

11-1-2013

## Morgan, J.W. & Wu, B. Higher Education Reform in China: Beyond the Expansion. New York: Routledge Press, 2011.

Ryan Guffey Ph.D.

Lindenwood University, [rguffey@lindenwood.edu](mailto:rguffey@lindenwood.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Environmental Studies Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Guffey, Ryan Ph.D. (2013) "Morgan, J.W. & Wu, B. Higher Education Reform in China: Beyond the Expansion. New York: Routledge Press, 2011.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 5 : No. 1 , Article 23.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol5/iss1/23>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of International and Global Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact [phuffman@lindenwood.edu](mailto:phuffman@lindenwood.edu).

**Morgan, J.W. & Wu, B. *Higher Education Reform in China: Beyond the Expansion*. New York: Routledge Press, 2011.**

Part of the Oxford China Policy Series, *Higher Education Reform in China: Beyond the Expansion* consists of an introduction followed by three sections: Widening the Provision of Higher Education (Chapters 1-4), Expansion and its Consequences (Chapters 5-7), and A Growing Global Perspective (Chapters 8-10). Throughout the edited 167 page volume, multiple approaches were utilized to frame and contextualize recent developments in Chinese education, including (1) the implementation of supply and demand tuition pricing, (2) human capital formation, and (3) interest aggregation. The text additionally frames the ways in which the Chinese education system has been affected not only by the forces of regionalization and globalization but also by China's newly developing awareness of social justice. The content of the text advances the position that despite its growth, the development of national education in China has not been equally distributed or consistently implemented due to a complex, multi-interest actor system consisting of strong internal and external constituencies. In addition, this volume examines the historical and present role of the government; markets; and academic, civic, and commercial networks related to the current state of educational affairs in China.

The introduction espouses that the growth and strengthening of China's economy over the last ten years is reflected in the development of its higher education sector. From 1999 to 2006, the number of Chinese undergraduate entrants went from 1,596,800 to 5,460,500, making the Chinese education system one of the largest in the world (Cheng, 2009). China's recent educational history (from the 1960s through the 1990s) reflected an emphasis on "manpower-planning," which paired higher education curricula and programs with specific state needs. Today, the emphasis remains on creating a productive workforce; however, now, higher education programs also seek to produce an increasingly educated and, specifically, globally productive work force. This interest in producing academically competitive "global citizens" has led to the creation of not only world class Chinese universities but also non-formal education options such as self-study distance learning and vocational training programs.

The introduction of a world-class post-secondary education system in China is relatively new and signifies a paradigm shift from earlier approaches to education. Prior to the implementation of this system, under the socialist system, Chinese ministerial institutions were self-contained entities that independently controlled the education and training of all members of their work forces. In the 2000s, the ministries were required to relinquish authority of their institutions (including the training and education of their employees) to either the provincial or national authorities, depending upon the regional or national impact of the institution, and the education of employees was left to regional educational institutions. This transfer of authority also required regional authorities to provide some level of governance in the running of the educational institutions and share in the financial responsibility for the operation of such institutions.

In the first chapter, *The regional division of the higher education sector in China*, Aijuan Chen and Bin Wu discuss the socioeconomic stratification of the Chinese higher education sector and how such stratification affects the development status and potential of universities relative to their provincial locations. The authors present a historical sketch of the expansion of the system of higher education since the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Centralized funding was initially sufficient to maintain the system under the planned economy of the 1950s-

1970s, but once the expansion of higher education swelled beyond its original design, a new system of co-funding was introduced in 1998 that divided financial responsibilities for the running of the institutions among the central government, the provincial governments (of the provinces in which schools were located), and the families of the students attending the schools. This system, however, created unequal institutional development and gave rise to “national” universities (since more wealthy provinces were able to more significantly support their institutions).

The authors conducted a study that compared student enrollments with financial indicators in order to determine each university’s development status and potential. There were four possible outcomes: high development status and high development potential (Zone I); low development status and high development potential (Zone II); low development status and low development potential (Zone III); and high development status but low development potential (Zone IV). They found that Zone I consisted of schools located in the most highly populated areas, all of which are located on the country’s eastern coast. In contrast, Zone IV included schools located in over half of all Chinese provinces, most of which are located in the West. While the differences between the scores of Zone I schools and Zone IV schools are partially due to the co-funding system, the authors claim that there are also historical and cultural issues at play that prevent the country from developing a standardized formula for developing its universities nationwide (though it remains uncertain whether any such standardization would be desirable to all schools in all regions); nonetheless, the authors explicitly see the central government’s preference for some geographic regions over others to be a problem that contributes to the uneven nature of the development of institutions of higher education across China.

