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State, Society, and University: Historical Context of Chinese Higher Education

ABSTRACT: *In many cases, ideally, the Society assumes that the State can operate on behalf of the Society by intervening Universities' activities in order to meet societal expectations. Conversely, the Society can also pressure the State via the University behaving as a buffer zone of interests between the State and the Society. This paper is intended to reflect the intertwined role and interconnected relationship between State, Society, and University in China. It highlights how these three main stakeholders have responded to their environments by emphasizing the role of Universities. The paper provides a general overview of the role of higher education in the Chinese society, and its responses towards other stakeholders and changes in its environments from the past to the present. From the perspective of chronological history, the analysis of the evolution of Chinese higher education is based upon the premise that these three main stakeholders: State, Society, and University, embedding in their own socio-cultural underpinning factors have to respond to changing environments. The role of Universities is substantially highlighted as the key stakeholder in this paper.*

KEY WORD: *State, university, society, historical context, Chinese higher education, stakeholders, and changing environments.*

IKHTISAR: *"Negara, Masyarakat, dan Universitas: Konteks Sejarah tentang Pendidikan Tinggi Cina". Dalam banyak kasus, idealnya, Masyarakat berasumsi bahwa Negara dapat beroperasi atas nama Masyarakat dengan intervensi kegiatan Universitas dalam rangka memenuhi harapan Masyarakat. Sebaliknya, Masyarakat juga dapat menekan Negara melalui kegiatan Universitas sebagai zona penyangga kepentingan antara Negara dan Masyarakat. Tulisan ini dimaksudkan untuk merefleksikan jalinan peran dan hubungan yang saling berkaitan antara Negara, Masyarakat, dan Universitas di Cina. Ini menyoroti bagaimana tiga pengampu kepentingan utama ini telah merespon lingkungan mereka dengan menekankan peran Universitas. Makalah ini memberikan gambaran umum tentang peran pendidikan tinggi dalam masyarakat Cina, dan tanggapan terhadap pengampu kepentingan lainnya dan perubahan lingkungan dari masa lalu hingga saat ini. Dari perspektif sejarah kronologis, analisis evolusi pendidikan tinggi Cina didasarkan pada premis bahwa tiga pengampu kepentingan utama ini: Negara, Masyarakat, dan Universitas, harus melekat dalam sosial-budaya mereka sendiri sebagai faktor-faktor pendukung dan merespon perubahan lingkungan. Peran perguruan tinggi secara substansial disorot sebagai pengampu kepentingan utama dalam makalah ini.*

KATA KUNCI: *Negara, universitas, masyarakat, konteks historis, pendidikan tinggi Cina, pengampu kepentingan, dan perubahan lingkungan.*

INTRODUCTION

Although previous research and work on the role of Universities have laid the foundations for in-depth understanding

of Universities' functions and roles in a Society, it appears to have room to investigate the roles and functions of Universities from a combination between

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a perspective of chronological history and a proposed conceptual framework derived from six conceptual terms of: State, University, Society, changing environments, political ideology, and knowledge definition.

The development of a Nation or a State could be argued that University has been used as a State apparatus for many purposes. On the other hand, Society gives up their power into the hand of the State with the belief that the State can perform better than individuals in some circumstances. In many cases, ideally, the Society assumes that the State can operate on behalf of the Society by intervening Universities' activities in order to meet societal expectations.

Conversely, the Society can also pressure the State via the University behaving as a buffer zone of interests between the State and the Society. It is relatively difficult to capture the complexity of the interactions of these three key stakeholders, and the responses of these three players towards changing environments throughout the historical formation of individual national histories.

Therefore, this paper is intended to reflect the intertwined role and interconnected relationship between State, Society, and University of China that have responded to their environments by highlighting the role of Universities. The paper provides a general overview of the role of higher education in the Chinese society, and its responses towards other stakeholders and changes in its environments from the past to the present.

