

Reflections

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Abstract

These reflections were invited by the editors of this special issue to provide a frame for analysing the significance of this set of articles on “Higher education and the state in Greater China.” They are framed around the three elements of modernity identified by Francis Fukuyama in his book *The Origins of Political Order* – the modern state, the rule of law and accountable government. They also highlight comparative dimensions among the three societies of Greater China.

Keywords: modern state; rule of law; rule by law; accountable government; Greater China

In his influential book, *The Origins of Political Order*, Stanford sociologist Francis Fukuyama made the following prescient comment: “many of the elements of what we now know to be a modern state were already in place in China in the third century B.C., some eighteen hundred years before they emerged in Europe it is for this reason that I begin my account of the emergence of the state with China.”¹ Fukuyama goes on to identify the other two elements of modernity that he will trace in his wide sweep of the history of modernization – the rule of law and accountable government. The focus of this special issue on higher education in Greater China – including the mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong – is thus of particular interest at a time of rising Chinese influence globally. What kinds of influence can we expect from the forms of higher education that are emerging, and how can they be understood in terms of historical roots and also practical action? Fortunately, the authors are a unique set of individuals who have had extensive experience of scholarship and leadership in all three contexts, and their work touches upon each of these dimensions – a number have backgrounds in law and deal with the legal dimensions of higher education, while others focus on issues of equity, inclusion and other aspects of accountability. Comparison among the three jurisdictions is also of great interest, given Hong Kong’s colonial inheritance of a common law tradition and a university defined in terms of autonomy and academic freedom, while the mainland and Taiwan give a stronger role to the state.

Scholars of comparative higher education such as Burton Clark and Guy Neave made an interesting distinction between what they termed the

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¹ Fukuyama 2011, 19.

Anglo-American or Saxon model of the university, with full autonomy as a legal person, protected by charter since the Middle Ages, and the continental or Roman model, whereby European universities became integrated into the emerging nation states, with their professors given the status of civil servants in the 18th and 19th centuries.² Probably, France's grandes écoles exemplify this move most clearly. And one of the historical questions that has never been adequately addressed is whether the writings of Jesuits missionaries, with admiring accounts of China's civil service examinations and the role played by scholar officials in China's governance, had any influence on this development in European higher education.

In any case, the deeper question for reflection on the Greater China side is how this dominant role of the state has shaped higher education, and how far autonomy and academic freedom, the defining concepts of the European university, and now the so-called "global research university" can or should be integrated within the emerging Chinese model. In my research on Chinese higher education over many years, I came to see how deep historical differences in epistemology and structure resulted in "a century of cultural conflict" as China borrowed French, German, American and finally Soviet higher education models over the 20th century.³ While European rationalism, with a dualism between facts and values, nurtured a context where university scholars were free to speak out in critiquing state and society, as long as they did not use that as a basis for political action in a fairly authoritarian state, this was not possible for Chinese scholars who inherited an epistemology that saw action for the public good as the main criterion of truth. Thus, Cai Yuanpei's 蔡元培 classic definition of academic freedom at Peking University sparked a movement of political action that led him to resign when he could not persuade students to refrain from action and focus on laying the foundations for a new culture: "I am open to all schools of thought, according to the general standards of the universities of all nations and the principle of freedom of thought, I believe we should be inclusive of diverse viewpoints. Regardless of which school of thought, if their words are logical, those who maintain them have reason ... indeed even if they are mutually contradictory, I will allow them to develop freely."⁴

An even more striking example is that of Ma Yinchu 马寅初, president of Beida 北大 in the 1950s, who refused to retract his essay on the need for population control in 1955, even at the persuasion of Zhou Enlai 周恩来, and went into a long exile, with the following words: "After writing articles, one should be brave enough to correct mistakes, but one must adhere to the truth and bear all consequences, even if they are disadvantageous to his private interests or his life. I do not teach and have no direct contact with students. But I always

2 Neave 2001.

3 Hayhoe 1996.

4 Xiao et al. 1981, 65.

want to educate them by means of action.”⁵ Academic freedom might thus be better expressed as intellectual freedom, based on an epistemology that favours action and tolerates contradiction in a Chinese context.

Autonomy is similarly a difficult concept in China’s tradition, given that higher education was integrated within the state. Chinese institutions did not benefit from a legal charter that protected them from government interference but rather were a part of government. In one sense, scholar officials had much greater authority than the civil servants of European universities, and thus the Chinese term, self-mastery (*zizhu* 自主), may be a more appropriate concept than self-governance (*zizhi* 自治). While there were some constraints on the actions of scholar officials, coming from independent academies or *shuyuan* 书院 which had been inspired by Indian monastic communities, Chinese institutions rose and fell, not having the permanence that legal protection gave to European universities.⁶

This brings us to the issue of the rule of law, the second area of focus in Fukuyama’s text. The term *fazhi* 法制 – legal system – suggests a system of law that is above politics and to which political leaders are also bound to be subordinate. While the development of law has been of extraordinary importance in recent Chinese history, most would agree that China’s current party-state is not subordinate to its legal system, nor has that been the case historically. Rather, we see what might be described as rule by law (*fazhi* 法治) – law as a tool of government to guide and control society’s actions in widely agreed areas that have been defined through the passing of laws. The degree to which this is different in the Hong Kong context, with its traditions of common law and an independent court system, and in Taiwan, where authoritarian rule has given way to a more democratic system, becomes an interesting comparative element.