The next chapter, *Adult higher education in China: Problems and potential* by Naixia Wang, illustrates how Chinese cultural concepts of lifelong learning have resulted in an increase in adult higher education (AHE), challenging the government to assess both the constraints and potential of such adult education programs within the higher education system. Wang begins by defining AHE as referring to either post-graduate education or advanced vocational training for adults who want to further their careers. She goes on to discuss lifelong learning from both a Western perspective and a Chinese perspective. To gain insight into the AHE system, Wang conducted a comparative study of three universities in the city of Taiyuan, using a questionnaire and interviews with students, professors, and school directors. Wang considered three aspects of AHE: content of curricula, teaching and learning, and quality assurance. In general, she found that with regard to the first two aspects, students were more or less unsatisfied and that they reported feeling that their programs were outdated or unappealing. With regard to the third aspect, Wang found that students saw little practical oversight and limited quality controls. Wang ultimately concludes that although AHE institutions go through a process of assessment and evaluation by the government to assure quality, the institutions often hide their flaws and falsify documents for fear that they will lose funding. Despite these shortcomings, Wang believes that AHE has potential in China and will eventually be sustainable once Chinese society more broadly embraces lifelong learning.

In *The role of distance education in contemporary China*, the third chapter, Bernadette Robinson, Shuoqin Yan, and Shukun Mo discuss the increasing importance of distance education and technology in Chinese higher education. Although distance education has been present in China since the 1980’s, it still faces challenges with respect to growth, organization, and credibility. The university at the forefront of distance learning practices is the Open University of

China (OUC), which has, through various means, helped increase access to higher education among all Chinese residents, especially those in rural areas; it is in this capacity that the university has piloted the use of technology and distance learning. Additionally, the growth of distance higher education in China was also made possible by the Modern Distance Education Project. According to the authors, “Chinese government has been a driving force in developing the use of ICT in higher education, providing the infrastructure, injecting large funds, developing technical standards, and regulating provision” (54).

The main challenges that Chinese distance education programs currently face are quality and credibility, collaboration and competition, and pedagogical interpretations (the majority of which are also challenges that face distance learning programs worldwide). Distance education in China (and, indeed, among all nations offering a variety of post-secondary educational programs) is often seen as second-rate or less effective than traditional face-to-face instruction. In China, people who receive online degrees have a more difficult time finding a job than those who receive degrees through traditional higher education institutions. Perhaps because of this bias, distance higher education has only recently been collaboratively addressed, with the formation of the National Distance Education Collaboration Group of Chinese Higher Education Institutes, which discusses issues regarding the management and teaching of online programs, resource sharing, examinations, and online platform development. In an attempt to authenticate distance higher education, distance learning in China is currently undergoing a pedagogical shift from relying on “delivery and dissemination” (the traditional educational model simply delivered online) to a model of “interaction and knowledge construction,” which makes explicit use of the nature and flexibility of online communication. In order to continue developing distance higher education and catering to the public desire for it, China will have to continue to address the challenges that constrain it and continue promoting growth in the field.

In chapter four, *Private higher education in China: Problems and possibilities*, Fengliang Li and W. John Morgan illustrate the current state of the private higher education system in China and predict several possibilities for its growth in the future. Unlike private higher education institutions in the West, private higher education institutions in China are perceived as less desirable (and are, therefore, often less competitive) than public institutions. In China, private higher education is viewed as a business, with many private universities falling under the influence of large corporations who seek to profit from the education of its students. As such, tuition for such programs often becomes commensurate with the quality of education offered therein, unfortunately rendering a good education at a decent rate of tuition at a private university unavailable to many low-income families. Because of this, private higher education institutions are socially stratified and are populated primarily by students who can afford to attend them. Students who cannot afford private tuition (which is to say, a great majority of China’s student population) therefore seek admission to public universities, generating fierce competition for admission to public schools. This competition not only results in the perception that public schools are “better” than private schools, but it also compels the public schools to actually provide a high quality education (and employ exceptional faculty members, conduct cutting edge research, etc.). Private schools, on the other hand, despite their cost, are not held to the same standard of excellence and, thus, in general, a degree from a private institution is less valued than a degree from a public one.

Li and Morgan address the issues facing private education in China (which they believe is a model that should be improved, not abandoned). They address both threats and opportunities that could result from global participation in China’s higher education system. One possibility of

a threat, say the authors, is that increased foreign investment and privatization of education will perpetuate social stratification. One possible opportunity is that as more and more NGO's and IGO's become involved with the Chinese education system, underprivileged groups will receive the help they need to create a more equal social system that will be reflected in the improvement of private education, which will in turn increase the availability of better quality education for all. Time will tell whether or not the Chinese government, investors, NGO's, and IGO's are able to cooperate and improve the private higher education system there.