The analysis of the evolution of Chinese higher education is based upon the premise that these three players embedded in their own socio-cultural underpinning factors have to respond to changing environments from the past to the present. The role of the University is substantially highlighted as the key stakeholder in this paper.

To be more specific, the paper will focus on the two following questions: (1) What types of knowledge definitions and political ideologies have been utilized and applied to the Chinese higher education throughout its historical of societal formations?; and (2) How does the intertwined magnitude of political ideology, knowledge definition and changing environments affect the relationships between State, University, and Society of Chinese higher education?

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATION

The diagram of proposed conceptual framework aims to enlighten the process of how University knowledge is produced, reproduced, distributed, and redistributed. The three stakeholders of State, University, and Society are key players that stimulate the process of knowledge creation. The function of University is principally emphasized as a key knowledge producer and knowledge transmitter from the consensus of State and Society. In addition, due to changes in environments, these three stakeholders are subject to compel them to strategically respond and interact to one another.

In this paper, these changes in environments are perceived through the lens of chronological history of individual nations. The way how these stakeholders behave strategically throughout the changes is based upon what types of political ideologies they hold in order to respond with other stakeholders and the changes.

University refers to higher learning institutions in the past or those higher education institutions over the different periods of time. Within the University context itself, it also has different interest groups who collaborate, compete, and challenge to one another such as University Councils, the President, academic staff, and administrative staff. Politically, their

