

## Countermeasures of Connotative Development in Higher Education

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### Abstract

Chinese higher education has been adopted an extended development model predominantly for more than a decade, which makes higher education expand quickly and the number of schools and students increase rapidly. Meanwhile, the teaching quality of schools declines sharply as the phenomenon of “Unemployment after graduation” becomes more and more obviously. Consequently, it’s urgent to change the higher education development mode to solve these problems, and to realize the connotative development with the quality improvement as a core.

Key words: CONNOTATIVE DEVELOPMENT, HIGHER EDUCATION, TEACHING QUALITY

### Introduction

For a long term, there is a strong trend of China’s economy development with a growth rate of nearly 10% maintained in the past three decades, which means China has been the significant impetus for global economy growth. Meanwhile, China is also a developing country

with a large population which leads to the endless difficulties and challenges in economy construction. Our economic growth has slowed down all over the world under the influence of international financial crisis and European debt crisis and the bad influences are increasing. The next decade is a very important period for China

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in which we should try our best to build a moderately prosperous society, to lay solid foundation for the establishment of a modern powerful country. The purpose of country development encourages us to cultivate more innovative talents with high qualities thus enhancing the competitiveness among countries all over the world. In this case, the driving force for sustained economic prosperity in China will be continuous.

### Background

*A Series of Disadvantages of Extended Development Lead to the Change of Higher Education in China into Connotative Development*

The time of modern higher education development in China is much shorter than that in western developed countries, and the growing rate is relatively slow as well. With the reform and opening-up, higher education has not flourished until the end of Cultural Revolution. In order to narrow the gap between developed countries in popularization of education as soon as possible, higher education in China has expanded enormously since the end of 1990s. In the last ten years, the gross enrolment ratio of national universities and colleges has been growing, which was from 15% by 2002 up to 26.9% by 2011. At 2011, the enrollment numbers of higher educational institutes was up to 6.81 million per year. Such an achievement surpassed Russian, India and America reaching the first place all over the world. With the huge increase of higher educational institutes and the expansion of higher education, China is at a stage of popular development in higher education, becoming a country with a large number of higher education institutions. However, such a rapid expansion is realized by the mass expansion of higher education, "Industrialization of education" development, "construction of college town" and establishment of a large number of private colleges and universities. These ways of expansion mainly based on extend expansion model, which brought in a series of problems to higher education. For example, in order to meet the requirement of extensive enrollment, many colleges and universities constructed campuses even under debt causing too much economic pressure and financial difficulties; the quality of students has dropped off significantly after the realization of higher education popularization; also, with the growing scale of colleges/universities, there is a serious shortage of teachers in quantity and quality [1].

At the same time, some potential crisis existed in such a extend expansion model in the

development of higher education. First of all, with the growing of gross enrolment ratio in recent years, there are increasing numbers of unemployed graduates every year. According to a survey, China's graduates have been relative surplus these years which indicates an oversupply. And the decrease of employment plummet public's trust in colleges and universities as quite a few students and parents have less enthusiasm for university applications. Secondly, the expansion of higher education is too rapid to have enough educational funds. The degree of National financial investment in higher education can't keep up with the expansion. Students and parents have to under the economic burden, which lead to the increase number of poor students who can not afford the high tuition fees. Therefore, it's urgent for China to change the way of higher education and set up correct and scientific development concept which is developing the connotative model of quality-oriented education.

*The Epochal Features of "Globalization of Economy" and "Knowledge Expansion" Encourage the Connotation of Higher Education in China.*

Society in 21st century is informative and networked. With the development of information technology such as multimedia and Internet, the trend of globalization is strengthening continuously. Tons of knowledge and information come out through various ways and keep up to date. It's also a knowledgeable society that has a shorter knowledge renewal cycle, the faster frequency of innovation, the higher requirement for human quality and the greater significance of human resources with the rapid development of science and technology. Under this circumstances, higher requirements are proposed for college students in the whole society. Nowadays, there is still a big gap between China higher education cultivated graduates and talented people who are required to have high quality and be versatile. Graduates have weak capacity in independent innovation and they are uncompetitive in International competition. Therefore, it is significant to improve the quality of higher education. Normally, there are some basic principles in higher education: (1) taking people-oriented concept as core strategy; (2) combining the ideas of "science and technology are primary productivities" and "talents are primary resources" to play a positive role; (3) taking the responsibility of improving the quality of higher education, cultivating creative students with high quality and building our country into one with excellent higher education.