Chapter five, *Thirty years of reforming China's higher education funding mechanism*, by Xiaohao Ding, Fengliang Li, and Yuze Sun, describes the funding of Chinese higher education since the Open Door Policy, the nature of funding mechanisms that have been developed, the challenges the government faces in reforming funding, and prospects for the future of funding Chinese higher education. The 1980s were characterized by the re-definition of administrative responsibilities among various levels, changes in the government method of appropriation of funds from universities, the establishment of a cost compensation mechanism, and the expansion of university-driven fundraising (as opposed to relying primarily on funds granted by the Chinese government). All of this led to the initial development of private higher education in China and a private funding system. Because of this development and other funding reforms, funding streams for systems of higher education diversified, student participation in higher education widened, types of institutions and educational provisions became more diverse, public resources were more equally distributed, and the motivation of universities to participate in their own fundraising increased.

China now faces certain challenges in the continued reform of its funding mechanisms. First, it struggles to meet its own requirements for fiscal appropriation and allocation of resources, creating a power imbalance among governmental agencies and resulting in authoritarian decision-making. Another problem is increasing tuition fees, which have remained the second largest method of funding since the mid-1990s. (This remains one of the primary causes of social stratification in Chinese higher education and has become a political issue as well as a monetary one.) Last, the rapid expansion of higher education has left institutions struggling to keep up with their debts, putting even more fiscal pressure on them. Thus far, additional funding streams are not likely to present themselves. The authors suggest that China develop its higher education on a more local level (i.e. with less reliance on national funding) and with an eye toward the Western model of private higher education funding streams (i.e. endowments and development campaigns) so as to promote cooperation between multiple constituencies in order to combat funding issues.

The sixth chapter, *The labour market for graduates in China*, Fengliang li, W. John Morgan, and Xiaohao Ding discuss the current job market for graduates of higher education in China. The authors evaluate starting salary employment probability based on gender, degree specialization, and level of education. Overall, they say, there are fewer employment opportunities for women than men, though when women are hired, there is no difference between their salaries and men's salaries. The authors also discuss factors besides gender that can give particular graduates advantages over others. Some such factors include the reputation of the institution the graduate attended, whether the graduate holds a National Standard English Certificate, the graduate's participation in student societies or volunteer social work, and the graduate's successful networking with employers and institutions.

The main challenge China currently faces with respect to its higher education is the risk of "over-education". The authors examine the notion of the concept and attempt to determine

whether over-education will become an even bigger issue as higher education continues to expand. While some claim that higher education in China is expanding too rapidly, precipitating the perceived need on the part of students (and their future employers) for students to accrue further and further training and credentialing, others see a need for and justify the continued expansion of higher education in China, asserting that a highly educated population will serve to maintain China's overall global competitiveness and economic development. The authors make four suggestions regarding how to avoid employment issues that may result from the continued expansion of higher education and the possible "over-education" of a student communities: (1) improving the quality of higher education so that earning fewer degrees still authentically prepares graduates for job placement, (2) encouraging the popularity of the credit system so that students may follow structured degree guidelines and not remain enrolled in programs indefinitely, (3) diversifying the ways in which higher education may be acquired so that students have more choices and (4) developing information channels about potential employment opportunities so that all appropriately qualified students learn of and may apply to available positions. Based on the results of their research, the authors are optimistic that China will be able to maintain a stable labor market.

In *The occupational orientation of doctoral graduates in China*, Chapter 7, Yandong Zhao and Dasheng Deng describe the attitudes of doctoral students toward certain occupations. The authors use the *Survey of Doctoral Graduates' Occupational Orientation*, funded by the Chinese Association of Science and Technology, to illustrate the perspectives, orientations, and propensities of doctoral students based on the geographic regions from which the students hailed as well as the students' occupational choices, wages, and expectations. The authors also take into account 15 dimensions that influence doctoral graduates' occupational orientations, the top three of which include future opportunity for development, salary, and personal interest in the job. Based on these dimensions, the authors devise five categories of occupational orientation: freedom orientation, reward orientation, working unit, center orientation, and family orientation. The authors assert that the types of jobs Chinese doctoral graduates choose are a reflection of these orientations. As such, their ultimate job selections tend to match their fields of study and career preferences.