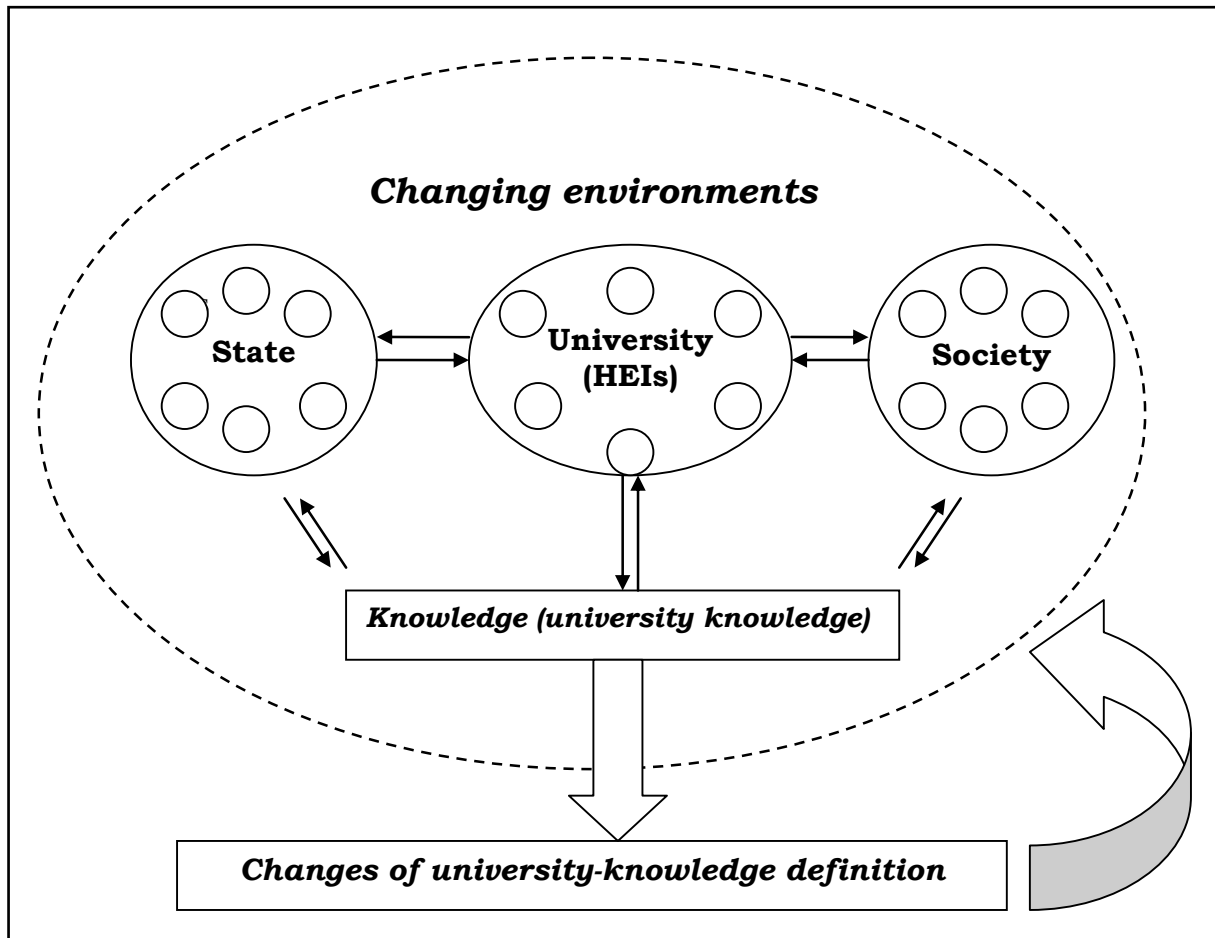


Diagram 1:
Three Stakeholders: State, University, and Society

competing roles within the University indicate the manner of retaining status quo of individual interest or group interest. This paper is primarily based on the assumption that the University is given a priority role to produce and transmit knowledge according to the State and Society's demand under changing environments.

Society refers to those service receivers from the university and those who have a vested interest directly and indirectly from the knowledge produced from the University such as students, governments, citizens, industry.

Changing environments are one of the most crucial factors that compel these three main players respond to and share the differentiation of knowledge definitions in different historical epochs.

The history of an individual country has different types of changing environments that varies according to individual state and societal formation. Changes are one of key elements in determining various responses from stakeholders.

The discourse of changing environments via the historical context of individual nations reveals how individual State, University, and Society use different strategies to cope with these changes. The interconnected and competing role of these three stakeholders over their individually historical transitions determines how knowledge production of the university is defined and interpreted. As stated by M. Gibbons *et al.* (1994), and his colleagues, that knowledge is always produced under a process of continuous

negotiation among various interest groups, and it will not be produced unless and until the interests of these groups are met.

Political ideology is defined as contested political beliefs and values among individuals and interest groups. The make use of political ideology by the three stakeholders is implicitly and explicitly embedded in different interests of social, economic, and political activities. Political ideology also plays a key role in how the University defines and produces knowledge.

Knowledge can be defined in different dimensions at different contextual levels. Knowledge is treated as a core University production for the historical analysis of selected higher education systems. The analysis aims to comprehend not only how knowledge is created, but also why such knowledge emerges.

The changing environments through the historical context of an individual nation pose a challenge for the State, University, and Society to overcome. The interconnected role and the struggle of the three stakeholders within the chronological transition of historical context determine the definition of knowledge and its connotation created by the University.

The differentiation of knowledge definitions in each historical epoch implies different roles of the University in the Society. For example, M. Castells (2001) distinguished four predominating functions of the University in each historical era as the follows: (1) formation and diffusion of ideological apparatuses; (2) selection of dominant elites; (3) the generation of new knowledge; and (4) the training of the bureaucracy.

To sum up, the conceptual framework used in the analysis of the evolution of American higher education deploys 6 conceptual terms: State, University, Society, changing environments, political ideology, and knowledge definition. These 6 conceptual terms are

used as operational definitions in order to explore the history of Chinese higher education more systematically.

THE ROOT OF CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATION

The long and uninterrupted Chinese civilization provides an explanation of how the intertwined role of State, University, and Society has undergone different environments of the history of Chinese higher education. According to B. Wang *et al.* (1994) and W. Min (2004), the term of higher education in Chinese context can be traced back as early as 1100 BC (Before Christ) in the Zhou dynasty, when it was called *Pi-Youg*; during the Han dynasty, 206 BC – 220 AD (Anno Domini), Chinese higher education institutions were called *Tai-Xue*, which means “institutions of higher learning”; later, during the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD) and afterward, Chinese Universities were called *Guo-zi-Jian*, a type of higher education institutions established for the children of royal families and senior officials.

