

Workshop WT14

Reform of College Education

July 2007

To educate a man to make him a man... Nietzsche

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REFORMING COLLEGE EDUCATION

Presentation of the workshop

Nowadays, in China and in Europe, what does the society expect from college education? What kind of university do we need? For two centuries, the world has been through radical transformations regarding not only the goals but also their complexity and their scale. Scientific and technological knowledge have literally invaded our everyday life and have become major factors of production and power. Development of techno-science is led by economic and strategic interest more than by the mere hope to lift the mysteries of nature. The expectations of society toward college education have changed dramatically both in nature and in range.

Yet, in organization and ideology, university today is still a direct heir to modern university as it was born in Europe in the 19th century, and the “social agreement” between college and society might not be reflecting the role played by college in the evolution of society anymore.

Nowadays there are huge needs for education, and major deficiencies. Edgar Morin pointed out the ethnic dimension of such challenges. Today, an individual must use complex and global knowledge in a context of incertitude; they must re-learn alterity and take care of others: high risk, therefore high responsibilities, is transferred to them.

In this workshop, analysis from actors of various natures concerning those questions shall be collated.

Goals and objectives of the seminar

Goals

Trading viewpoints. College crisis being but a part of the broader education crisis, college reforms are multiplying. Many experiments are being conducted, many experimentations that ORUS must observe and analyse. It seems that the crisis, far from resorbing, is on the contrary getting worse and worse. In spite of the commotion about reform, and the sometimes extremely substantial increase of the associated budgets, this crisis still endures.

The goal of this workshop is to trade viewpoints about questioning college and the various reforms it regularly undergoes.

Two discussion proposals for participants to this workshop:

1. One observable constant of college reforms, clearly meant to integrate the increasing flow of students caused by the seemingly obvious democratization of college studies, already shows its limits. Indeed, it shows the hypertrophy of analysis carried out with mere quantitative measures to deal with such an issue, and it biases reality by not taking phenomena into account through a qualitative approach.

One proposal for those two days could be to carry out a reflexion deliberately centered on qualitative issues, a heterogenous view whose undertaking raises a number of problems, epistemological in nature. University, as the name says, claims universal thought and strives for it. However, even though its aim and ambition are such, one is forced to see that it effectively does not reach that goal: the postulate and axioms associated with that universal thought actually lock more than they allow to innovate and encourage creation. Movements, needs and pressures multiply, and get more and more intense: they point out the necessity not only to know but to recognize the primacy of local over global, the primacy of special over general, the primacy of singular over universal. With this in mind shall we address our reflexion over the qualitative aspect: it will allow us to address universality from the singularities, the multiplicities and diversities it is composed of, and that are the stuff it is made of. In a general manner, analyses of college education completely exclude any qualitative approach to leave but quantitativistic, quantifying considerations, when it should instead be put (back) at the very core of its reflexion on universality. No real, deep reform of college can take place if no qualitative dimension is taken into account. If strictly quantitative, any reform can only be but a mutilated reform, for it only corresponds to a single, unidimensional view of the goals of college in tomorrow's society.

2. In the field of education as in many others, globalization produced and is still producing effects that were not always too well anticipated, whether they are (to cite only two examples) those of commercial liberalization, or those of the fast evolution of information and communication technologies. In a way or another, they question the role

of State in the definition and conducting of education policies, therefore calling for a renewed reflexion.

That reflexion is what this workshop shall strive to contribute to, by formulating a constataion, identifying an objective, defining a method.

Constataion.

Several diversification movements are observed:

- Diversification of education actors.

That diversification is not merely a consequence of a possible “privatisation” (greater or lesser) of the education sector. In many European states, public and private actors have actually been coexisting for a long time, often (from a historical point of view) on a religious basis. Diversification also comes from the evolution of private actors themselves, and the increased presence of actors motivated by commercial logics, even if not exclusively so. It also comes from the presence of actors of “exterior” origin, foreign or possibly multinational (actors of multinational range).

Diversification of the actors also includes that of the audience, which certainly wishes for expansion (or, as it is sometimes referred to, “democratisation”) of education, but also for movement or increased mobility of the audiences (though it should not be exaggerated either, and should be addressed in a differentiated way according to the education level).

Diversification, at last, is also connected to the rise of new kinds of actors, in response to new concerns such as evaluation, control, quality verification, creation of labels, normalisation, etc. All quantitative in nature...

