

General Education and University Education Reform in China

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Abstract

This research briefly introduces the history of general education in universities in China. It is discovered that the word *suzhi* (no single English term fully catches its nuances) has become central to contemporary Chinese education since 1980s. In higher education, its meaning is very close to liberal education, general education, whole-person education, all-round education, etc. This paper will take them as the same concept.

Beginning from the 1990s, *suzhi* education caused great reform in university education. There are mainly three aspects:

First, the idea of university and the purpose of education changed profoundly. During the last half-century, China always emphasized the important role of science and technology and paid more attention to specialized training. In 1990s, university recognized the peculiar limitations of special education then coined the slogan *suzhi* education which implied that the basic goal of education system reform is to raise the comprehensive (including moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetical) quality of all students. Universities and colleges should not just train specialists but cultivate educated men.

Second, more and more universities took various measures to carry out *suzhi* education, such as enlarging out-class activities greatly, enforcing general education curriculum, and training critical thinking and creative ability. All these attracted many students to join and played a very important role in broadening students' horizon, improving their knowledge structure, and balancing with professional education.

Third, some universities started to do the experimental exploration of undergraduate cultivation mode which named "professional education based on general education with a wide range of knowledge". They tried to foster the aims of general education through reform of university structure and management system innovation.

The most difficulty is how to fully realize the meaning and value of general education, how to save general education and its values within a system where specialism is dominant. Another complicated problem is how to response to the impact of social change. The influence of commerce and utilitarianism is so strong that universities have largely abrogated their basic function of educating students and alter to researching and other things service in recent years. Surely the hope of a sound general education in China depends on the systematic reform of higher education.

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