### *The Trend of Higher Education all Over the World Encourages the Connotation of Higher Education in China*

There's a common problem of how to improve the higher education quality after reaching the popular development stage all over the world. With the exploration and development in a long term by western developed countries, some successful experience was accumulated eventually which mainly focused on improving quality and cultivating innovative people. It is the history tendency and necessary choice to develop higher education. To develop the connotation, colleges are supposed to be guided by scientific progress view and fully integrated by its own features while taking the educational quality improvement as a core, learning from the experience of top universities.

#### **The basic problems of connotative development**

##### *The Meaning of Connotative Development*

Connotation and denotation are in relative categories in logic, which are two basic properties originally. The connotation is the sum of essential attribute, which means "the quality" while the denotation is the scope of essential attribute objects, which means "the quantity". From the aspect of development model, the power and resource of connotation are from the internal factors, paying attention to the essential attribute, while those of denotation are from internal factors, emphasizing the extension of external [2]. As for the development model of higher education, the connotative development is mainly based on external input, generally enlarging the overall scale of higher education by massive enrolment, constructing new campus and increasing the private colleges and universities. And the denotative development impels the development of higher education by improving utilization of internal resources to optimize the internal structure and explore their own potential, improving management efficiency and teaching quality in colleges and universities. Compared with denotative development, the connotative one lays more emphasis on education quality promotion, educational characteristics and revolution and innovation of higher education, which are intrinsic requests for colleges and universities. As a result, connotation is the only way for China to develop higher education.

##### *The Proposal of Issues on the Connotative Development in China's Higher Education*

Comrade Hu Jintao said "it's of great significance for higher education to improve the education quality while consisting on connotation. The educational quality should be improved

overall combined with the concepts and experiences from other countries" when he delivered a lecture in Tsinghua University, which indicated a direction for higher education in China.

It is also pointed out in Guidelines on National Mid and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development Planning (2010-2020) that "it's a core task for educational revolution development to improve quality and establish the scientific view of quality in education. The fundamental criterions for educational quality measurement are to promote people's all-round development and make them adapt to society [3]. In addition, setting up the concept of education development which has a core of improving quality, and focusing on education connotation development." Meanwhile, The Several Opinions on Improving Roundly the Quality of Higher Education proposed by Ministry of Education clearly indicated that: "it's supposed to center on cultivating talents, establishing the scientific development view of higher education and developing connotation in quality improvement." Report of the 18th Party Congress proposed that: "Education is the foundation of national revival and social progress, which should be the priority. It's supposed to deepen the integrate reform in education, improve the educational quality and encourage the connotation of higher education." Carrying out the mind of the 18th party congress is to construct and improve the education theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, explore ways for China's higher education, and then push forward the reform of educational system, to remove obstacles and cultivate versatile talents with high quality for modernization.

#### **The strategy of promoting the connotative development of higher education**

Connotative development of higher education should base on educational quality improvement to construct the basic ideas and thoughts of the development of higher education [4]. It should also base on optimization of discipline and specialty structural adjustment to speed up the coordination among discipline, coordinated regional development in colleges and universities and the upgrading of industrial structural transformation. Moreover, it should focus on stimulating the vitality and exploring the reformation of higher education.

