

# On Current Conditions of Higher Education in China

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**Abstract:** Education is the foundation and original power for a country and a nation to prosper and develop. Therefore, powerful education is essential to build a strong country. China's prosperity lies in education, and education determines qualifications of citizens and state. And higher education, as a phase to cultivate top-class talents for a country and a nation, shall deserve more attention of us. However, current conditions of current higher education are quite worrying, and the question from the famous scientist Qian Xuesen makes people thinking deeply. This paper is written to explain current conditions of higher education and explore for reasons and ideal higher education from the perspective of a postgraduate taking higher education.

**Keywords:** Higher education; Current situation; Opinion

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## 1. Introduction

Higher education is at the top of national education system, and colleges and universities are institutes to cultivate high-quality talents. Prosperity of a country and a nation cannot be realized without education, and higher education, as a phase to cultivate top-class talents of a country and a nation, shall deserve our attention. After many years of development, higher education has cultivated many "talents" who, however, are like this: most of the college students can smoothly graduate from colleges and universities, and cannot use the knowledge that they have learned after starting to work. They have to learn from the very beginning. "All knowledge that we've learned in the four years of university is totally useless, which is just a waste of time", "Universities are places where you grow old", "There is no need to learn at ordinary time, and just memorize before examination", "Narrow down preparation contents for closed-book examination, and directly find out answers from books for open-book examination". We have been developing higher education in all these past years, haven't we?

## 2. My Opinions on Current Conditions of Higher Education

I believe that each Chinese kid has imagined university life before going to one. I can still remember what one of my middle-school teachers said: "You will be liberated after going to university". They keep installing the thought that university is the heaven on earth into our minds. However, what the place that we finally reach after the twelve years of hard study after the final examination brings us is the huge disappointment. Teachers in universities will not force us to learn, so that we start to get ignorant and enjoy while we can. Is this the university life that we hope to live? I was once a university student, and my answer deep inside is "No", we don't want to live like this. During my undergraduate study, I frequently asked myself is this the life that I exchanged for with the tedious and hard study in senior high school? Although this is not the life that I want, I, all of a sudden, I found out that it is without supervision of teachers in senior high school, I've lost all my abilities to learn and that I cannot learn at all since I'm used to learning what the teachers ask us

to learn and being obedient all the time. I still have not learned how to learn even if I'm a postgraduate student now. What I'm good at is rote memorizing and copying. Isn't it pathetic for Chinese education? The 19 years of learning breaks down my first dream. I can still clearly remember that I dreamed to be an environmental protection expert when I was a kid, which, however, was abandoned just to go to university. We entered the university with great confidence and lofty faith, but get smashed in the melting pot which is full of feasting and revelry and love stories. We are muddleheaded and drift along every day, and our lofty aspirations disappeared. We never think about refining our examination performance, and it's ok if we don't fail an exam. Most of the university students can smoothly graduate, but cannot use what they've learned after starting to work. Sometimes, they have to learn from the very beginning. The university is, now, deemed as a place where students grow old. Teachers repeat what the book says, and students are confused about what they are learning. The flamboyant atmosphere in the society has extent to colleges and universities. Teachers focus on theories and neglect understanding and practice while teaching, so that students only know what it is, but don't know why it is. We learn what teachers teach, and students' of 20s still don't know how to learn. What teachers focus on is not how to get prepared for teaching and how to teach students knowledge, but scientific research, papers and academic titles. Teachers and professors in university who should have been researching how to teach knowledge, are limited to the social utility, for compared with scientific research and papers, even the best education cannot be recognized. What are students pursuing for is not what they learn, but not failing the exam. Teachers do not teach carefully and students do not learn carefully.

### 3. Personal Inspiration from Higher Education, Exploring for Reasons of the Current Conditions

"Why can't our universities cultivate outstanding talents?" This is the famous "The Qian's Doubt". In 2005, when Premier Wen Jiabao visited the academicians of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chinese Academy of Engineering, Mr. Qian Xuesen, he once signed with feeling: looking back, there is still no one academic achievement which can be compared with the masters in the Republican period even though we have cultivated so many students! Mr. Qian Xuesen believed that: "One of the significant reasons for China's underdevelopment lies in that there is no university able to run a school in the mode for cultivating talents for scientific and technological inven-

tion and creation. They have no unique and innovation. That's the reason that we have no outstanding talents today". Why is this?

