

Chapter 12

The State Role in Excellent University Policies in the Era of Globalization: The Case of China



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Abstract In order to obtain considerable amounts of capitalist profit available in a globalized market, individual countries need to enhance their own international competitiveness – a goal that can be achieved through the channel of schools by cultivating human capital. The linear linkage among globalization, international competitiveness, human capital and higher education has convinced many countries to engage in the expansion of higher education institutes. The notion of international competition further generates the idea of university ranking and, in turn, many countries have viewed the world class university as the top priority on the political agenda. As neo-liberalism has become a prevailing new world value, constructed by America, the private sector that addresses efficiency is defined as the best mode of running the higher education market. Therefore, this mode functions as the gateway of achieving this political mission. However, this approach may jeopardize state sovereignty because if the state is unable to balance the relation between capital accumulation and social justice, it cannot win people’s trust. The interactive prin-

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principle between social cultures and education policies also rejects the universal practicality of free market logic. In order to overcome these challenges, individual countries may adopt transformative strategies, allowing them to improve the international reputation of their own top universities. This essay sets out to shed some light on this issue through examining the case of the Double-First-Class-Universities initiative in China.

Introduction

Numerous prominent sociologists have highlighted, from a variety of perspectives, the profound influence the State can have on education policy. For Marxists, education functions as an instrument for dispersing ideology or consolidating the cultural hegemony of dominant classes. Scholars influenced by Foucault tend to see the state as a device for producing social discourses that shape people's minds in order to exercise social control. Although Marxists and Foucauldians differ with regard to how they understand means of domination and the exercise of power, they both stress the connection between value and social control, especially as exerted by the state. In contrast to these two schools, the concept of internal rationalization focuses on the positive function of the state—protecting the common good—so that the main purpose of national policies is to create advantages for the majority of citizens.

While integrating these different perspectives would provide systematic insights into the characters of the state, they are not as helpful when considering the impact of globalization on its operations. The theory of isomorphism may be able to fill this gap, through its notion of an institutionalized milieu constantly refabricated by globalization. However, because this theory addresses efficiency that homogenizes configurations and operations of organizations, its converting-led approach, may neglect nuanced variations in different countries' policies. In response to the globalized system, nations may adopt transformative tactics to meet the new requirements brought about by social changes. Furthermore, because such an efficient-based perspective adopts a homogeneous assumption, assuming that all organizational members are selflessly committed to accomplishing organizational goals, isomorphism situates the status of power as neutral. In fact, individual actors have their own subjective intentions, so that the exercise of power may be regulated personal preferences. This principle suggests that the connection between power and top politicians' self-interest appears to reconstitute the performances of the state. The present essay proposes that the beliefs of leading politicians should be seen as the core element in molding the state's role in higher education policies. In recent years, many countries have been devoting themselves to increasing their international competitiveness through the expansion of excellent universities, which are viewed as gateways to improving the quality of human capital (Chiang 2011). As the Chinese government has implemented policies promoting the development of excellent universities for over two decades, changes in these policies provide a typical

case for examining what the role of the state in the higher education policy is, how it performs different roles and the ways in which such changes interweave with the beliefs of top politicians. In short, this essay sets out to discover the correlation between top politicians' beliefs and the state.

The State's Role—From Superstructure to Cultural Hegemony

Sociology has long sought to characterize the features of the state. Marx (1969), for example, portrays the state as an agent disseminating dominant value to control working classes through the exercise of superstructure. This social control mechanism blurs the class consciousness of the working class which, in turn, diminishes social conflict between capitalists and proletarians. For Althusser (1971), the state is comprised of a repressive state apparatus (RSA) and an ideological state apparatus (ISA). The ISA is responsible for the function of value construction and education, which is mainly achieved through a wide range of social institutions, such as family, school, religion, culture, party, medium, union and law. This account of the exercise of superstructure pictures the relation between superstructure and base as unidirectional, largely neglecting the reactions of the dominated groups. Further, traditional Marxists focus only on economic and political dimensions, so that the influence of the cultural dimension of the state is largely ignored. The theory of cultural hegemony, proposed by Gramsci (1971), redresses these weaknesses. For Gramsci, social control is not mainly reliant upon coercive force, the exercise of which is mainly through political society, but upon social consensus, the voluntarism of which can be shaped through civil society in reeducation. In contrast to political society, civil society can generate a more profound influence on the behavior of social members, because when the mainstream social culture is able to transmit legitimate values that drive actions, social cultures embody political functions that serve the interests of the ruling classes. Although cultural hegemony embodies the mechanism of social control, the character of this domination is never static, but always dynamic. When the ruled groups question a popular belief, this will jeopardize the sovereignty of the ruling classes, who then constantly need to employ organic intellectuals to amend the existing cultural hegemony or to construct a new one. This is because unlike traditional intellectuals who hold their own beliefs, organic intellectuals serve the interests of the ruling groups by transforming their ideas into the mainstream social culture. This relation shows how domination triggers resistance and resistance leads to a new stage of consensus/domination. Hall (1993) conceptualizes such dynamic interactions as "moving equilibrium", a notion later utilized by others to examine youth sub-cultures that refuse to be dominated by mainstream social culture. Teds, Lads (Cohen 1971; Hebdige 1979), counter-school culture (Corrigan 1979; McLaren 1989; Willis 1977), or not acting white (Ogbu 2003) all project resistant actions that attempt to reverse the dominated social status

of certain groups by allowing them to assume the role of master. This rejection of domination enables them to sustain their working-class identity. Cultural hegemony indicates a new mode of domination through the construction of social beliefs that help the dominant group attain social consensus, which is achieved by seizing intellectual supremacy. This political action transforms intellectuals and the state into the agents of construction of popular thought. This is in line with Gramsci's idea that the state functions as educator (Gramsci 1971).