During the Eastern Zhou dynasty, when State institutions were becoming weaker, Confucius (551 – 479 BC) introduced private higher education in China, which it recorded that he had more than 3,000 students. One of the most important higher education institutions during the pre-modern Chinese higher education were *Shu-Yuan*. *Shu-Yuan*, began to appear during the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD), initially as places for collecting books, were private academies or scholarly societies. They were alternatives to official higher education institutions, became a dominant type of private University throughout the Chinese Society during the Song dynasty (960-1279 AD), and later continued to function until the early twentieth century (Min, 2004:56).

It could be argued that Confucius knowledge produced through private higher education institutions during the Zhou dynasty have had an considerable

impact on the traditional definition of Chinese knowledge. The fundamental definition of knowledge in the eyes of Confucius was mainly based on moral education as a whole. Confucius believed that:

[...] the purpose of education is to give people ideals and principles; the aim of education is to cultivate people's sentiment, to develop its noble character, and to improve awareness of benevolence [...]. The main tenets of his moral education are benevolence, propriety and such items as, filial piety, love and respect (for one's elder brothers), faithfulness, forgiveness, trust, and righteousness (CUHK, 2007:229).

With the definition of knowledge from Confucius, this philosophical scholarship has eventually been developed, applied, and distorted through the discourse of Chinese history and society in terms of political, social, cultural, and economic development. Moreover, one of the significant contributions of Confucius was the establishment of precedent for private education and dissemination of ancient documents and traditional academic ideas to the common people, which were formerly monopolized by the upper class (CUHK, 2007:231).

With the leading role of his efforts within his higher education institutions (Confucian School), he broke away the definition of knowledge from the belief in ghosts and gods in that time into a new definition of knowledge based upon social reality and moral ideals (*cf* CUHK, 2007:231). The creation of Confucius School (higher learning institutions) also could be regarded as the creation of favorable conditions for the emerging bargaining power of higher education institutions against the State in the Chinese context.

THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATION (1840-1911)

The humiliating experience of loss in the Opium War had altered the

attitude of the State and Chinese Society towards the tradition definition of knowledge, particularly those ruling class of the Chinese State. The orthodox definition of knowledge from Confucianism dominated Chinese education for more than 2,000 years was challenged by the strong ships, gunboats, and powerful guns of those Western invaders ever since in 1840. How to resist the invaders had brought about learning Westernization in China. Indeed, the notion of being a central Kingdom of the world was jeopardized by the outside newcomers. Inevitably, the Chinese State had to assess the function of higher education institutions and the definition of knowledge as a result of a new environment from the aggression of invaders.

The Qing government decided to adopt Western knowledge in terms of science and technology in order to strengthen the national military and industrial enterprises due to three factors: (1) the Realization of China's weakness and Western countries' strengths in science and technology as a result of the defeat in the Opium War; (2) Western science and technology would enable China to gain skills and capabilities to defend itself against Western powers; and (3) Traditional Chinese higher education institutions' development of science and technology was not be able to meet the urgent demand for technological personnel of industrial and military enterprises (Pan, 2003:67-68).

The Qing State utilized three approaches to the redefining of traditional Chinese knowledge: (1) the translation of foreign knowledge into Chinese through publications; (2) the establishment of modern higher educational institutions emphasizing teaching of foreign languages, Western industrial technology, and Western military sciences; and (3) the dispatch of Chinese students to study in Western countries (Pan, 2003:68-69). In 1872,

the Chinese State dispatched a group of 120 students to the USA (United States of America), the country's first official study-abroad programs; this was followed by programs that sent students to the UK (United Kingdom) and continental European countries (Min, 2004:57).

