

The Development of Higher Education in Tibet: From UNESCO Perspective (Draft)

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Abstract: Tibet is a highly controversial area in the present world, which gives birth to the completely different viewpoints and sentiments to the same issues concerning Tibetan society, history and development. How to unveil an authentic higher education in Tibet from the controversial standpoints on this issue and come to its contribution or influence to the social, economical and cultural development in Tibet? The perspectives and ideas proposed in *Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: vision and Action*. (UNESCO) will usher the analysis in order to present the situation of the higher education in Tibet within an all-sides-accepted-value system.

Key word: Tibet; higher education; UNESCO; development.

Introduction

Tibet is a highly controversial area in the present world, which gives birth to the completely different viewpoints and sentiments to the same issues concerning Tibetan society, history and development. As to the higher education in Tibet, Chinese government takes the stand that there is a great leap forward since 1958 due to the government's enormous investment in finance and human resources, including a great number of especially-Tibetan supports of different projects. The higher education in Tibet, starting from nil, has grown into a talents pool and research foundation, contributing to the economical and social development in Tibet. Conversely, Dharamsala insists that the education (as well as higher education) policy that the Chinese government has been practicing in Tibet has greatly destroyed the Tibetan culture, even "eradicating the Tibetan language." (Tibetan Centre for Human Rights & Democracy, 2003)

How to unveil an authentic higher education in Tibet from the controversial standpoints on this issue and come to its contribution or influence to the social, economical and cultural development in Tibet? An unbiased perspective is needed for the analysis. A top selection would be the one from UNESCO in *Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: vision and Action*. The perspectives and ideas proposed in this document will usher the following analysis in order to present the situation of the higher education in Tibet within an all-sides-accepted-value system. In this way, the simply yes-and-no viewpoints can be avoided.

China is witnessing an unusual 2008; the ecstasy by successfully hosting Beijing Olympics Game is going side by side with the occasional inharmonious conflicts

dotted in Olympics torch relay. 2008 is also a special and significant year for Tibet, who celebrated her 50 anniversary of the higher education practice. In 1958, Tibetan Public School (*Xizang gongxue*) was founded with the purpose of training the Tibetan officials. This is the initial step of higher education in Tibet. In 1959, the study of Tibetan as a language was introduced into the School, taken as a starting symbol of Tibetan higher education and its modernization process later on.

Over the past five decades, Tibet has established a complete tertiary education system which covering doctorate or master's degrees, bachelor degree and diploma of all higher education level. And by 2006, six modern university and college had been established in Tibet, including Tibet Institute for Nationalities, (TIN, 1965 , originally founded in 1958 as the Tibet School)、Tibet University(TU,1985)、Traditional Tibetan Medicine College(TTMC,1993)、Tibet Police College(TPC, 2003)、Tibet Technical College(TTC, 2005) and Tibet Teacher's College (TTC, 2006) . In the last half a century in Tibet, more than 20,000 students including a group of Tibetan doctorate or master's degrees, graduated from the universities and colleges. The total number of college students at present hit 26,767 in Tibet (Council of PRC, 2008).

Nevertheless, the 50-year's higher education practice in Tibet, cast in the fore-mentioned shadow of opposite standpoints, inevitably involves accomplishments and problematic issues.

Access to higher education

no discrimination can be accepted in granting access to higher education on grounds of race, gender, language or religion, or economic, cultural or social distinctions, or physical disabilities (UNESCO, 1998) .

The National Unified Higher Education Enrollment system was introduced in 1978 and it stipulated that there should be one standard university entrance examination drawn up by the Ministry of Education, with one set of answers and common methods of grading. All the candidates throughout China would attend the examination at the same period. It seemed to be an equal treatment, but not suitable to the minorities regions with the consequence of inequality of opportunity of access to university. By 1980, the bias could be seen in the enrollment pattern: in TAR, only 10 per cent of the quota of students sent from the region to universities in China were Tibetan, although Tibetans comprised over 97 per cent of total population.