Similarly, Poulantzas (1979) highlights the educating feature of the state by illustrating how it may employ the system of democracy to redefine social inequity. The inclusion of various groups under the state generates "relative autonomy" allowing the state, under the banner of democracy, to transfer social inequity from the domain of social structure to the private sphere. Dominant classes are thus committed to promoting the democratic value of treating individual citizens equally, so that personal achievements are mainly determined by their own intelligence and efforts. Once again, the state here acts as an educator, proactively producing an ideology that rationalizes existing inequities arising from the social structure.

Social Discourse, Internal Rationality and Policy

In a similar vein, Foucault (1972) argues that the state actively creates the value of dominant classes in social discourses. Because discourses are the primary mechanism of social control, power produces orthodoxy. On this account, social discourses function to establish legitimate knowledge, which is justified by reference to the ostensible neutrality of the state. Thus the state as such incorporates and conceals the political goals of the dominant group, which are all aimed at maintaining privilege. According to Foucault (1991), the internalization of dominant values produces docility, since existent social institutions are perceived as natural and inevitable. Social control is therefore no longer reliant upon coercive force; populations are controlled rather by schooling. Social control thus shifts from corporal punishment to spiritual discipline.

In this light, social engineering can thus be conceptualized as the art of 'shaping souls,' functioning to commit the subject to particular values and ways of life. Even when the direct political power of the state over individuals is weak, it can shape citizens' souls by schooling, i.e. by reassembling them in a synthesis of power and duties articulated in the grammar of social necessities (Rose 1999). Because the operation of civil society is based on a voluntarism that fuses individual minds into a social soul, education is the most efficient way to make people think and act in accordance with the goals and ideals of elites (Popkewitz 2000; Säfström 2005). Shaping souls is then a form of social technology, or "governmentality". Examples from education abound: teachers' education that successfully reconstitutes beliefs and pedagogical practices (Popkewitz 1994), and, as suggested by the notion of performativity, teachers' contributions to organizational development are verified

through psychological rewards such as pride, honor and ideas of excellence (Ball 2006).

In defining the state as a political instrument serving the interests of elites, positive functions of the state are largely disregarded. In contrast, integrating Parsons' (1951), discussion of the relation between social systems and functions, and Weber's (1964), examination of the features of bureaucratic rationality, Offe (1985a, b, 1996) articulates the idea of internal rationality to illustrate the positive features of the state. With these works in mind, the state can be interpreted as a device the primary function of which is to protect the common good through the implementation of bureaucratic rationality at the level of the state. On this account, regulations and duties, stipulated by legitimate authority derived from the bureaucratic system as such, can curb the personal impulses and private interests of civil servants, making them loyal in the first instance to that system (the government) and thus, by extension, to the greater good of all.

Working for the welfare of the citizenry, policies would then be designed to protect public interests. Economic activities are normally viewed as the gateway to proceeding social progression. This relation encourages civil servants to introduce more policies contributing to economic development with the feature of capital accumulation. However, if the state inclines to capital accumulation, this situation will deteriorate social justice. Regarding social development, it is the state's obligation to balance the relation between capital accumulation and social justice. If governmental officials fail to implement this collective mission, people will no longer trust in the state, depriving it of the core element that sustains its sovereignty. In other words, in order to win the trust of the people, the state needs to balance the relation between capital accumulation and social justice. Its collective duty is then, among other things, to improve the lives of its citizens through policies that can improve the standard of living of most members of the polity. On such a reading of the functions of the state, it is no longer an instrument for serving the interests of the dominant classes, but a mechanism for stimulating social development.

Isomorphism, Globalization and Higher Education

While Offe's argument fills gaps in the theories of Gramsci and Foucault, his functional perspective is confined to the nation-state. As such, the effects of globalization are generally underestimated. Currently, the globalized market is the main source of capitalist profit, a situation that compels countries to shift their focus from the domestic economy to the global one. International competitiveness is the byword of political economy, diminishing the cause of social justice on the political agenda of many countries (Chiang 2013). Globalization has come to constitute a new form of institutionalized context that places demands for policy modification on many, if not all, national governments. As Meyer (1977) points out, beliefs can generate collective expectations that gear governmental policies, as is evident in the case of education. The public believe that education can increase the chances of upward

