

A STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA'S HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract

China has significantly enhanced the quality of education through comprehensive curriculum reforms and other strategic initiatives. With a goal to build a modern education system, China aims to achieve universal access to quality pre-school education, advance vocational training, support development for disabled youth, and establish an education management framework that engages society as a whole, beyond government involvement alone. The Chinese education system is recognized globally for its high standards. In recent years, China's rapid economic growth has spurred substantial advancements in educational standards. Currently, the education system in China is progressing along multiple dimensions. This study examines the structure and functioning of the Chinese education system, with the aim of providing valuable insights for the learners and scholars of the Chinese language.

Keywords: China, Higher Education, Chinese Schools, Development

Introduction

A nation's progress and prosperity are inherently tied to the educational opportunities available to its people. As the second most populous and the third largest country globally, China's higher education system plays a critical role in assuring the quality of human resources through knowledge creation and application, serving as a cornerstone for technological innovation, industrial transformation, and societal advancement. Education is a crucial factor in a nation's overall development, closely linked to the comprehensive growth of its citizens. "The development of a society must begin with the country's education system." (Deng Xiaoping, 1978). Today, China's educational progress is both observable and commendable.

Aim

China's higher education has achieved notable advancements in terms of scale, quality, and structural development after years of rapid growth. As China's economy accelerates, the educational standards have risen to impressive levels. This study aims to explore the complex and multifaceted evolution of the Chinese education system.

Research Question

1. How is China's education system?
2. How China's Higher education development in various aspects related to its education system?

Data and Research Methodology

Data for this paper has been collected from the articles related to the Chinese education system, Xinhua News Agency, and various other media outlets. The research utilizes descriptive and interpretative methods to analyze the collected data.

Literature Review

Pu Shi (2021), in his paper "The Development and Influencing Factors of Higher Education in China," discusses the scale of higher education, education input, education output

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and analyzes the current situation of the development of China's higher education and looks for the possible problems.¹ Li Huashu (1994), in his paper "China's Higher Education Evaluation System and its Development Trends," discusses the evolution and future directions of China's higher education evaluation system. He highlights the significance of research and manual studies in the field of higher education evaluation as pivotal components for the advancement of higher education.²

Similarly, Li Jun (2020), in "The Study of the 'Chinese Model' of Higher Education," examines the development and reform processes within China's higher education. His study aims to elevate China's education system to an international standard, recognizing it as a world-class educational framework.³

Tin Nyunt (2019), in his book "The Analysis of China's Education System," analyzes how the current generation is being nurtured in science and technology to foster national development. He vividly illustrates the country's efforts to promote scientific advancement through education to remain competitive on the global stage.⁴

The development of Chinese higher education

China's higher education system has roots dating back to the Han Dynasty, with modern higher education generally emerging in the late 1890s. Following the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, higher education in China began a period of significant growth. At that time, there were only 205 higher education institutions, including 123 state and provincial universities, 61 private universities, and 21 church-affiliated universities, with a total enrollment of 120,000 students. The gross enrollment rate was extremely low, with barely one in 10,000 Chinese people participating in higher education. The Cultural Revolution (1967–1976) severely impacted higher education, more than any other sector, leaving lasting effects into the 21st century. In 1977, Deng Xiaoping's decision to reinstate the National Higher Education Entrance Examination (Gaokao) profoundly influenced China's higher education.

Since the late 1990s, China's higher education has experienced rapid expansion. In 1999, China initiated a decade-long higher education expansion with an annual increase rate of 2%, leading to a gross enrollment rate of 30% by 2012. Official statistics indicates that China's higher education system includes over 2,442 academically oriented colleges and universities, 348 adult higher education institutions, and 823 non-academic private agencies. Among these institutions, 1,623 were affiliated with provincial or local governments, 113 with national ministries, receiving additional funding and prestige, and 706 were privately funded and operated.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, higher education has undergone numerous reforms, especially following the reform and opening-up period. In the early 1990s, a national strategy aimed at rejuvenating the country through science and education was launched, achieving remarkable progress over two decades. The study of the development of China's higher education system offers valuable insights into the country's modernization efforts.

¹ Pu Shi (2021) *The Development and Influencing Factors of Higher Education in China*, Guanxi Normal University, Guanxi.

² Li Huashu (1994) *China's Higher Education Evaluation System and its Development Trends*, Journal of Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Chengdu.

³ Li Jun (2020) *The Study of the 'Chinese Model' of Higher Education*, Fudan Education System, Shanghai.

⁴ Tin Nyunt (2019) *The Analysis of China's Education System*, Mauka Press, Yangon.

In 2023, China had 498,300 schools enrolling 291 million students and employing nearly 18.92 million full-time teachers. The gross enrollment rates reached 91.1% for preschool, 91.8% for secondary education, and 60.2% for higher education. According to the *QS World University Rankings 2024*, China continues to excel in higher education, with 118 institutions among the world's top 1,000 universities, making it the third most represented country after the United States and the United Kingdom.

Chinese education Schools System

The Chinese educational structure consists of six years of primary school, three years each of lower secondary and upper secondary school, and four years in standard university programs. The compulsory education system covers six years of primary school and three years of lower secondary school, both tuition-free. Parents are only responsible for school uniform and book costs. This system assigns academic levels to students, who must complete each level to pursue higher education. The school age divisions are as follows: kindergarten for ages 2–6, primary education for ages 6–12, lower secondary education for ages 12–15, and upper secondary education for ages 15–18.

