

The Significance and Practice of Liberal Education in China

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Liberal arts education has been a buzzword for many Chinese universities over the last few decades as well as a focus of undergraduate education reform in the context of building up world class universities. It is visioned not only as a means of improving the quality of higher education, but also as a strategic plan for fostering future leaders in China and the whole world. Inspired by the philosophy of liberal education with its origins in both western and Chinese cultures, a number of Chinese universities have been implementing general education or /Suzhi (素质) education with the conviction that all undergraduate students should be broadly educated while trained in a specialized area. Various kinds of programs were initiated to introduce students to courses and programs that will acquaint them with the major approaches to knowledge in areas other than their own academic specialties. Key universities such as Tsinghua, Beida and Fudan are among the first batch of universities in China to have sets up core courses aiming at cultivating cultural awareness and developing interdisciplinary perspectives and skills across humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. This paper will showcase the rationale and the means of implementing liberal education in China with Chinese characteristics in spite of the American influence.