mobility among working class students, and this social expectation in turn compels the government to undertake reforms of the education system. The expansion of higher education and the proliferation of its institutions are emblematic for the correlation between social values and institutionalization. According to Schofer and Meyer (2005), many countries used to adopt the elite mode to run the higher education market due to fear of an oversupply of human resources that might engender social and political crises. But this concern was replaced by aspirations, after the Second World War, to make human capital the main resource for stimulating social development. This value led to a dramatic expansion in the number of institutions for higher education. Furthermore, democratic notions and the values of freedom of thought and expression have been embraced by many countries and introduced into their school curricula in an attempt to liberalize society and confer agency to individuals (Lerch et al. 2017). Moreover, globalization has forced many countries to incorporate cosmopolitanism into the school curriculum. At the same time, there is a trend toward isomorphism, i.e. the homogenization of institutional arrangements and their organizational form, structure and operation in education at all levels (Meyer et al. 1997). While the perspective of isomorphism recognizes the influence of globalization on the state, it only addresses the interplay between values and institutionalized settings without including the relation between values and power. This neglect fails to uncover the correlation between power, top politician and policy. Particularly, power can be viewed as the core element in initiating governmental policies. Because power is normally exercised by the elites of a political system, their ideas and goals can accommodate the requirements of globalization into national policies. In this case, the influence of globalization isn't directly imposed upon individual governments but is regulated by the leadership of political elites. As the theories of glocalization propose, the universalism of globalization and the specialization of localism can be integrated (Khondker 2004; Robertson 1992). According to Luhmann (1995), unique functions are the core component of sustaining the independent operation of a system. In order to maintain such independence, individual systems need to proceed with functional evolution. In order to generate the best outcomes, such evolution needs to be based on a principle that individual systems or sub-systems should recognize the new requirements of social changes in their own way and develop creative action schemes based on their advantages. Without such a strategy, it is very difficult for individual systems to evolve their unique functions and this situation will undermine their independent operation. Both the perspectives of glocalization and system individuation highlight how the state may employ an adoptive strategy to maximize its own advantages in an institutionalized milieu formed by globalization. When national policies are conditioned by power, the leadership of political elites is the core element in initiating such an adoption. In other words, their personal conviction may function as the buffer, accommodating the international requirements into endemic features. The transformative role of the state in institutionalized settings created by globalization is also regulated by such commitment.

The operation of a globalized market is largely based upon a consensus within the international community. In advocating the advantages of neo-liberalism, the

US behaves in this context like a transnational corporation creating a discursive environment that promotes its interests (Berberoglu 2003). It performs this role through the actions of international agencies, such as the World Bank, the IMF (Hytrek and Zentgraf 2008; Stiglitz 2002), the WTO (Robertson et al. 2006) and the OECD (Rizvi and Lingard 2006), which it influences through its status as dominant sponsor. Since a number of senior personnel reshuffles beginning in the early 1980s, these international institutes have become committed to promulgating the discourse of deregulation and free trade, and establishing neo-liberalism as both the aim and underpinning of the process of globalization (Heywood 2003).

Most nations have no choice but to join the capital game of globalization, as evidenced by the fact that the WTO's constitution has eroded the control of individual nations over tax policy for imported commodities (Dale 2003). Embracing globalization, however, involves the exercise of national transformative strategies, so that many countries are actively engaged in modifying themselves in order to meet the requirements of the global system (Lingard 2000; Olssen 2006; Rizvi 2000). For such countries, improving international competitiveness to achieve this modification is now regarded as a national mission. With globalization having fused many countries into an interlocking body, the focus of competitiveness has shifted from the domestic to the international level. The OECD has proffered a linear model for the relation between globalization, international competitiveness, human capital and higher education, establishing a new world value that appropriates the higher education policies of many countries, shifting them from an elite mode to a mass one (Morrow and Torres 2000; Rizvi and Lingard 2006). Because free market ideology emphasizes individual choices and personal achievements, personal effort is, on this model, construed as the crucial factor for the achievement of successful outcomes (Blackmore 2006). The combination of individualism and international competitiveness thus evolved into the notion that the provision of education should no longer be classified as a citizen's basic right, but rather as a personal choice, since individual actors can rationally calculate the returns on educational investment. This redefinition abrogates the state's structural constraint of public obligation (McCarthy and Dimitriadis 2006). When personal qualities are held to account for failure, poverty, criminality and inequity, public services are no longer associated with collective interests, but reduced to the outcome of personal preferences and predilections. The new function of the state is now to enhance employability or individual self-sufficiency in its people through education (Lingard 2000). This phenomenon is an important element in national strategies to attempt to improve international competitiveness and acquire a greater share of the global market. This inclination to state capital accumulation occurs, as mentioned, at the expense of social and economic equity (Chiang 2013).

The notion of efficiency, central to neoliberalism, now plays a fundamental role in the administration of higher education. The ideas of free market logic, such as deregulation and privatization, require a drastic reduction in state-funded public services, which are considered monopolies and thus hindrances to competition and thus to efficiency. (Olssen et al. 2004). To the extent that publicly funded education exists, it is to be run according to the principles of New Public Management (Chiang

2016; Olssen et al. 2004; Rizvi and Lingard 2006), implemented through the strategy of devolution—transforming them into independent units responsible for their outcomes. As a result, the entrepreneurial rules of a new model of industrial production have become axiomatic for the administration of institutions of higher education (Bok 2003; Chiang 2014; Currie 2004). Legitimated by reference to the demands of efficiency, governments regularly audit the outcomes of public sector organizations (Ball 2006). Such governmental actions serve, for instance, to justify the status of elite universities; the designation of excellence intensifies mechanisms of entrance selection which may in turn exacerbate the phenomenon of cultural reproduction, since, in comparison to their middle and upper class counterparts, working class students are normally situated in a less privileged learning position due to their practical habitus (Bourdieu 1993) or restricted code (Bernstein 1996). Inevitably, the exercise of international competitiveness may undermine educational equity.