Kindergarten Education

In China, preschool or kindergarten is viewed as an essential stage in a child's education, available to children aged two and above. These schools engage children in activities fundamental to academic progress, and in some regions, kindergarten attendance is mandatory. Chinese parents place high importance on early education, with most children enrolling in kindergarten or pre-primary programs where the Chinese language is introduced as the primary language of instruction.

Primary education

Primary education in China, starting at ages six or seven, is provided free of charge. Chinese primary schools differ from Western counterparts by introducing students to Chinese language, mathematics, music, art, and dance. Due to the importance placed on early education, primary school teachers are well-compensated. Formal exams are not administered at this level.

Secondary education

Secondary education in China is divided into lower secondary (compulsory) and upper secondary education, spanning ages 12 to 18. Lower secondary education is mandatory until age 15. After completing lower secondary school, students may attend upper secondary, vocational, or professional schools. Only about 30% of students who complete the middle school exam advance to high school.

Higher education

Higher education in China includes high schools, vocational high schools, secondary vocational schools, and technical schools. High school is a critical level where students take monthly tests assessed by the school, with teachers, students, and parents collaborating to prepare for government exams. Primary, middle, and high schools are typically separate, although some rural schools combine multiple levels due to limited resources. By September 2022, the national enrollment rate in higher education reached 91.4%, a 6.4% increase from a decade prior. In 2023, college registrations rose to 12.91 million, setting a new record, with college entrance exams held every June on designated dates.

Table 1: College Entrance Examination Schedule

Date	Time	Major
June 7	09:00-11:30	Chinese
	15:00-17:00	Maths
June 8	15:00-16:30	English
	15:00-17:00	Russian, Japanese, German, French, Spanish
June 9	08:00-09:30	Physics
	11:00-12:30	Political
	15:30-17:00	Chemistry
June 10	08:00-09:30	History
	11:00-12:30	Biology
	15:30-17:00	Geography

The total score for the high school entrance exam is 750. Admission to universities is determined based on this score, with a minimum of 600 points required to apply to top-tier Chinese universities. Students pass the exam with a score of 450 or above.

The Chinese education system emphasizes holistic development, incorporating academic learning alongside social relations, health, and fitness. Monthly report cards inform parents not only of academic performance but also of health metrics such as body weight, height, vision, and hearing. Parents are encouraged to discuss their child's health and education with teachers. Grading extends beyond academics to include participation in social activities, reflecting the well-rounded focus of Chinese education. Although China's education system may not yet surpass Western standards, it has shown significant progress across various dimensions. President Xi Jinping has introduced reforms inspired by Western educational models to further enhance the system.

Over the past decade, China has appointed 1.48 million full-time teachers in primary and secondary education, bringing the total number to 10.57 million, according to the Ministry of Education. Currently, 207,000 students are enrolled in the nine-year compulsory primary education program. The enrollment rate for compulsory education students under the National Education System has increased from 91.8% in 2012 to 95.4% in 2022. Based on entrance exam scores, students apply for college admission. All newly admitted university students are required to undergo military training for a minimum of 15 days, with scores awarded as part of their curriculum.

Huai Jinpeng, China's Minister of Education, recently stated that China, with its population of 1.4 billion, has established the world's largest education system. He added that by 2035, China aims to be a global leader in education, a long-standing national aspiration.

International Studies in China

In recent years, China has become an increasingly popular destination for international students. However, the number of American students studying in China has declined significantly, from a peak of 15,000 a decade ago to around 350 in 2023.

Myanmar students who pass the matriculation exam and the HSK Level 4 can pursue higher education at Chinese universities, selecting their preferred subjects and applying for scholarships. Those who pass HSK Level 5 are eligible to pursue a Master's degree in China. As China is a neighboring country with similar food and cultural practices, Myanmar students often find studying in China accessible and relatable. Through policies promoting international exchange, China offers numerous scholarships, supporting students from around the world, including Myanmar. For example, Beijing Language and Culture University hosts students from over 180 countries. Increased exchange between China and Myanmar through scholarships can provide valuable insights for Myanmar's educational development.

Finding and Discussion

China boasts the largest state-run education system globally, with over 518,500 schools enrolling 293 million students and employing 18.8 million teachers as of 2022. China's education system has undergone significant evolution, from traditional schooling to advanced contemporary education, achieving remarkable outcomes. The higher education system is particularly instrumental in fostering comprehensive national development. The ongoing development and progress in China are closely linked to its robust education system, with higher education experiencing notable achievements in recent years, particularly due to internationalization. As China's neighboring country, it is beneficial for us to study and adopt relevant strengths of China's educational advancements for the benefit of our own educational development.

Conclusion

Since the late 19th century, China has consistently advanced its national higher education system, incorporating distinct Chinese characteristics. This evolution reflects a blend of Western educational influences and China's enduring national ideology and cultural values. Education remains a cornerstone of Myanmar's development, emphasizing lifelong learning as essential for societal growth. Valuing education at every level and fostering a continuous learning environment are critical. This responsibility extends to parents, teachers, and students alike. Education is not solely for obtaining degrees or status; it is about genuine learning and effectively applying acquired knowledge. This paper presents an overview of China's current education system, highlighting the ongoing development of its higher education system across multiple dimensions in today's modern age.

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