The "Qian's Doubt" awakens the deaf, which makes me unconsciously think why it happened? What makes universities look like this? Why cannot Chinese higher education cultivate outstanding talents? When will China under national rejuvenation set up new education concepts? From my personal perspective, we all have experienced 12 years of purgatory study before we finally go to university. They just get rid of the college entrance examination, and graduation is far away from them. They can finally enjoy their free lives here without control and restrictions from parents and teachers. They mind nothing but enjoyment in the easy and happy environment, treating college life as the end of their lives naively. Their dreams and ambitions all disappear in such a flamboyant environment. They picked their majors either based on parents' advice or random choice. They do not have many requirements for their test performance as long as they don't fail exams. So they select to live easily at loose ends. Without supervision, they have forgotten diligent study and hardwork for success for a long time. How could they learn knowledge during college life, let alone talent cultivation?

#### 3.1 Lack of Innovation

Exam-oriented education is similar with the feudal imperial examination system in Ming and Qing Dynasties. The ancient could write eight-part essay, what could we do? We can only memorize and learn by rote, and record standard answers. We have lost our thirst for knowledge and curiosity in the many years of education. We have to memorize by rote if we don't want to fail exams. My personal experience tells me that memory is the most important, no matter in junior high school or in college. Exams are no problem at all as long as we can memorize all the key points that the teachers have narrowed down. This is the current higher education, which is indeed in the same strain with our exam-oriented education! How could such higher education cultivate any talent? What it can cultivate are mediocre persons. The society starts to criticize that college students has no innovative ideas. How could we be innovative in such a background? I can still remember that the teacher asked me to make a sentence with Chinese characters "look like". I wrote, my father looks like my uncle. The teacher gave me a severe comment, and signed with a big X on my homework. I asked the teacher in a very innocent tone, my father and my uncle look like each other? But, he scolded me severely, asking me why I'm the only one for not being obedient? He ordered me to correct it and write it ten times, or he would call my parents...I

had to correct the sentence based on the one in the book, and finish my punishment...I was not an obedient kid for teachers, but turned into one under guidance of teachers and parents. I learn what they ask me to learn, and don't do what they don't want me to do...Here in college, I don't know how to learn, and the curiosity and imagination all disappeared. So is for examination in college. We would fail if we refused to memorize standard answers. Therefore, it sounds reliable to memorize by rote. We don't need to listen to the teachers, and this has become a convention. All college students have similar experience. The society always criticizes that college's students have no innovation ability, and are lack of courage to break through the routine. We have lost all these and our innovation ability to the many years of exam-oriented education, and have adapted to sticking to conventions. Our brains are rigidified, lack of strain capacity and innovation ability. This is not only caused by the higher education, but also caused by our entire education system.

### 3.2 Neglecting Comprehensive Quality

"It is necessary to pay attention to communication, exchanges and dealing well with interpersonal relationship, and improve their comprehensive quality". This is an issue that almost all college teachers will talk about in class. This is the most basic quality for each of us. Now we've been postgraduate students. Why do teachers still repeat this issue? The answer to the question is quite clear. Because most of the college students are lack of this most basic ability. Our comprehensive quality is still quite bad after 19 years of study. How could we call them "talents" cultivated by Chinese higher education? When we were in preliminary school, "put your hands behind, and do not talk". In middle school, "have you finished all your assignments? I should assign more if you keep talking!" In college, "don't talk while the teacher is talking, and let's communicate about this if you have any objection after I'm done talking." We are asked to shut up at the age when we are supposed to talk, and talk after class at the moment when we are supposed to exchange opinions. Our communication ability has been fading, and talking ability has been gradually replaced by typing ability. Our communication ability and exchanging ability get worse and worse, let alone the ability to get along with others. In 1978, Chinese government started to implement family planning, and there appeared a new noun, "the only child". At school, teachers emphasized disciplines and study from the very beginning and we had little time to get along with classmates, and at home, we don't have brothers or sisters. And parents took us so carefully, and seldomly let us to play with other kids outside. Parents can do almost all