##### *To Improve the Quality of Higher Education and Transform the Concept of Higher Education Development*

In respect of higher education, China is only big but not developed mainly because that

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the quality of education needs to be improved. Quality of higher education is of great importance that makes our country be more competitive. In the 18th party congress, Comrade Hu Jintao pointed out that: "It is supposed to fully implement the party's education policy, to improve the quality of education, to promote connotation development of higher education". This is the urgent request put forward by Party Central Committee in view of the current situation of higher education. We should make a response to the 18th party congress. In order to promote the connotative development, we must take the quality improvement as the most important and urgent task in the development of higher education. Higher education means to emancipate the mind, change ideas, and set up the scientific view on development [5]. It also means to improve the quality and to form idea of students-oriented while teachers being the subject. In addition, cultivating talents to adapt to the needs of economic society is the criterion of measuring education quality. We should also improve college students' ideological and moral qualities, scientific and cultural abilities, as well as health to strengthen their sense of social responsibility, innovation spirit and practice ability. Thus it makes them develop all-round to become socialistic constrictors and successors.

### *To Meet the Needs of Economic and Social Development and Strengthen the Structural Optimization Adjustment of Disciplines*

In the 18th party congress, it's pointed out: "adhering to the principle of serving the socialist modernization in education and serving people". At present, the country has been in a critical stage where we should build a well-off society in an all-round manner, promote the reform and opening up process, and speed up the economic transformation. We need focus on the discipline construction in higher education with the specialty structure further optimized and the distribution of disciplines adjusted in order to meet the urgent request of adapting to the change of the economic development pattern, implementing innovation and development strategy for talent training. In that case, several things should be done. First of all, it's supposed to adjust the specialty structure. Higher education need to be fully investigated and discussed to set up a batch of professional disciplines related to emerging industries and the livelihood improvement with the demand of national development strategy and the economic society. At the same time, according to the current economic development situation in China, we should integrate education resources with overall

planning of the subject construction, and pay attention to subjects intercrossing and the combination of production, teaching and research, in order to build up a distinctive system of academic disciplines with reasonable structure. Second, we are supposed to lay emphasis on characteristic discipline construction, gaining professional advantage. All colleges and universities are better to focus on fields where they do well with the combination of their local culture. They also should pay more attention to the characteristic subjects leading the development of other subjects in coordination. In addition, as for some specialties with relative low employment rate, it's necessary to make appropriate adjustments according to the social development in curriculum and teaching content to broaden students' knowledge and create more employment opportunities.

### *To Focus on Education Quality and Lay Emphasis on Basic Teaching*

Education quality is the most important part in higher education. Nowadays, there are still some bad phenomena in many colleges and universities, such as paying more attention to research but less to teaching, undervaluing undergraduate teaching. Some professors are unwilling to teach undergraduate students. These phenomena show the urgency of improving the quality of higher education in our country. The first thing is to clear the basic status of undergraduate teaching. All college staff, from the management to the faculty are supposed to establish the people-oriented concept and center on undergraduate teaching. With the establishment of rules and regulations guided by teaching level, teachers should solve various problems as soon as possible in teaching work. And the non-academic departments in colleges also should do a good job of service and security for teaching. Second, strengthen the construction of professional high-level teaching teams. Teaching work in colleges and universities should give priority to undergraduate course, improve the mechanism of professor teaching. In the teaching process, more teaching activities should be carried out to make young teachers improve teaching methods, accumulate teaching experience, and improve teaching ability by mentoring and assisting. The third is to construct quality system for undergraduate teaching. According to the needs of economic and social development and the real situation [6], with well teaching supervision and teaching orders, various colleges and universities should have feedbacks and long-effect mechanism to ensure the teaching quality, and finally establish a system of standardization

teaching quality for undergraduates, which is keeping up with the needs of the time.