The introduction of a unified university entrance examination put non-Han Chinese nationalities, including Tibetans, at an immediate disadvantage in enrollment in higher education. The most important reason why minorities were less successful in the unified university examination was that all the papers were in Chinese, and could not compete with Native speakers. Thus, unequal treatment was thought to be needed to propitiate equal opportunity, with equality of results as the eventual goal (Barry Sautman, 1999). Preferential policy was proposed by the Ministry of Education by revising the enrollment regulations of the previous three years, and five measures

were put forward as below (Sheng Zhao, 1980):

1. National key institutions, including Beijing University, would set up 'minority' nationality classes, and would take a quota of students who were outstanding in their own region but who might have failed the unified entrance examination.
2. Departments of education in the autonomous regions could set their own entrance examinations for enrolment in colleges in their own regions.
3. Non-Han Chinese students could take the university examination in their native language for subjects such as geography, mathematics, physics and chemistry.
4. The pass mark could be lowered slightly for 'minority' students.
5. Students from 'minority' nationalities in Han areas would take priority in admission if they had the same scores as their Han counterparts.

With the new enrolment regulations applied in 1984, the proportion of Tibetans and other non-Han Chinese nationalities in tertiary enrollment has increased from 48.6 per cent in 1984 to 57.8 per cent in 1993.

To raise the enrollment of national minority students in Tibet, the Chinese government has adopted preferential policies by setting different admission scores for national minority students and those of the Han nationality in addition to the whole region's low scores. The number of national minority students in Tibet sitting China's annual National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) reached 14248 in 2008, and 10211 was actually accepted into university. The total enrollment proportion is 60% in Tibet. More than 70 per cent (72.7%) are national minority students among the students recruited by universities.

Through this way, the number of students in higher education institutions in Tibet increased rapidly. By the end of 2005, the average number of students in colleges and universities is 1139 per 100,000 in Tibet, surpassing Qinghai (905), Yunnan (904), Guizhou (838), Guangxi (993), Henan (1119), Hainan (1133), Anhui (1110), and the national average is 1613 (Statistics Bureau of TAR, 2005).

Quantity and quality

Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit (UNESCO, 1998)

Since the higher education expansion in 1999 in the whole country, the enrollment of higher education has also increased rapidly in the early years of 21st century in Tibet. According to the 10th Five-Year plan of Tibetan economy, the gross enrollment rate of higher education would account to 10% in 2005, and 15% in 2010, entering the early stage of mass higher education (Educational Bureau of TAR, 2001). However, in 2007, the number of college students has already attained 26,767, with 17.4% gross enrollment rate (Council of PRC, 2008).

Table 1: Numbers of Enrollment and Total Students from 1965 to 2007 (Council of PRC, 2006-2008)

Year	Number of Enrollment	Total Students
1965	910	
1975	772	1964
1980	233	1494
1985	530	1577
1990	645	2025
1992	683	2239
1993	1193	2813
1994	1095	3280
1995	1175	3878
1997	717	3200
1998		3400
1999	1681	4021
2000	2320	5475
2001	2420	6793
2002	3414	8438
2003	4279	11600
2004	6009	14731
2006		23327
2007		26767

The quality of higher education has been influenced by the expansion, with some long-existing quality problems being highlighted. That is, the fact that students with lower academic records who are enrolled under the preferential policy has an influence on education quality.

As the result of the preferential policies, the admission score in TAR is lower than that in other provinces over the years. Furthermore, the different admission scores between Han and minority group make it possible that national minority has much lower admission scores than Han in TAR. Table 1 shows the admission scores in Tibet and other regions, which shared the same NCEE paper in 2008.

Table2: the Comparison of admission scores between TAR and Other Regions in 2008

Regions Type		Tibet		Qinghai		Gansu	Hebei	Henan	Guizhou
		Minority	Han	Minority	Han				
A	Key	350	500	470	490	560	537	557	566
R	Institution								
T	Common	270	360	405	425	501	503	513	503
S	Institution								

	Vocational Institution	230	320	312	322				
S C I E N C E	Key Institution	290	500	418	438	558	552	563	521
	Common Institution	220	365	368	388	507	514	517	468
	Vocational Institution	200	300	262	272				

*College Admission Scores around China in2008 <http://www.eol.cn/>

It is obvious that the scores of national minority in Tibet are much lower both in Science and Art, even compared with the minority in Qinghai.

