion has played an important role among many changes and reforms. The reasons for its expansion are mainly driven by the country's economic development and the increasing demands of the people. It has actually had influences on all aspects of China. Just from the perspective of education, the expansion of higher education has led to the decentralization of education and the emergence of private universities and colleges, even promoted the internationalization of higher education in China. More and more students have the opportunities to accept higher education and make different choices according to their own needs and conditions. At the same time, the rapid expansion also brings a certain challenge, that is the quality problem of higher education. Under this situation, the government has actively made relevant measures to face this challenge. But there is no denying that, with the continuous expansion, this problem cannot be completely solved at present. In this regard, the government and universities still need to make continuous efforts to solve this challenge and better meet the bright future brought by education expansion.

References

- [1] Bie, D. R. and Yi, M. C. (2014) 'The Context of Higher Education Development and Policy Response in China', *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(8), pp. 1499–1510.
- [2] Cheng, Y. X. and Zheng, Y. C. (2005) 'Analysis of Private Higher Education in China', *US-China Education Review*, 11(2), pp. 18-21.
- [3] Hanson, E. M. (1998) 'Strategies of educational decentralization: Key questions and core issues', *Journal of*

Educational Administration, 36(5), pp. 111–128.

[4] Li, F. L. et al. (2014) 'Can distance education increase educational equality?—Evidence from the expansion of Chinese Higher Education', *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(10), pp. 1811-1822.

[5] Luo, Y. and Yang, P. (2011) *Between expansion and equity: The justice of Chinese higher education— An analysis sociological neo-institutionalism*, *Tsinghua Journal of Education*, 6(1), 3–8.

[6] Luo, Y. et al. (2018) 'Expansion and inequality of higher education in China: how likely would Chinese poor students get to success?', *Higher Education Research & Development*, 37(5), pp. 1015–1034.

[7] Mankowska, A. (2018) 'Studying Abroad: A Case Study of Chinese International Mobility', *Education in Modern Society*, 16(3), pp. 150-156

[8] National Bureau of Statistics of China. (1996–2007). *China Statistic Yearbook*. Beijing: China Statistics Press.

[9] The People's Republic of China. (1982) *The Constitution of China*. Beijing: Chinese Legal Press.

[10] Wei, Y.T. and Zhang, G.C. (1995) 'A Historical Perspective on Non-governmental Higher Education in China' (from the International Conference on Private Education in Asia and the Pacific Region), the University of Xiamen, China.

[11] Wu, Y. X. and Du, S.J. (2018) 'The Development of Higher Education over 40 Years since China's reform and Opening-Up', *Social Studies for Marxism*, 5(2), pp. 1-21.

[12] Yan, F. Q. and Mao, D. (2013) 'Institutional Transformation and Scale Expansion for Chinese Higher Education System', *China Higher Education Review*, 4(2), pp. 29-42.

[13] Yang, D.P. (2002) *Development of Education and Related Issues in China in the New Century In Analysis and Forecast of China's Social Development*, Beijing: Social Sciences Documentation Publishing House.

[14] Ying, C. (2011) 'A Reflection on the Effects of the 985 Project', *Chinese Education & Society*, 44(5), pp. 19–30.