The theory of internal rationality would not then seem to make sense of the state's role in balancing the relation between capital accumulation and social justice. Furthermore, the state may employ international competitiveness to justify cultural hegemony or as a social discourse rescinding its public obligation. Nevertheless, globalization comes to form an institutionalized milieu in which transformative strategies are used to secure the prospect of national development and thus enable the government to handle the tension between capital accumulation and social justice. In this regard, the state does not perform as an apparatus for the production of cultural hegemony or social discourses, but practices its collective duties to win trust from people by improving their living standards. Elite universities can cultivate more highly qualified professionals who can contribute to the prospect of national development due to the close relation between human capital and international competitiveness; the creation of excellent institutes of higher education, therefore, becomes vital. The operations of government necessarily imply the exercise of power, and the intentions of those in power are therefore directly germane to the operations of government. In short, politicians at the top are key agents in the formulation of explicit policy. Even if we grant that self-interest and the seeking of personal advantage cannot be entirely avoided, the legitimacy of governments rests on the attitudes of those governed. The actions of powerful elites are thus always, in one form or another, a response to the collective expectations of civil society. In particular, when social inequity reaches dangerous levels that threaten to tear the fabric of society, the state will be expected to govern, that is, to realize its mission of securing the collective good. This correlation constitutes a mechanism through which public service can trump the temptation for private gain among government officials. For political leaders concerned with social justice, a space is thereby opened to undertake a new higher education policy with the aim of reducing educational inequity. One consideration in this regard is geographical allocations in the expansion of top universities. Chinese culture values collectivism, requiring the national leader to perform as a social guardian, so the Anglo-Saxon paradigm of elite universities would need to be modified to some extent in China. The commitments of the government leadership determine how this modification is conceived

and implemented. In light of these possible formulations, we can now explore how the quest for international competitiveness constantly steers top university policy in China, and why the present national leadership is committed to introducing the Double-World-Class-Universities Initiative and the Excellent Disciplines Plan.

Higher Education Under the Leadership of President Xi Jinping

China has clearly profited from a globalized market, much due to its economic reforms. Since Deng Xiaoping's rise to leadership in 1978, the Chinese government has adopted a strategy that integrates aspects of liberalism with of the teachings of Marxism. National Leader Deng was committed to modernizing China because he believed that improving the living standard of people was the best way of sustaining state sovereignty and stability. This intention generated the philosophy of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, allowing him to import free market logic to improve declining national production. The program of *Gaige Kaifang* (literally "reforms and openness", but often summed up as the *Four Modernizations*) was born in this milieu, and resulted in the initiation of large-scale economic reforms commencing from 1979, resulting in, for example, the creation of Special Economic Zones in Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Xiamen and Shantou. In order to participate in the developing global market, Deng further introduced the Open Door policy in 1984, mainly implemented in coastal areas such as Tianjin, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, the Yangtze River Delta, the Pearl River Delta (Deng 2001), and the Financial Zone in Pudong, Shanghai (SCPRC 1990). This free market driven approach proved fruitful. The national statistical data listed in Table 12.1 demonstrate a strong ascendant trend in national economic growth.

While the Open Door policy was mainly exercised in coastal areas, successive national leaders have further expanded economic reform policies to Henan, Anhui, Hubei, Jiangxi, Hunan, Jilin and Heilongjiang, which are geographically adjacent to the coastal areas. The indications are that the Open Door policy was first and most intensively implemented in coastal areas, followed by a more modest promotion in the central region and then by an unsystematic and insufficient implementation in the western region. This gradual trend paints a vivid picture of social inequity related to wealth distribution. While major metropolitan areas have become modernized and wealthy, as marked in the dotted circles in Fig. 12.1, the general impression is that this wealth generation has been concentrated in the big cities in the coastal zone, and decreases progressively from east to west. Therefore, China can be classified into three zones from the perspective of economic development: the coastal areas, the central region and the western region. Figure 12.1 shows how these geographic segments are related to wealth distribution.

In other words, the gap in wealth distribution among those three zones is huge. For example, the wealthiest cities and provinces, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin,

Table 12.1 GDP and per capita GDP in China from 2000 to 2017 in RMB

Year	GDP (unit: 100 million)	Per capita GDP
2000	100,280.1	7942
2001	110,863.1	8717
2002	121,717.4	9506
2003	137,422.0	10,666
2004	161,840.2	12,487
2005	187,318.9	14,368
2006	219,438.5	16,738
2007	270,232.3	20,505
2008	319,515.5	24,121
2009	349,081.4	26,222
2010	413,030.3	30,876
2011	489,300.6	36,403
2012	540,367.4	40,007
2013	595,244.4	43,852
2014	643,974.0	47,203
2015	689,052.1	50,251
2016	743,585.5	53,935
2017	827,121.7	59,660

Data from NBS (2018)

Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Guangdong, are all located in coastal areas. In contrast, most of the western region is economically underdeveloped and even poor, with personal incomes far lower than those in the other two regions. One of the crucial indicators of these differences is annual income per capita. The national statistical data listed in Table 12.2 confirms a vast gap between people living in urban and rural areas.