things for us, which reduces the opportunities to get along with others and surely worsens our interpersonal skills. The disability to communicate with others and get along with others, and the poor working ability and strain capacity jointly lower the comprehensive quality of college students. Exam-oriented education pays excessive attention to scores, lack of cultivation for quality education. What does Chinese education consider, teach and learn. Teachers do not teach or pay attention to ethics, sports, art and labor, for these are not examination contents. This is the education that we have received since we were kids. What we gain from such higher education are "talents" with high scores but low abilities.

## 4. My Ideal Higher Education

Education is the basis for national rejuvenation. How should we learn today? School is not just an institute, but also a ladder to realize dreams. As a postgraduate in the first year, I have experienced the four years of university life. In my opinion, higher education shall be like this. It shall be closely related to future career, pay attention to cultivating comprehensive ability, and enable students to apply what they have learnt. And it is necessary to develop higher education suitable for our specific conditions, and with Chinese socialism characteristics.

### 4.1 Cultivate Professional Skills

After the four years of undergraduate study, I deeply know that employment now is quite tough for college students at present, and it's quite difficult to find a satisfying job. It is difficult because what we have learned on campus rarely work for employment, and it's hard to find a job suitable for our majors. Even we have found appropriate jobs, what we've learned in college will barely be used. Higher education shall focus on professional cultivation. By saying professional, I'm not referring to being professional, but specific professional skills related to future career. Pay attention to combination between professional skills and practice, and between theories and practice. It is required not only to teach theories, but also to pay much more attention to actual application of professional skills. Enable students to explore to obtain knowledge and skills in practice.

### 4.2 Inspire Exploratory Teaching

Teachers introduce their unique opinions in a certain professional field during teaching, and can lead students to think of questions and explore for new knowledge in class. Students can discuss with teachers based on excessive reading. They can combine the mature opinions of teachers with brand-new prospects of students, bringing

thinking sparks. College students are expected to have more opportunities to actively get engaged in discussion, but not memorizing various materials and taking various examinations. It's meaningless to just memorize knowledge printed in books.

### 4.3 Pay Attention to Cultivating Comprehensive Quality

College life is just the starting of life, and college students shall seize their lives freely, and select starting points of their paths. Like the sun at eight or nine in the morning, the higher education shall cultivate students' comprehensive quality in colleges and universities, enable students to learn how to conduct and work, and make up for the situation where exam-oriented education only cultivates tools which can only answer questions. Higher education shall emphasize cultivation of students' comprehensive quality, and lay a solid foundation for students to work in society. It is required to ask students to participate in various club activities and social practices, and take assessment on comprehensive quality as a standard for graduation.

### 4.4 Various Examination Forms

I believe that the current higher education applies too simple student assessment methods. Examination mode shall be innovated, but not determining students' learning performance based on just exams or submitted papers. Such assessment mode is basically the same as the exam-oriented education mentioned in the above, and its defects can tell their own tales. Therefore, in my opinion, the ideal higher education shall apply various assessment methods, but not be limited to testing on the knowledge memorizing ability. It shall examine students' ability to explore and solve problems, strain capacity, innovation ability and other comprehensive abilities, but not just determine students' learning status through a piece of test paper. I think we can apply various modes for assessment, such as competition, practical activities, experience sharing, etc.

## 5. Conclusion

"Education is the most fundamental for our great plan for one hundred years". It urges researches engaged in higher education to pay attention to developing higher education

all the time. In the above, I have interpreted my understanding to the current higher education in China from the perspective of a postgraduate student studying higher education. Both the Needham Problem and the Qian's Doubt reflect that the higher education in China cannot cultivate "outstanding talents", which is the worry of the Chinese nation and weakness of Chinese education. They also tell us that researchers engaged in studying higher education shall explore to reform the current higher education, to make higher education in China more suitable for specific conditions in China, and make contributions to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

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