### *Strengthen the Team Construction of Teachers and Build a Long-term Mechanism for Teacher Development*

As teachers are the primary resource of teaching, the team construction and development of teachers is the key to realize the connotative development of higher education. Colleges and universities should establish the scientific viewpoint for talent development, build team construction of teachers in the development of important strategic role and focus on bringing out a group of teachers with reasonable structure, high level of teaching and research skills, and strong sense of innovation. In order to achieve these goals, several things need to be done. First of all, we need to improve the training of teaching personnel and the introduction of mechanisms to optimize the structure of teachers' qualifications, ages and job titles. Support and encourage teachers to upgrade their qualifications and get training. Also, some backbone of teaching can be sent to study in key universities to optimize their knowledge structure. Schools should introduce high-level talents, especially those who are good for key disciplines according to the characteristics and the development of academic disciplines. Second, improve and perfect the competitive appointment system of teacher, appropriate incentives and safeguards system. Ensure the subjective position of teachers in the teaching process with improved methodologies for teachers' work assessment. Pay more attention to teaching performance and improve the incentive system for fully mobilizing the enthusiasm of teachers. Thus, teachers can devote themselves to teaching. Third, lay emphasis on updating teachers' minds and the construction of professional ethics. Like the old saying goes: those with more knowledge can be teachers, and those with integrity can be role models. Teachers not only teach students knowledge, but also have subtle influence on students with their own values. Therefore, colleges and universities must adhere to the moral education, psychology education, and ethics training to build out a team of teachers with rich connotation and dedication willing to devote themselves to education.

### *Take Innovation Talents Cultivation as Central Task and Promote the Reform and Innovation of Higher Education*

The report of the 18th party congress indicated to deepen comprehensive reforms on ideas and suggestions of higher education reform. If we take the connotative development path of higher education, we must recognize that

innovation is the source of power and the fundamental way to improve the quality of higher education [7]. First, accelerate the change in higher education system to establish standardized, effective, comprehensive system. Higher education administration departments, colleges and universities as well as the whole society are supposed to establish a mind of reform, carry forward the spirit of innovation, and remove obstacles in education and institution. To realize that, there are several things need to be done: (1) Further improve the responsibility system of party Committee, promoting the separation of management and teaching based on the coordination between leadership and academic research. (2) Perfect the internal management structure and powers of regulatory mechanisms to promote comprehensive social supervision mechanism, establish modern University system as soon as possible, expand the University's autonomy thus achieving coordination between government decentralization and autonomous development in colleges and universities, ensuring to follow educational law. (3) Speed up the construction of College rules and regulations, improve the policy of teachers' and students' rights and responsibilities, and establish mechanisms for decision-making and management holding on democratic centralism, and promote the university to construct scientific management system with management, supervision and coordination, as a result formatting a system based on the law and democratic management.

Secondly, it is urgent to reform talent training mode. As the 18th party congress reported, teaching should aim at "cultivating students' sense of social responsibility, creativity and practical ability". To achieve this, we should recognize that the essence and fundamental mission of higher education is cultivation of talents because the level of talents cultivation is a primary yardstick to measure the quality of higher education. Therefore, the core issue of higher education reform is how to create an atmosphere of cultivating creative talents, enhance research and innovation capacities. (1) Improving teaching concept and mode. As focusing on professional education, we should also pay attention to moral education and combine the transform of teaching ideas with innovations and mechanism reform of cultivating mode, and then exploring a training mode with coordinated development among scientific inquiry, creative and practical ability and humanistic quality; promoting the model of school-enterprise joint education with interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary. (2)

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Optimizing undergraduate credit system. Institutions of higher learning should explore the paths of higher education reform and set up training programs to meet the age requirement according to the needs of the current situation of economic construction and social development. Based on the guarantee of teaching quality, we are supposed to make the appropriate adjustments on the curriculum, reduce the compulsory courses while increasing the proportion of optional courses; reducing classroom teaching time but increasing practical teaching alters methods into encouraging students to learn independently; we can also set up an innovation credit system to stimulate and encourage students to explore and cultivate creative thinking. (3) Cultivate innovative spirit for college students. One great way is to encourage students to participate in all kinds of creative activities actively and scientific/technological competitions at the same time, arranging teachers with professional guidance for them and supporting them with scholarship or other things as well. Another way is to establish innovative scientific research funds for college students to encourage them to actively carry out research project or participate in teachers' teaching and scientific research projects. Through a variety of research learning and innovation activities, it is able to improve students' structure of knowledge and ability, and cultivate students' innovation ability in scientific research and attitude of seeking truth from facts.

### Conclusions

At present, the modernization of our country is at a crucial stage. Facing with the urgent situation in economic social development, we must exchange the focus of higher education from expansion to connotation development. Based on innovative talents cultivation, further enhance the quality of higher education and deepen the reform of higher education. We should develop modern higher education in a sustainable way with Chinese characteristics.

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