These gaps show that while the Open Door policy created considerable wealth for the coastal cities, most people in other regions did not benefit significantly from economic growth. While globalization normally generates an uneven distribution of wealth across countries (Chiang et al. 2014), President Xi Jinping, who was elected General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party at the 18th National Congress in 2012 and has been the president since 2013, is determined to reduce this social inequity. Drawing upon the philosophy of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, developed by the former National Leader Deng, President Xi proposed the New Era of China as a vision for the future China at the 19th National Congress of Chinese Communist Party in 2017, which embraces dual forms of governmental obligation, conceptualized as environmental protection and social guardianship. With regard to environmental protection, President Xi has publicly and repeatedly addressed the essential value of environmental sustainability. Inspired by Xi, a Green Movement has gradually spread over China, leading many local governments to become actively engaged in counter-pollution campaigns (CEPO 2018). With respect to the issue of social guardianship, President Xi interprets social equity as the very essence

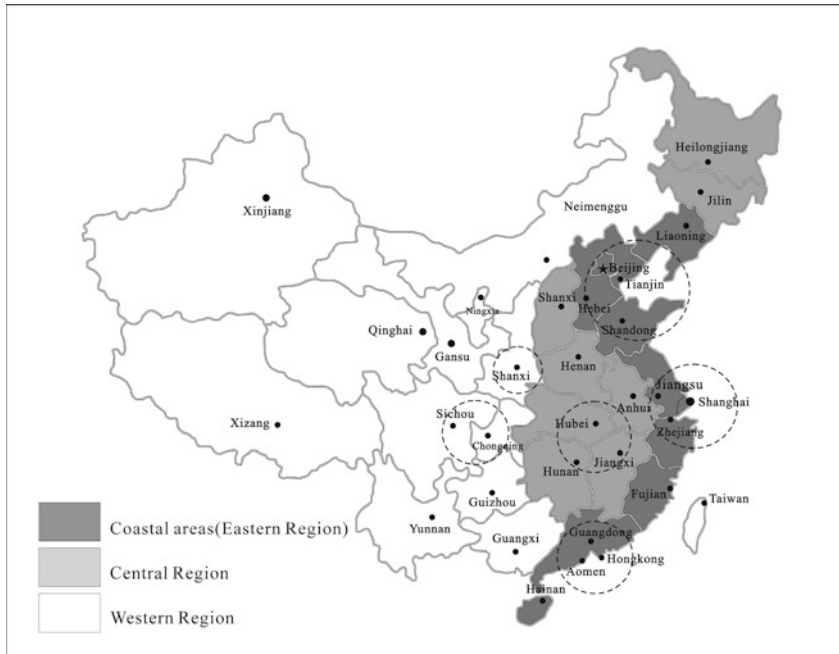


Fig. 12.1 Three zones of economic development in China

Table 12.2 The annual income after tax per capita

Year	Rural	Urban
2013	9430	26,467
2014	10,489	28,844
2015	11,422	31,195
2016	12,363	33,616
2017	13,432	36,396

Unit: RMB, data from NBS (2018)

of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (Wang 2016). He insists that all reforms have to focus on improving social justice and increasing people’s welfare, and that the ultimate goal of the Chinese Communist Party is to serve the interests of people (Xi 2013). This argument situates the enhancement of living standards as the top priority on the political agenda. For President Xi, social equity consists of three dimensions—rights, opportunities and rules—which can be practiced by an institutionalized system because it guarantees citizens have equal rights to social participation and development. The government is responsible for the establishment of this system in order to achieve this goal (Xi 2013). His commitment to social equity thus inspired the enactment of the Poverty Alleviation Program, targeting over 60 million persons who belonged to the poorest group (Xi 2017). One of its core goals

is that all children in rural areas shall have fair access to good quality education that helps him or her realize his or her potential (Tang 2015).

The Expansion of Top Universities

As the previous analysis shows, international competitiveness is a crucial element in sustaining the position of a given country in the globalized market. This principle has had a profound influence on how higher education policies have been reshaped in many countries. Although China is no exception, President Xi is also committed to improving educational inequity. Thus the state is confronted with a potential conflict between academic excellence and social equity. For President Xi, accelerating the economic development of the central and west areas will make a great contribution to social equity, and this development requires human capital. Therefore, creating more top universities in these areas is a strategy through which the government may resolve this dilemma. His advocacy of educational equity stimulated the central government to announce the Top Universities and Disciplines Plan in 2015, leading to the introduction of the World Class Universities Initiative and the Excellent Disciplines Program, officially launched in 2017. Before detailing these two programs, it is worth describing the 211 Project and the 985 Program, which were previously implemented in succession with the aim of creating top universities in China. The 211 Project, announced as the national higher education policy in 1993, aimed at raising 100 universities to the level of world recognition by the twenty-first century (MOE 1993). The central government further enacted the Overall Construction Plan of the 211 Project in 1995, which specified the purpose of the 211 Project, focusing on improving the standard of facilities, main disciplines and public services, thus ensuring the qualitative cultivation of human capital (MOE 1995). With a huge investment of extra resources, the 211 Project universities substantially improved their academic performance and therewith their international reputations (The 211 Project Working Group 2007). Because the 211 Project officially recognized those selected higher education institutions as ‘top universities’, they became more competitive in terms of recruiting excellent academic researchers and students (Cuaa net 2014).