- Diversification of methods and means of education.

That diversification is not a mere result from that of the actors, but also from technological innovations that allowed circulation of different models, their possible mixing and crossbreeding, their common inflexion due to a dematerialisation, which raises again the issue of the technical, financial, but also human means of education.

- Diversification of objectives or logics

Liberalisation, if carried out according to commercial logics, is not beneficial solely to actors moved by commercial logics. Education has always been counting some ideological or identity stakes, which contribute to structure the educational system (identification through religion, culture, language, minority origin, etc.). Those stakes, far from being reduced, are developing (an example: the development of sectarian-typed organisations in the educational sector).

If those various tendencies can contribute to facilitate access to education for all, and increase the educational offer, they may as well cause perverse effects, and hypothetically raise new issues and new needs.

Among those issues, one major one is the role of the State in this renewed context, for the State may not renounce its responsibilities, if it were only for existing international obligations that force it to ensure the right to education, including all of the associated implications.

The Objective.

The aim is to contribute to realizing what the situation is and coordinating the appropriate response, while comparing two realities (Chinese / European) concerning the function of the State in reform policies.

More specifically, the objective in those discussions is to identify the different kinds of experience that better allow to evaluate college reform projects – within a liberalisation logic or not – and the decision and action margins that are necessary for a suitable endorsement of college's social responsibility.

A few working guidelines:

- Diagnose the progression of college reform in different contexts: China/Europe.
- Lead a reflexion on the goals and modalities associated with defining indicators that are qualitative in nature.
- In 2001, the ministers of education responsible for the Bologna process pointed out that college education is a public good, and is therefore of public responsibility. Is it?

Those reflexions will be led from a series of questions:

Can we bring into light the positive or negative effects of the liberalisation of education, in a China/Europe context?

In your opinion, what are the main responsibilities of the State? What should be the ways and the range of the State's control, especially concerning private actors of college education?

How about college education being free? Does it make sense? If it does, how to enforce it?

What are the elements of a "common base" that would constitute a shared reference at the international level?

What structures and criteria should be promoted concerning quality evaluation: the 100% quantitative approach, or a sensible dosage between qualitative and quantitative?

Is there anything such as European college education? Is the Bologna process an integration mechanism, or standardising logic?

What kinds of cooperation should exist between Europe and China?

Prolonging the WT14 workshop

Designing qualitative evaluation criteria for college reform, inventory of publications on the subject, designing a working methodology, forming teams.

Leading initiatives of reflexion on college reform should be continued within the activities of the Institute for European Studies – Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Staying available for any partner wishing to put their reforming ambitions to the test of reflexion and realisation.

Publishing the results of every experiment.

Alfredo Pena-Vega
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Temporary list

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In 2007 Kristine Bruland works in the French-Norwegian cooperation center in social and human sciences. She is a professor of economic history in the history department of the University of Oslo (Norway), and a guest professor in the University of Strasbourg. She got a PhD in modern history from the University of Oxford. Her researches address the following themes: (i) technological change and industrial development, where she emphasizes the importance of social and institutional change to create the necessary conditions for industrial innovation. (ii) International technological diffusion and its role in industrialisation, where she emphasizes the importance of increasing the population's literacy, migration, public policies for education and strategies used by companies to promote innovation. (iii) The third theme deals with the production of knowledge, and knowledge management in the 19th century's industr. (iv) Kristine Bruland is currently developing a project on education, and she organizes, among othr things, an international colloquium on "Education and economic development: historical and contemporary questions".

Kristine Bruland published several books and articles, among which: (dir.) Essays on Industrialization in France, Norway and Spain (Oslo 2005); British Technology and European Industrialization. The Norwegian Textile Industry in the mid-nineteenth Century (Cambridge 2003/1989); with P.K.O'Brien (dir.) From Family Firms to Corporate Capitalism (Oxford 1998); with Maxine Berg (dir.) Technological Revolutions in Europe, Historical Perspectives (Cheltenham; USA 1998), "Industrialisation and Technological Change" R.Floud og P.Johnson (dir.), The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain (Cambridge 2004); "The Management of Intellectual Property at Home and Abroad: Babcock & Wilcox 1850-1910" Ian Inkster (red.), History of Technology (London, 2002); med David Mowery "Innovation through Time" J.Fagerberg, D.Mowery et R.Nelson (dir.), The Oxford Handbook of Innovation (Oxford 2004).

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