Finally, there is the issue of accountable government and, here, there are a whole range of questions around how and for what higher education should be accountable: to produce knowledge that makes possible competition in a global knowledge economy, or to focus more on participation in a global knowledge society where inclusion and accessibility for all, even the most vulnerable, are the main concerns and the definition of “world class” is seen more in relation to the public good rather than economic productivity alone. Qiang Zha recently published a reflective piece looking at Chinese higher education through Fukuyama’s lens,⁷ and linking this to Burton Clark’s famous triangle of the state, the market and academia.⁸

Arguing for the importance of the state’s role within this triangle, Zha makes the point that “the university is better conceptualized as being nested within the state – together with the market – rather than existing as discrete and mutually

5 Boorman 1968, 478.

6 Hayhoe 2019.

7 Zha 2014.

8 Clark 1983.

exclusive modes of communication. In this formulation, the state is simultaneously an actor as well as an instrument of contest, acknowledging the legitimacy of the market and the interests of academic estates as they pursue their own goals.”⁹ Zha concludes that “arguably a strong state is less likely to be compromised by market forces, and more capable of advancing its own vigorous higher education agenda.”¹⁰ This may be a helpful lens to apply in reflecting on the papers in this special issue where clearly the state plays a key role.

If we begin by looking at the university models presented, we see an ideal in Jun Li’s depiction of the *zhong-yong* model, combining moral responsibility with a form of self-mastery that allows for considerable independence of action at many levels. We also see the success of Chinese universities in achieving both massification and the upgrading of a core set of institutions to world-class standing over the same remarkably short period of time, as depicted by Gerard Postiglione. At the same time, there is an acknowledgement that quality is still stymied by inadequacies in the governance system. Even more disturbing is the picture given in Terry Bodenhorn’s paper of the ways in which administrators at every level dominate decision making, not allowing the academics in responsible positions to participate seriously in the decisions that affect the quality and impact of academic work. Bodenhorn’s nearly ten years as a dean in an institution that had been initiated with great promise and possibility illustrates the ongoing problem of administerization (*xingzhenghua* 行政化) and how difficult this legacy is to overcome.

By contrast, a democratizing Taiwan shows the possibilities of higher education taking on remarkable social responsibility relating to poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability and service to the public good in ways that bring enrichment and enhancement to their scholarship and create a richer meaning to the concept of being “world class.”¹¹ Given the shared heritage from Chinese history, one can only hope this may be predictive of future possibilities in the mainland. The case of the universities of Hong Kong, presented so vividly in John Burns’ account of the different historical phases of higher education development in this colonial setting and the persistence of considerable autonomy even after the return to China in 1997, gives cause for reflection on how far elements of the Western model could be integrated into that of Greater China. On the one side, we see the remarkably high standing and reputation of Hong Kong’s top universities, while on the other, deep questions are arising about how this can be maintained in the current environment.

Many of the papers in this special issue deal with the legal dimensions of higher education and one of the most interesting is that comparing the training of lawyers in the three jurisdictions. While professionalism is the key element in the Hong Kong context, reflecting British influence, government regulation defines

⁹ Zha 2014, 50.

¹⁰ Ibid., 52.

¹¹ Lo 2019.

legal education in both the mainland and Taiwan, resulting in somewhat different emphases in each case but a general concern for greater ethical orientation. The degree to which law ensures the protection of students and standards of equity and inclusion is also a fascinating area. Michael Palmer shows that while there are clear legal guidelines to ensure that students suffering from various types of handicap should not be disadvantaged in their access to higher education, the reality does not match this promise, with various loopholes resulting in a situation where many are still excluded. On the other side, Ling Zhou shows how student consumers in the expanding area of private higher education have been able to use the law to demand accountability from their institutions in terms of the quality of the programmes offered and costs incurred. This is certainly a relatively new and positive development in China's socialist market economy.

Given China's vast size and the huge differences in development level of the different parts of the country, geography and participation in terms of region and rural/urban background are key issues relating to equity and access. Undergirding the whole collection is the striking account of transition from regional and social class patterns reflecting the civil servants trained by the imperial examination system to the transformation that took place under the Nationalist regime that is so remarkably documented in the article by Bamboo Ren, Chen Liang and James Lee. Records drawn from more than 160,000 students enrolled in the best universities, who came from business and professional families, had a significant percentage of women, were exposed to a high concentration of STEM fields and taught by scholars largely trained in the West, demonstrate the foundation laid for the post-1949 era. The geographical shift to the south-east and Pearl River Delta area in that period has also persisted.