The central government later announced the 985 Program in 1999, targeting the creation of world class universities (CCSC 1999). The 985 Program was initiated by former President Jiang Zemin (1993–2013), who recognized the close connection between human capital and international competitiveness, as reflected in his speech at the ceremony for the 100th anniversary of Beijing University on May 4, 1998 (Jiang 1998). This talk prompted the Ministry of Education to launch the 985 Program, with a clear goal of raising 39 selected universities to the world-class level (MOE 1998). Having acquired official recognition and a sizable amount of extra funding from the central government, these 985 Program universities were designated “the best of the best” (Cuaa net 2014). As these 39 higher education institutions were also on the list of the 211 Project, there was naturally a heavy concentration

of funding allocations to these top universities. However, this concentration of funding greatly intensified the uneven geographic distribution of elite universities, without addressing the problems of education inequity. Furthermore, there was a strong correspondence between the geographic locations of the elite universities listed on both the 211 Project and the 985 Program, and the three zones of economic development. As Fig. 12.2 indicates, the 211 Project universities were concentrated in the coastal zone, with 57.8% (67 out of 116) being located in that region. The western region only included 19.8% (23). This imbalance reappears in Fig. 12.3, which shows that the coastal zone was home to 61.5% of the 985 Program universities (24 out of 39), as opposed to 18.0% in the western region. If we compare Figs. 12.1, 12.2 and 12.3, it is clear that the uneven distribution of top universities corresponds with the segments of the three economic regions. This lopsidedness suggests that excellent universities did not exercise the idea of education equity (Seventh Strategic Research Group 2010). In line with this structural constraint, elite universities tend to be dominated by students from wealthy areas. As economic capital is the basis for creating cultural capital, it is highly likely that middle- and upper-class students predominate at the best universities. A series of studies have documented this possible linkage by pointing out that the implementation of the 211 Project and the 985 Program was based upon an unfair competition (GPW 2015). Specifically, their entrance examination systems disadvantaged students from rural regions (DDP 2011; Southern Weekly 2011). As a result, the number of students from these

