

## China Crossroads Discussion Minutes

Topic: Education System in China  
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### Equality

In China, education inequality has been a prominent problem among regions and within schools in the same city [Rong]. Take Gaokao (College Entrance Exam) system as an example, the disparity of admission quota between provinces seems to suggest that students in Beijing are somehow "superior" than students in other provinces. Although it's difficult to disprove this assumption [Su], the transition from "one exam for all" model to the current "one exam for one region" model, on the contrary, suggests that the government intentionally tried to conceal the inequality issue [Junze]. This is similar to the "Elevator Phenomenon" when people inside an elevator refuse to take more people in [Rong].

The issue becomes more complex if one argues that a standard test itself is not a fair measure. Unfortunately, it seems that Gaokao is currently the most fair selection system we could possibly have in China [Jingsi]. However, within the top 5% of students, one cannot and should not try to measure who is better. It's also impossible to select the great minds from a standard examination [Florian]. In the US, the SAT is also getting more and more unpopular [Dheera]. Moreover, education itself should be beyond the concept of selection [Donna].

The root cause for the inequality, however, may be the insufficient education resources available in China and thus the inequality is somewhat inevitable [Weiqi]. Although Gaokao is a fair exam system in the sense that it uses a single measurement, students in underdeveloped areas in China have long suffered from poor education system from primary schools and consequently they are no longer at the same level facing Gaokao [Chung]. So the bottom-up approach - creating better education system in less developed area could be a priority for China's education development [Chung]. Another important aspect of providing more education resources is to build more universities. (Side mark: the working model in US universities is that each of them adopts an independent yet complicated admission system [Dheera].)

Applying technologies (online teaching software for example) to provide better educational resources for students in less developed areas is promising [Benyue]. However, this approach may only work for the students who are self-motivated [Cody]. Additionally, technologies are easy to be misused to hinder the critical and creative thinking process [Dheera]. Finally, we should not forget that there are a large number of people out there in the world waiting for more and better education resources. For example, in India, 1/4 people are still illiterate [Dheera].

### **Creativity**

Why do Chinese university graduates have difficulties in finding jobs in a booming market [Florain]? First and maybe the foremost of all, knowledge that college graduates learn does not fit the skills required by the market, partly because of the typical industry structure in China [Su]. Secondly, college graduates also have higher expectations and are reluctant to work for "not-so-good" jobs. Lots of them use graduate schools as a buffer for the job market [Weiqi]. And lastly, lots of students really do not learn anything useful in the college. And obviously, it's not only their fault [Weiqi].

So where does creativity come from? It stems from a relatively free environment. You cannot be creative under constant pressure [Chung]. External motivations may get you good test results, but creativity mostly comes from internal motivations, like interest and passion [Florain]. Sparks also come from the interactions among people with different backgrounds [Chung]. Creativity can even be promoted by providing equal opportunities [Takuji]. One thing we might omit is that students need to be inspired by teachers or other things to trigger their passion [Dheera]. The bottom line here is that creativity is part of the human potentials. Given opportunities and a flexible environment, everyone can be creative in his or her own way.

Teachers are the most important part in implanting independent thinking and creative minds [Fei]. Innovative ways of thinking should be rewarded in class. But the adoption of this rewarding creativity practice should be rewarded in the first place [Fei]. However, teachers might not need to do a lot of things. They can try to include self-teaching approach – letting students to choose everything they want to learn [Dheera] or to engage fun, exciting and inspiring ways of teaching [Feng], but they can also choose to stay out of the way and simply try not to kill the creativity [Cody]. In some sense, creativity cannot be taught. What the

teachers need to do is to let the kids realize that they are able to be creative [Feng]! It's much harder to do than saying. The implementation requires good teachers who really understand the meaning and importance of innovative ways of teaching [Cody]. But it is feasible if innovative ways of teaching can be institutionalized [Florian].

Chinese culture tends to be conservative in terms of trying new things. Does that have anything to do with the creativity [Jingsi]? Germany case may provide partial answers. In Germany, almost every family keeps a toolbox to fix stuff at home; many people love to discuss philosophical issues over dinner. And that's perhaps why Germany produced so many philosophers and world-class manufacturers. So innovation is usually not learnt from schools but from life [Florian]. It is still arguable whether traditional Chinese culture could adapt and fit into the modern concept of innovation. However, it is obvious that we should not limit our focus in school education. Innovation of a country calls for social values that embrace changes [Florian] and flexible systems that support new ideas [Weiqi].

Let us not forget some of the classical views on the purpose of education: To search for the truth, to enlighten society, to drive the advancement of science, and to preserve individual differences. The last one - to embrace individual diversity – may have many practical meanings today. One may not be a great innovator, but everyone can be an independent thinker [Ross]. Independent thinking may serve as a premise to foster creative minds [Weiqi], and we should caution against deviating from this wisdom because of religious, social and cultural reasons in China and the rest of the world [Dheera].