The ideological support of Confucianism was not abolished, and its existence helped maintain the absolute power of the Qing State. Before the collapse of Qing dynasty in 1911, Qing State still utilized Confucianism to support imperial autocracy although modern schools were established. Indeed, the Qing government persisted in maintaining the status of Confucianism as the unchallengeable orthodoxy and the core of education, and resisting foreign liberal and democratic theories. As stipulated by the court in that time, all modern schools had to teach mainly the Confucian Four Books, Five Classic, and Confucian Ethic, while making history, Chinese and foreign politics, science, and technology subsidiary courses (Yuan, 2001:196).

Although the new knowledge meaning of science and technology imported from the West began to implant in the role Chinese higher education, the Qing government had a great concern with the new philosophy and political ideology of learning from the West that eventually jeopardized the state power. To offset the undesirable effect of Western political ideology from the Western scholarship, the adoption of Japanese educational model embracing both French and German models with similar Confucian education values was implemented.

The attempt of the State of Imperial dynasty to lessen the undesirable values binding with the discourse of Western knowledge did not succeed in retaining the political status of the Qing government and the enduring legacy of the Chinese dynasty. Perhaps, it

was the predetermined fate of the Qing State. Sun Yat-Sen, who accepted the idea of democracy as he studied medical sciences in Japan, became the leader of the revolution of 1911, which ended the Qing government and imperial history of China (Pan, 2003:69).

HIGHER EDUCATION UNDER THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA (1912-1948)

Between 1912 and 1927, the weakness of the State power helped the role of the University to experiment on various models, especially from the European and American models. A considerable number of higher education institutions calling themselves Universities mushroomed in this period. Cai Yuanpei, as the first Minister of Education in the Republic of China (RoC) and the President of Peking University played one of the leading roles during this period. He broke away from the definition of knowledge derived from the era of imperial dynasty by abolishing the teaching Confucianism as the knowledge of state orthodoxy, and introduced Western higher educational models within the Chinese higher education institutions (Min, 2004:58).

Having studied in Germany and France, Cai Yuanpei formulated 1912 education reform legislation which reflected a European model derived largely from his experience in the German universities of Berlin and Leipzig (Min, 2004:58; and Hayhoe & Zha, 2007:668). He laid a foundation of the Western concepts of institutional autonomy and academic freedom along the lines of the German university model (Hayhoe & Zha, 2007:668).

The influence of American model could also be illustrated from the new educational reform legislation implemented in 1922, such as the adoption of American 6-3-3-4 schooling system (Min, 2004:58). According to S.Y. Pan (2003), in 1927, Cai Yuanpei established a National Academic Council (NAC) Daxue Yuan, which replaced the

Ministry of Education (MoE), giving academics statutory power to govern the entire educational system, independent of the KMT or *Kuo Min Tang* (Cai, 1991). As a result, the bargaining power of the University was considerably strengthened although it was on a temporary basis.

Between 1927 and 1948, in the founding period of the Nationalist government, the power of the State over the University was strengthened. Those students enjoying activities about freedom and democracy during the 1912-1927 was imposed by tight restrictions on student activities by the Nationalist authorities. In December 1930, Chiang Kai-Shek issued a decree that students were forbidden to strike and hold rallies without authorization; otherwise, the State would punish them as reactionaries (Yuan, 2001:209). The decree specifically stipulated that:

[...] a student should devote himself/herself exclusively to studies, cultivate the mind, and follow the ancient instruction that (a noble man does) not consider things outside (his) position (*Jiaoyu zazhi*, 1930:175-176).

Moreover, Chiang Kai-Shek's criticism over the dissatisfying role of NAC (National Academic Council) led to the resignation of Cai Yuanpei as Chairman of the University Council in protest, and the re-establishment of MoE (Ministry of Education) under Chiang Kai-Shek as the Ministry of Education (Pan, 2003:71). Again, the State overwhelmingly controlled over the University's behavior.