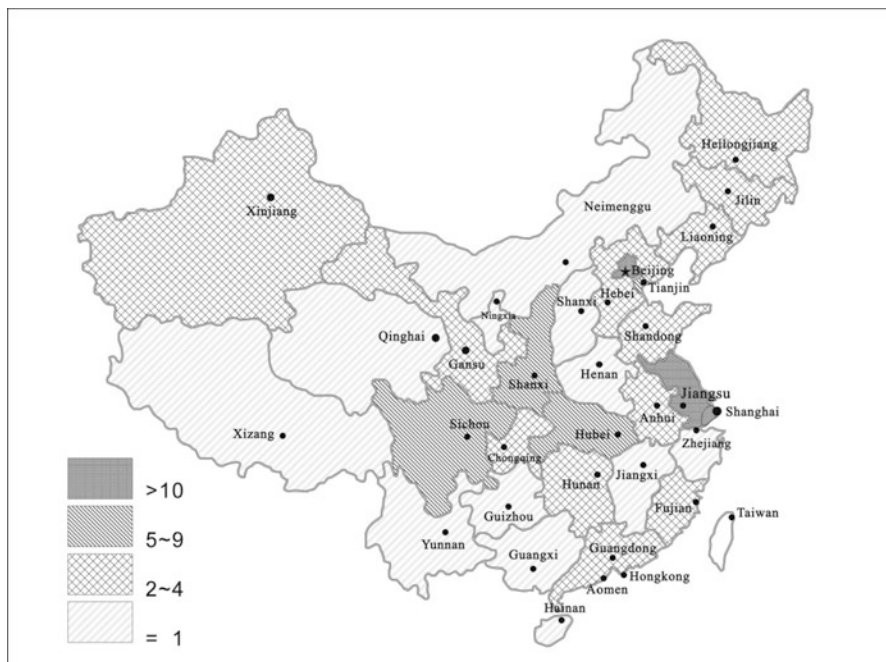


Fig. 12.2 Geographic locations of the 211 Project universities

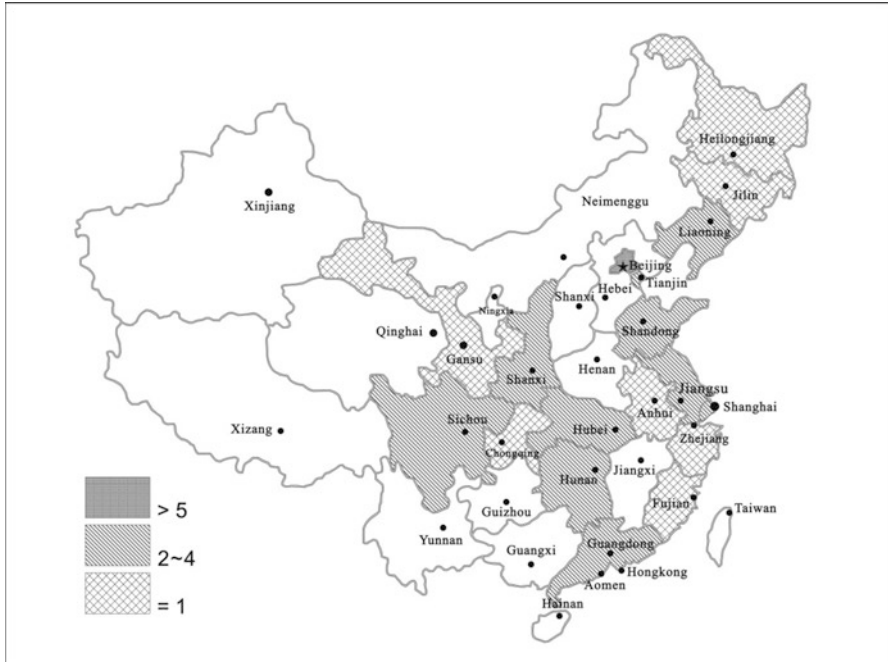


Fig. 12.3 Geographic locations of the 985 Project universities

regions registered at top universities shrunk, as was evident in the case of Tsinghua University, one of the top two higher education institutions in China, where the percentage of students from agricultural areas dropped from 21.7% in 1990 to 17.6% in 2000 (Xinhuanet 2005). A similar picture was found at Beijing University, with one striking finding indicating that this student group had reduced in number from between 20% and 40% from 1978 to 1998 to around 15% between 2000 and 2005 (Liu et al. 2009). Furthermore, the uneven distribution of top universities may impede the economic development of underdeveloped and poor regions insofar as institutions of higher education are the main instrument for the cultivation of the human capital that is the core element of the knowledge economy (Shen and Liu 2008; Tang 2011; Zhao et al. 2007). The examples demonstrate that while the uneven distribution of wealth tends to situate students from rural regions in an unprivileged position, and these students are generally classified as working class in the sociological perspective, the 211 Project and the 985 Program further intensified this connection, and are likely to have contributed to the phenomenon of cultural reproduction.

In response to this educational inequity, President Xi has repeatedly emphasized the notion of social justice. This concern prompted the establishment of a working group in 2015, which designed the framework of the Double World Class Universities Initiative and the Excellent Disciplines Plan. Its report explicitly emphasized the balance between excellence and social justice by proposing that the central

government construct a certain number of world class universities and disciplines, and expand this number by 2020 and 2030 respectively, through the strategy of internationalization. It also addressed the value of differentiated development of top universities and excellent disciplines (GPW 2015; Wu 2017). Based upon these proposals, the central government officially introduced the Double World Class Universities Initiative and the Excellent Disciplines Plan in 2017. In order to balance the relation between excellence and social justice, the Double World Class Universities Initiative includes 42 universities, consisting of the 39 universities of the 985 Program and three institutions of higher education from underdeveloped and poor areas. Specifically, Zhengzhou University, Xinjiang University and Yunnan University are located in Henan Province, Xinjiang Province and Yunnan Province respectively, and belong to the central and western regions of China. Figure 12.4 shows that the Initiative addresses the central government’s concern to expand the range of top universities from coastal areas to the central and western regions.

In order to reduce educational inequity, the central government has further included all provinces in the Excellent Disciplines Plan. Furthermore, as showed in Fig. 12.5, there are a considerable number of universities in the central region that are on the list of the Excellent Disciplines Plan.