Qiang Zha's paper on the current period shows the changing emphasis as higher education expanded with an initial focus on equality and efficiency, moving then to accessibility and cost equity, finally resulting in a social stratification that continues to ensure the privileges of students from urban and east coast backgrounds, although this is mitigated by a range of initiatives that offer some opportunities for those less advantaged to move into a more privileged environment. The overall mapping of China's three main regions clearly shows the advantages of those in the prosperous east coast region, a pattern that reflects the state's greater concern for competitive success in a global knowledge economy than fair regional participation and benefit. The fact that the recent "double first-class" initiative, described in Miaoyan Yang and James Leibold's contribution, opened a door into the top level to three regionally disadvantaged institutions – Xinjiang, Yunnan and Zhengzhou – as well as many that could be included on the basis of first-class disciplines, such as Highland University on China's Qing-Zang Plateau, can be seen positively, however, in terms of a fairer regional participation. Local mapping on university campuses is also fascinating, such as the case shown in James McDougall's paper, allowing students to interact in ways that challenge the symbolic space laid out and shaped by strong state and Party representation.

Probably the most sensitive and difficult aspect of equity has been the opportunities for higher education provided to ethnic minorities, which involved recognition of the importance of their language and culture and a balance between an education that will enable them to be leaders within their own communities or enter mainstream higher education without being disadvantaged. The paper by Yang and Leibold gives details on how Highland University on the roof of the world in Tibet was able to establish ecology as a world-class discipline, a move which brought resources and a profile that otherwise would have been impossible. Nevertheless, it is difficult for minority institutions to establish themselves in ways that enable their students full and equal participation with those of the majority.

Returning to the picture of the university nestled within the state and the state as a key actor in each of these jurisdictions, are there lessons to be learned and positive possibilities for higher education elsewhere? Perhaps the most helpful dimension of all of these papers is the way in which they are rooted in history and readers can see a trajectory towards a global research university with Chinese characteristics that is being shaped to respond to new challenges such as sustainability, climate change and more equitable participation in terms of region, social class background and minority or disadvantaged status. At the same time, global ranking systems continue to benchmark against a model of the global research university rooted in the German–American tradition and tending to give higher importance to research productivity than teaching quality. The convenience for governments to distribute funds based on standing in these global rankings seems to be something difficult to relinquish in Greater China, probably a matter of pride and also of demonstrating the achievement of standards no lower than those of top Western universities.

This, however, begs the question of diversity in terms of potential university models and whether Greater China might bring alternative models for consideration which could enrich the discourse along the lines of “harmony without conformity” (*he’erbutong* 和而不同), a point noted in Jun Li’s paper. Here, I move beyond the parameters of this collection to raise a suggestion of mine that Greater China might now be in a position to promote a global normal university which gives highest respect to education as an interdisciplinary and applied field of knowledge with a unique capability of nurturing global citizens. While the normal university has been forgotten in the Anglo-American world, there was a moment in history when Chinese and French educational values came together in a remarkable way.

Recognizing that the European university with its focus on knowledge for its own sake and the traditional professions would not be capable of forming citizens for the new republic, the French created an entirely new institution – the *école normale*. It was responsible for forming teachers who were capable of bringing all children to understand their responsibilities as citizens of a new republic. Women were among the first to benefit from this new opportunity and became key contributors to the formation of teachers for public systems of education

open to all. The French word “normale” was translated into Chinese as *shifan* 师范, the teacher as a model, embodying a core value of the Confucian tradition, accountability both to the state and the public good. Until now, both mainland China and Taiwan have maintained a commitment to the normal university, yet there has been little consideration of how this model might challenge or at least mitigate the dominance of the global research university.¹²

In conclusion, let me say how timely is this collection of well-researched papers delineating core features of higher education in Greater China in terms of change, contradiction and the state. Each of the authors has extensive and, in some cases, unique experiences of involvement in an institution or context and tremendous care has been taken in the collection, analysis and presentation of data such that new insights are opened up into both the potentials and constraints of higher education in the region. This takes us back to the advantages of a strong state when it comes to higher education development, a key feature of the region.

Conflicts of interest

None.

Biographical note

Ruth HAYHOE is a professor in the department of leadership, higher and adult education of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Canada. Recent books include *China through the Lens of Comparative Education* (2015), *Canadian Universities in China's Transformation: An Untold Story* (2016) and *Religion and Education: Comparative and International Perspectives* (2018)

摘要: 本特刊编辑邀请此篇反思, 旨在提供一个框架来分析这期关于高等教育和大中华区国家专辑的重要性。这些论文围绕着弗朗西斯·福山的《政治秩序之起源》一书所甄别现代性的三个要素——现代国家、法治和问责制政府。此外, 它们强调了大中华区三个社会之间可比较的层面。

关键词: 现代国家; 法治; 依法施政; 问责制政府

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