HIGHER EDUCATION DURING MAO ZEDONG ERA (1949-1976)

Mao Zedong played a crucial role in shaping the function of Chinese higher education under the beginning era of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Mao Zedong's thoughts were the key factor in constituting the definition of knowledge and the role of the University

in Chinese Society. In order to restore political stability and boost economic development in the aftermath of the Chinese Civil War, Chairman Mao Zedong, the most powerful man of the State, took advantage of the University to succeed in his political ideology. Knowledge production of the University was redefined to serve as a national-building mechanism of both political education and centrally-planned economy. To abolish those concealed Western – particularly the American one – ideologies [the imperialist capitalism]¹ embedded within the sphere of education, political education in terms of Communist ideology had to be instilled.

The role of the University and the definition of knowledge had to serve the so-called definition of being both “red” and “expert”. “Red” and “Expert” (*hong yu zhuan*) refer to: “red” means having a socialist political consciousness; and “expert” means possessing academic and technical excellence (Pan, 2007:125). The knowledge of proletarian ideology had to be included in the University curriculum. The considerably extensive alteration in political education was delivered to young people under the umbrella of the University. All Universities were required to offer four compulsory political courses: the Foundation of Marxism, History of the Chinese Revolution, Political Economy, and Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism (Pan, 2003:81-82). Eventually, all Universities and Colleges became State-run institutions that were reorganized and reconstructed according to the Soviet higher educational model (Min, 2004:59).

S.Y. Pan (2003 and 2007) illustrated the role and relationship between the State and the University by shedding light on how Tsinghua University

¹Imperial capitalism refers to “Lenin’s term for what he believed is the final stage of capitalism, in which capitalists exploit foreign labor classes in order to continue to increase profits, but to avoid an uprising by their domestic workers” (Baradat, 2009:315).

in the early 1950s interact with the State and those internal and external environments. According to S.Y. Pan (2007:132), politically, Tsinghua University's strong affiliation with American higher education was one of the most important factors for Mao Zedong's decision to treat Tsinghua University as "a typical case in the educational revolution from the old capitalist system to the new democratic educational system" (Wang, 2001:18). Chinese Communist Party (CCP) supported Tsinghua University as a leading role of political effort to eliminate capitalist ideology, especially from the American one that influence on staff and students' thoughts; and to make Tsinghua University supportive of CCP's status (Ouyang *et al.*, 1992).

Due to the mistrust of the American higher education system, Russian higher educational model, at the beginning, provided significant assistance for fostering the role of Chinese higher education under the Mao Zedong's authority. To purify Chinese national identity and raise economic development, land reforms, Cultural Revolution, Anti-Rightist Campaign, and Great Leap Forward was implemented. Guiding political ideology to unite the divided society after the Civil War was constructively embedded in the definition of knowledge provided by the University.

Russian higher educational model was adopted as a short cut of political ideology to go through the period of political transition. This is because CCP viewed the former Soviet Union as: (1) an "elder brother" for ideological guidance; (2) the quickest way to access Western knowledge for economic development [the official rationale was the good things in British and American science had already been absorbed by the Soviet scientist (Fraser, ed., 1965:184-185)]; and (3) the specialized professional knowledge of Russian higher educational model (Pan, 2003:79-80).

Nevertheless, the tragic fate of Chinese higher education occurred during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1971). Teachers and University staff were killed by the Red Guards as a result of being labeled as "dirty bourgeoisie" (Landany, 1992:289). The State savagely attacked Universities and Colleges for disseminating ideas that combined Soviet revisionism,² Western bourgeois ideologies, and traditional feudalism (Min, 2004:62). Universities and Colleges were suspended from enrolling undergraduate students form more than four years; and there were no enrollments of postgraduate students for twelve years (Min, 2004:62). In other words, the University during the Cultural Revolution was torn severely apart by the State, because the political values of the University knowledge production were opposed to the current political ideology of the State.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE POST-MAO ZEDONG ERA (1977-2008)

Dramatic changes in Chinese higher education have taken place after the death of Mao Zedong. The Open Door policy of Deng Xiaoping and the mighty force of globalization have compelled Chinese higher education into the redefinition of knowledge and the relationship between the State, University, and Society. The increased income of many families as a result of market-driven-oriented socialism initiated by Deng Xiaoping, and the launch of Four Modernizations (agriculture, industry, technology, and defense) has aroused the reinterpretation of knowledge from intensively socialist indoctrination towards intensive economic reforms within the umbrella of CCP (Chinese Communist Party) political ideology.