In the next chapter, *Higher education and Chinese teachers: Professional education in the context of China's curriculum reform*, Janette Ryan discusses China's "nested circles" approach to teacher development based on recent educational reforms. Historically, education in China focused on lecture and examination, but current education reforms and revisions aim to move Chinese education in a more process-oriented, student-focused direction, teaching students to think critically and become lifelong learners. In an attempt to familiarize its teachers with such an approach, China has partnered with Australia and Canada to construct new models of learning and teaching. These models and the new curricula are strongly influenced by Western practices, with a K-12 system, revised standards, and student-centered teaching methods. During this transition, China has had to face several challenges, from lack of resources to institutional and professional resistance. Much of the resistance is due to cultural differences; the Chinese are trying to adopt and adapt Western educational practices while considering local contexts. They face the challenge of maintaining a balance between tradition and progress and marketing themselves nationally and internationally. Through their interactions with Canada and Australia, the Chinese hope to accomplish this.

In chapter 9, *Higher education and lifelong learning in Hong Kong*, John Cribbin describes education reforms that have taken place in Hong Kong since it returned to Chinese

sovereignty in 1997. While many predicted that the island's return to Chinese sovereignty would result in an exodus of much of its academic and commercial populations, Hong Kong has in fact remained an important hub for China's global interactions and has been given much of its own decision-making power to set its own policies with respect to everything but defense and foreign policy. As such, Hong Kong has been free to make educational reforms to its entire higher education system. With its unique history and demographics, Hong Kong faces its own set of issues in expanding its system of higher education, including demographic issues, the challenges of international recognition, and the question of how to manage the funding implications of the "massification" of higher education. In Hong Kong's public sector, five of its eight universities (roughly 60 percent) have been ranked in the world top 200 by Times Higher/Quacquarelli-Symonds. Despite this clear success, there is a continued push for more privatized education in what is known as the "lifelong learning sector." Indeed, it has been privately funded universities and vocational training facilities that have met the growing need (resulting from shifts in the job market) for opportunities for students to earn additional degrees and for accredited institutions to provide professional educations. Such institutions have formed partnerships with overseas universities, adding to the perception of Hong Kong as an international hub. This region both exports students to the U.S., Australia, and Canada and imports programs from the same countries. This exchange has largely taken place "under the radar," although the Chinese government is now becoming aware of it and is implementing soft regulations to moderate it. Cribbin thinks that at least some intervention is needed in order to continue developing this sort of international educational exchange, though he believes that China itself will become the primary beneficiary of its involvement in Hong Kong's model of international educational exchange.

The tenth and final chapter, *Brain power stored overseas? An Australian case study of the Chinese knowledge diaspora*, by Rui Yang, presents research on the influence of the Chinese students that have studied abroad and remained overseas upon graduation to work. According to the text, between the years of 1978 and 2006, 1,076,000 Chinese students left China to study abroad, and only 275,000 of these students have returned. This chapter aims to explain possible causes of this phenomenon. Yang interviewed 15 of Monash University's Chinese academic staff members and categorized their responses based on the study's research questions. These questions dealt with self-identity, influences of Chinese background, research collaboration with China, and differences between Chinese and other partners. Yang found that members of China's "knowledge diaspora" still consider mainland China to be integral to their identities. In fact, such individuals reported feeling as though they had not completely integrated into Australian culture, (though many asserted that it would be possible to do so). However, they said, due to Australia's multicultural environment and ample opportunity for career development and well-being, they had decided to remain in Australia upon completion of their degree programs and not return to China. With respect to questions regarding their Chinese educational backgrounds, the subjects saw both advantages and disadvantages of the education they had received at home, with most considering it rather favorably. Additionally, most interviewees expressed a desire to collaborate with mainland China in terms of research and academic exchanges, though they had made no concrete efforts to do so at the time the surveys were conducted. In contrast, many of the subjects had collaborated internationally with scholars from other countries, including Japan, Singapore, and the West and had formed personal relationships with these scholars. Pang concludes that the knowledge diaspora could be a loss or a gain for China, depending on the participants' future organization and their potential collaborative efforts.

This text provides a picture of China's evolving higher education. Despite the fact that the portrait of Chinese higher education continues to be a work in progress, the authors have painted with broad enough brush strokes that the audience may draw some reasonable conclusions regarding what the final picture may look like. Given the country-specific nature of the text, this work is clearly intended for China specialists and those interested in comparative education. As such, for those interested in these areas, this book will be a worthwhile addition to their collection.

Ryan Guffey, PhD  
Lindenwood University  
[rguffey@lindenwood.edu](mailto:rguffey@lindenwood.edu)

### References

Cheng, Kai-Ming. (2009). The legacy of planning: higher education development in China In Palfreyman, D. & Tapper, T. (Eds.) *Structuring mass higher education: The role of elite institutions*. Oxford University Press, UK: Oxford.