Table3 demonstrates different admission scores from the year 2000 to 2007 in TAR. The admission scores for national minority students are 65 to 212 lower than that for students of Han nationality. The gap has been increasing recently, mainly because the admission score of Han is becoming higher while that of minority has changed little in the past 8 years.

Table 3: Admission Score in TAR in the year 2000 to 2007

Year	Level	Arts			Science		
		Minority	Han	Gap	Minority	Han	Gap
2000	Key Institution						
	Common Institution	300	390	90	210	320	110
	Vocational Institution	215	290	75	200	270	70
2001	Key Institution	340	440	100	305	450	145
	Common Institution	283	350	67	235	340	105
	Vocational Institution	255	325	70	200	270	70
2002	Key Institution	335	450	115	305	450	145
	Common Institution	273	340	67	235	340	105
	Vocational Institution	255	320	65	200	270	70
2003	Key Institution	330	450	120	280	440	160
	Common Institution	250	320	70	210	325	115
	Vocational Institution	220	300	80	180	255	75
2004	Key Institution	350	490	140	300	480	180
	Common Institution	250	320	70	210	325	115
	Vocational Institution	220	300	80	180	255	75
2005	Key Institution	350	490	140	300	480	180
	Common Institution	250	320	70	210	325	115
	Vocational Institution	220	300	80	180	255	75
2006	Key Institution	355	495	140	300	505	205
	Common Institution	267	352	85	225	370	145
	Vocational Institution	235	320	85	200	300	100
2007	Key Institution	365	515	150	303	515	212

	Common Institution	280	370	90	225	370	145
	Vocational Institution	240	330	90	200	300	100

*Based on College admission scores in Tibet over the years.

With the over low admission scores, most minority students have many difficulties in study, and the teachers also have to face more challenges. After 3 or 4 years, almost every student can graduate and attain the degree due to the political considerations. However, some of them have not reached the standards what the subject requires yet.

Since the employment system of graduates in Tibet was reformed in 2006, all graduates are facing the situation of dual-choice and self-choice occupation. The employers prefer to employ the graduates who graduated outside of TAR or Han graduates. Therefore, without the competitiveness, minority graduates have to rely on the special preferential policy to find jobs.

For the political consideration, the preferential policy has been adopted for the higher proportion of undergraduate minority enrollment to fulfill the goal of equality of higher education. Nevertheless, the realization of the equity of entrance is at the expense of the equality of result---the same ability and job competitiveness, which finally makes the minority students less competitive in the employment market.

Subjects and language

Relevance in higher education should be assessed in terms of the fit between what society expects of institutions and what they do (UNESCO, 1998).

The subjects and programs of the higher education in TAR have experienced three stages in the past half a century.

Stage 1: Training the Tibetan politics cadres and the professional cadres (1958-1976)

The purpose of the higher education in Tibet in initial time is to train the Tibetan cadres. Because of the low quality of teachers and students, the primary curriculum consists of Tibetan and Chinese literacy courses in a long period.

In 1965, the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) was established. The collision between the shortage of professionals and the social development became intensified. To mesh the social demand, the subjects and programs gradually shifted to cadres training in various areas of specialty.

In this year, Tibet public school (*Xizang gongxue*) renamed as Tibet Institute for Nationalities and established the Tibetan language program and the Chinese language program based on the standards of higher learning to train Tibet-Chinese translators. After that, the Tibetan Medical College, Teacher's College of Tibet, Tibet Institute of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry were established successively. There were 23 programs in the period, covering medical science, teacher's education, accounting, agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, and others. A large number of professionals and minority teachers were trained.

Stage 2: Serving the development of Tibetan economy and preserving the traditional Tibetan culture (1980-1998)

After 1980, Tibet entered a new period of development. The types of the institutions, disciplines, programs and goals were changed a lot. Some new subjects relating to economy, including science, engineering, agriculture, medicine, finance and economics, politics and law, were established. In July 1985, Tibet University was founded on the basis of the former Tibet Teachers' college whose main purpose is the training of teachers in the TAR, offering programs of Tibetan Language, Chinese Language, Mathematics, Physics, Tibetan medicine and others. In 1993, Traditional Tibetan Medicine College was set up for the preservation of traditional Tibetan medicine and pharmacy.