²Revisionism originally was "a movement led by Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932) and Jean Jaures (1859-1914) that challenged almost every major principle of Marxism. Abandoning scientific socialism, the revisionists returned humanitarianism to a central place in socialist theory" (Baradat, 2009:319).

In the late 1970s, the Chinese reform of economic structure officially incorporated market mechanism into its socialist economy, along with its increasing engagement in different aspects of the international community.

The reaction of the State towards new environments of internationalization and globalization has been very active. The current movement of the policy makers concerning about massification, human capital flow, world-class university, and internationalization implies the proactive response of the State and the University to these new challenging environments. On the other hand, with the rapid economic growth and the active involvement in the international stage, the Society has also deliberately pushed their great demand for access to higher education towards the role of State and Society.

The state has employed decentralization, marketization, and quasi-market approaches to the social demand of mass higher education. The State has loosened the control over the University and the definition of knowledge in terms of intensive ideological support due largely to the large influx of secondary-school leavers. The concept of user-fee was introduced to struggle with the tremendously expansion of number of students accessing to higher education. Between 1990 and 2002, the figure of student enrollment had over a threefold increase from 2.1 million to 9.1 million; and if the part-time students and those enrolled in non-formal and private institutions are included, the number of students in 2003 reach 19 million (Hayhoe & Zha, 2007:686).

The loose rules and regulations on the function of the University in the Society have created a dreadful condition of less-knowledge-production orientation, but awarding-degree orientation. For example, one of the changes that pose one of the greatest potential challenges to the State control

of education was the re-emergence of private higher education institutions (*minban*) in the early 1980s, since some of them have not been certified by the central government to award degrees and diplomas (Chan & Mok, 2001:303).

Some new types of higher education governance by transferring the some discretion from the government towards institutions were implemented. The Universities were expected to play a role in the country's economic development. The role of Universities in helping the country's competitiveness and economy are, for example, Project 211 and Project 985.

Project 211 is a mega project of Chinese higher education initiated by the state in 1995. The project aims to tackle major issues concerning economic development and social progress. The project calls for marked improvements in teaching, research, administration, and efficiency in 100 schools of higher learning (100 first-class rate Universities) and in certain key fields of study in the 21st century, in which the projects entails three major endeavors: (1) improving Universities' overall conditions; (2) developing key fields of study; and (3) building a higher education public service framework (Zhou, 2006). The money required for this project is raised jointly by the central government, the ministries and commissions under the State Council, localities, and Universities.

The aim of the Project 985 is to create a competitive environment for those first-rate Universities to become research universities and world-class Universities. In other words, the State realized the changing discourse of knowledge production that no longer relied on the one single University or local universities. The international network of local Universities with foreign ones, particularly the prestigious ones, is inevitably significant. Moreover, the role of the University not only has to function locally to serve the demand of

local Society, but also has to compete globally in order to maintain the demand of national competitiveness.

CONCLUSION

Higher education in China reflects the significant role of Universities as the country's political, economic, and society tools. In Chinese context, it could be argued that the State has played a critical role over the function of Universities in the Chinese Society. The growing importance of human capital in maintaining global competitiveness, increasing numbers of secondary-school leavers wishing to have access in higher education pose many challenges for the State and the University.

The embeddedness of Mao Zedong's political ideology has had a significant impact throughout the contemporary Chinese Society, including the University's function in its Society. The complexities of both internal and external environments, particularly from the new forms of globalization and internationalization in higher education, inevitably drive these three players to be more proactive and strategic.

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