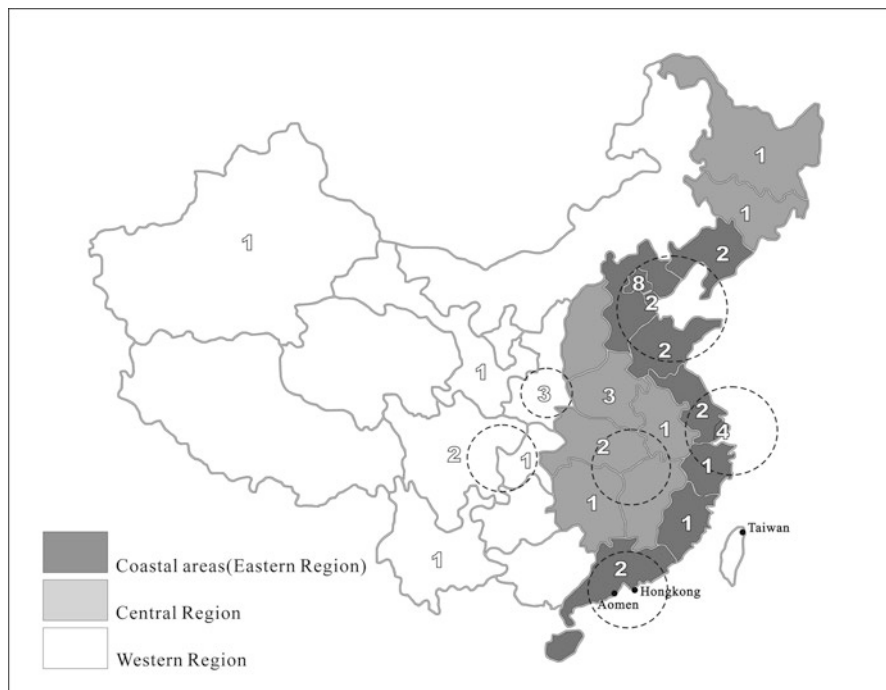


Fig. 12.4 Geographic locations of the Double World Class Universities

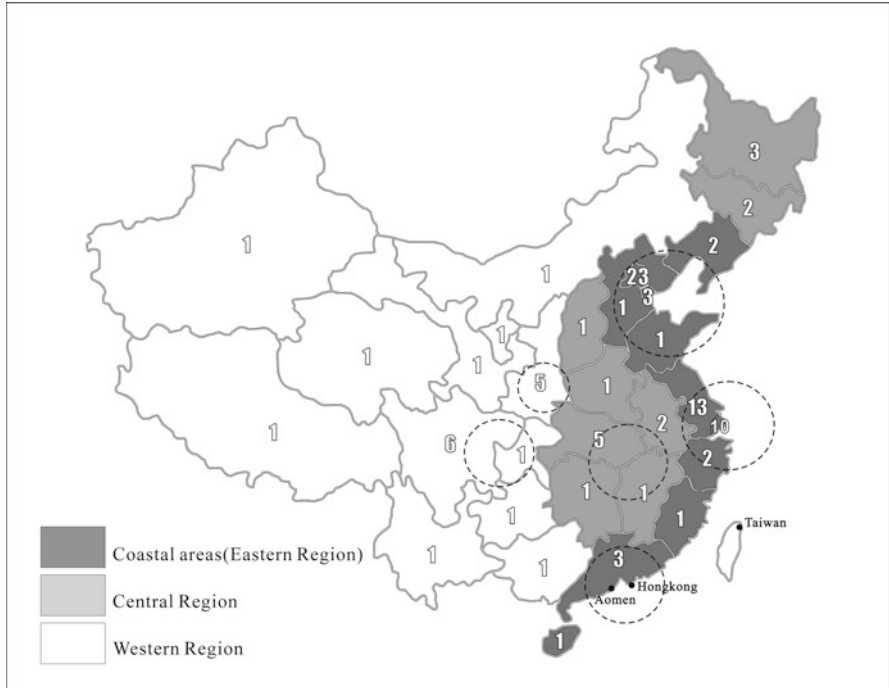


Fig. 12.5 Geographic locations of Excellent Disciplines

Conclusions

In most of the sociological studies that we have reviewed, the function of the state is described either as an instrument of social control or as a guarantor of public good. Both conflictual and functional approaches adopt a fixed characterization without including the dynamic development of the state in different contexts. Although the notion of isomorphism highlights the influence of globalization on the state, it fails to account for the correlation between power and the leadership of top politicians. Therefore, we propose that their commitments should function as the core element in regulating the state's role in higher education. Furthermore, the practice of such commitments should be conditioned by the institutionalized requirements constituted by globalization. This is because international competitiveness demands that its member countries cultivate human capital through the gateway of top university policies. When the state inclines to capital accumulation, the resultant situation may undermine social justice and thus state sovereignty. In terms of reducing the tension between capital accumulation and social justice, individual top politicians may have their own viewpoints. In order to examine this hypothesis, the article set out to explore why the policies of top universities in China change.

Our analysis shows that in order to modernize Chinese society, the national leadership focused on how to profit from the globalized market. Top university schemes, notably the 211 Project and the 985 Program, were viewed as gateways to improving human capital and fortifying China's international competitiveness. An unanticipated consequence was that the uneven distribution of funding was detrimental to social justice, as evident in the segmented distribution of economic development in China. The consequences of the state's orientation toward capital accumulation on a global market can have deleterious consequences for some segments of society and thus undermine popular trust in national leadership. At the same time, this context also provides an opportunity for political leaders to restore social justice. Such a project, however, will be directed by their own convictions. This can be exemplified by the case of the 985 Program, which intensified the phenomenon of cultural reproduction. President Xi has set out to strengthen the role of the state in the effort to restore balance in the tension between capital accumulation and social justice via the implementation of the World Class Universities Initiative and the Excellent Disciplines Plan. The state performs different roles in an institutionalized environment that is being perpetually reconstituted by global trends, including economic globalization. The convictions and commitments of the national leaders are fundamental features of the exercise of power in this context. The global economic system constitutes the basic institutional environment to which the leaderships of individual countries have to adapt in organizing their own agendas to meet domestic needs. The accommodations made will be largely determined by leading politicians, which means that their commitments can and do reshape the state's role in educational policies. The structural constraints of the institutionalized context will necessarily predetermine the space of their operations to some degree, as illustrated by the example of the world class policy that has been formulated and reformulated against the backdrop of international competitiveness. To the extent that political commitments can deflect undesirable consequences of given structural constraints, the state itself can be seen as malleable, its functions evolving with changes in the circumstances in which it operates.

The case of the development of top university policies in China bears witness to this process.

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