TOWARDS DIVERSIFICATION AND FLEXIBILITY:
The Selection System to Higher Education Institutions and Its Impact on Secondary Education in China

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Dr. Yue Kan
College of Education, Zhejiang University, China
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1. History and Reality

✧ A Chinese ‘Invention’
  ✧ As far back as the Han Dynasty (BC 206/AD 220), selection to the bureaucracy was on the basis of national examinations

✧ A Long Tradition
  ✧ Best brains for civil servants through imperial examination (Keju)

✧ The New Reality
  ✧ China has introduced a unified national college entrance examination since 1955
  ✧ In a country of limited access to HE, the examination system allows for all students to compete on an equal basis
  ✧ Most of person noted examination was the only merit-based and transparent system for university entrance workable in China
2. Existing Mechanism

- **Mainstream**
  - unified national entrance examination

- **Supplement**
  - selected university entrance examination
  - special admission procedure exemption from national examination
2. Existing Mechanism

National College Entrance Examination

- In China, the NCEE is taken by students at the end of Grade 12 at the completion of secondary schooling for admission to higher education.

- All sit for Chinese language, mathematics and a foreign language (usually English) and typically select one to three other subjects from around six options, three from the sciences and three from the social sciences.

- The most common NCEE is held in June each year (referred to as the Autumn). Starting in 2000 some provinces experimented with the Spring session as a way of providing greater opportunity for students. But since 2007, Shanghai remains the only province that still holds the examination.
2. Existing Mechanism

Government policies on student recruitment plans (Quotas)

- MoE works closely with provincial education authorities and HEIs to set all policy matters relating to student recruitment plans for access to HE.
- A matrix of provincial quotas, institutional quotas, and subject quotas is negotiated annually between HEIs and national and provincial authorities.
- MoE has overall jurisdiction for supervising and implementing plans. The provincial education authorities are responsible for NCEE student applications, conducting examinations, and developing recruitment plans. HEIs are responsible for recruiting students according to the plan.
- These national and provincial HEIs recruitment plans are targeted so that the top 10% of candidates are eligible for admission to Tier One HEIs and the next 20% are eligible for admission to Tier Two HEIs.
2. Existing Mechanism

**University entrance examination**

- Some top universities are authorized by MoE to experiment with modifications to the general national system.
- From 22 pilot universities in 2003 to 53 in 2006 and to around 80 in 2013.
- General aptitude tests and interviews.
- For a selected 5% of their applicants before the mandatory NCEE.
2. Existing Mechanism

Special admission exemption from NCCE

- Admission without NCCE started in 1984 in some pilot universities
- Comprehensive ability test organized by universities since 1999

- Current procedure
  - Eligibility for applicants
  - Public notice by senior secondary schools
  - Recommendation to universities
  - Test and assessment
  - Approval and admission
3. The New Change


- **Principles**
  - facilitating selection of students through *scientific approaches*
  - promoting better *development* of students, and
  - safeguarding *social justice*

- **A new system of examination and recruitment**
  - multiple choices for students
  - different categories of examination
  - comprehensive evaluation
  - diverse ways of recruitment
3. The New Change

- contents and forms of examinations
  - a shift to comprehensive quality and abilities
  - multi examinations a year on certain subjects
  - socialization of examinations

- organization and management of examination
  - National examinations for 4-year regular HEIs
  - Provincial examination for 2-3 year vocational HEIs

- Recruitment
  - NCEE + academic aptitude tests + overall quality assessment
  - Institutional interview or testing results for exceptional talents
  - Recommendation for excellent students of senior secondary school
  - special procedures for outstanding talents and professionals
4. The Impact

- **Fierce competition**
  - Millions crowed in the single-log bridge
  - ‘Migration’ for examination
  - Study abroad

- **The baton**
  - Academic stress/shadow education
  - Quality-oriented education is just a talk and examination-oriented education is very consolidated.
4. The Impact

- **Curriculum Reform**
  - While the NCEE score will remain a core criterion to assess a student’s ability for university entrance, broader competencies are increasingly seen as important attributes for entry to university.
  - Piloted in 4 provinces (Guangdong, Ningxia, Shandong and Hainan) in 2004 and fully implemented in all 31 provinces by 2014 expected by MoE.
  - To provide favorable conditions to open a variety of elective courses, provide more choices for students, and set the stage for comprehensive and personalized student development.
  - To vigorously promote inquiry learning (or projects), community service and social practices.
4. The Impact

- **Diversification of senior middle schools**
  - to diversify the school-running system
  - to expand high-quality education resources
  - to explore the modes of education and meet the needs of students with different potentials
  - to encourage them to identify and create their unique feature
5. The Way Forward

The Vision of Further Institutional Reform

- to foster a concept of systematic cultivation and development
- to enhance the links between HEIs and primary and middle schools
- to establish an open student-cultivation system with flexible mechanisms, interlinked channels and diverse choices
THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!