Stage 3: Emphasizing the comprehensive, minority and vocational subjects (1999-)

In the beginning of the 21st century, some new subjects (especially vocational ones) are set up to meet the needs of economic development and employment market, including computer science and technology, marketing, hospitality and tourism, management, Tibetan-Chinese-English translation, arts and crafts, and others. Furthermore, the national subjects are emphasized in TU. A group of subjects with the "minority" title, such as "minority history", "minority language", "minority art", and "minority religion" were established to preserve and promote the Tibetan traditional culture. There are more than 70 undergraduate programs and 60 higher vocational education programs at present.

The history of the development of subjects and programs reflect two main goals of higher education in Tibet to train professionals and preserve the Tibetan traditional culture. It not only demonstrates the basic features of modern knowledge and technology, but also initiates those special subjects and programs such as Tibetan language and literature and Tibetan medicine to inherit the Tibet unique culture.

In Tibetan HEIs, Tibetan language is used as teaching language in some subjects, such as Tibetan literature, Tibetan language and Tibetan medicine. Except these subjects, other curricula use Chinese as instruction language. Meanwhile, in the HEIs, there are clear requirements for Tibetan language learning. For instance, Tibetan language is a compulsory course for every student in TU and TIN, regardless of nationality. Students cannot graduate unless they pass the required level of Tibetan language examination. In TU, some electives relating Tibetan language and literature, such as Tibetan writing, Tibetan-Chinese translation and Tibetan spoken language, are provided for all the students.

However, language teaching and teaching language is of different effects. Using Chinese as the teaching language for a long time would certainly weaken the Tibetan culture in some extent. But the fact that Tibetan language is lack of accurate translation of the vocabulary of modern science and technology, as well as the social science terminology. In addition to this, the three major Tibetan dialects can not be well understood, making Tibetan language difficult to be used as teaching language in campus at present.

Conclusion

The higher education in Tibet has developed from the completely blank to mass higher education in recent 50 years. Based on the analysis above, it is found that the educational philosophy and policy of the Chinese government are in line with the UNESCO's in many aspects. For instance, various preferential policies have been adopted to expand the opportunity as much as possible for Tibetan students to access higher education, and nearly 20,000 graduates, in various areas of specialty, have been trained for service in the Tibet Autonomous Region since 1958. At the same time, the government also faces the challenge on how to deal with the conflict between the extending the opportunity of Tibetans and the quality of the higher education in Tibet.

As a result of the TAR political sensitivity, many education issues are converted to political ones. Every topic about Tibet, including higher education, has been involved into political domain. Under the background of debate, the respect of educational rules and the pursuit to the idea of education are often ignored in the practice, but for the political needs and positions. This neglect, coupled with the bureaucratic practices in the Chinese education system, makes the policies and practices with good intention distorted in the reality. For an instance, the Inland Tibetan Class is a kind of support project but it might cause the Tibetan students' dissatisfaction because the Tibetan Language and traditional culture are not taught. The Chinese government invests a lot in higher education in the TAR, and the result, though not as satisfactory as desired, is certainly not such as simple and crude as "Tibetan culture extermination theory" described. In fact, higher education policy and practice in Tibet is not bad, but not enough. The government and HEIS should provide more choices for the Tibetan students.

Setting aside political disputes in Tibet, we would find what the Tibetan people have to face is "modernization" rather than "Hanization". "Modernity", which came from the West, have also made Han nationality and the traditional culture experience the incomparably struggle, but as the trend of the development of human society, modernization is inevitable and also unable to turn back. Tibet is not the "Shangri-La", and there is no way to preserve its traditional culture by choosing the self-enclosed way in the age of globalization and Internet. Higher education will play a vital role in Tibetan modernization and transformation.

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The Relationship between Cultural Factor and Higher Educational Leadership;

The Higher Education in Tibet ;

The Development of Higher Education in Hong Kong