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Liberal Arts in China's Modern Universities: Lessons from the Great Catholic Educator and Statesman, Ma Xiangbo

Abstract Ma Xiangbo was born in 1840 and became a pioneer of educational reform during the republican period. He was responsible for introducing the idea that science and humanities should be valued equally in liberal arts education, a concept that became key to the model of university education. Ma's view of education combined Western humanism and science with classical Confucian humanism. His ideas still have a referential value for contemporary Chinese higher education and society.

Keywords Ma Xiangbo, higher education, liberal arts education

Introduction

Ma Xiangbo, a pioneer of educational reform during the republican period, greatly influenced modern Chinese higher education. As a founder of three prominent universities—Aurora, Fudan, and Furen—Ma introduced the idea of valuing science and humanities equally for a well-rounded education. Ma's model of university education with a combination of Eastern and Western traditions has continued to inspire Chinese educators and has had a major impact on contemporary liberal arts education in China.

The first part of this paper will focus on what prepared Ma Xiangbo for his important task. The second part will introduce key ideas of Jesuit education and its influence on Ma Xiangbo's educational thought. The last part will analyze the main elements of his educational theory and how he tried to make it a reality. At the same time, the author will reflect on the long-term implications of Ma Xiangbo's ideas about education for contemporary Chinese universities' mission and vision.

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Background

Ma Xiangbo was born on April 17, 1840, into a well-to-do Catholic family in Dantu County, Jiangsu Province. He was baptized when he was one month old and brought up in a strict Catholic tradition of faith. He was also educated in the Chinese classics in traditional private schools. However, the young Ma Xiangbo was not satisfied with this traditional education (Wiest, 2002). At the age of 12, he visited his married sister in Shanghai and was amazed at the state of development in the city. He asked to stay in Shanghai to enroll in the newly opened French Jesuit school, *Collège de Saint-Ignace*, in the Xujiahui District of Shanghai. The years spent studying and working at St. Ignace (1851–1870) laid the foundation for his acceptance of concepts of Western education, especially that of whole-person formation (Jiang, 2011). During his studies at St. Ignace, Ma Xiangbo not only learned the Chinese traditions and classics systematically but was also educated in the Western disciplines of Latin, Greek, mathematics and philosophy, among other subjects. Later, he was invited to teach classical Chinese literature and philosophy at St. Ignace. As China faced great challenges resulting from Western incursions in the middle of the nineteenth century, Ma Xiangbo began to discern how his future career would serve his nation. With the full support of his mother, he joined the Jesuits in 1862, underwent philosophical, theological, and spiritual training, obtained his doctoral degree with distinction in 1869, and was ordained a priest in 1870. During these years Ma Xiangbo became close to an Italian Jesuit, Fr. Angelo Zottoli, S. J., who encouraged him to deepen his knowledge of the Chinese classics and to study Western science and literature, following the example of Matteo Ricci's dialogue between the West and the East in the sciences, culture and humanities (Li, 1996).

From 1871 to 1875, Ma Xiangbo served as principal of St. Ignace College. During these four years, he was able to reform the pedagogy in a way that exposed students to the fundamentals of Chinese and European classical knowledge. On the one hand, he demanded that students be familiar with the Chinese classics before studying Western subjects. On the other hand, he wanted to make Western knowledge readily accessible to Chinese students (Zhu, 1996). As principal of one of the earliest Western-style secondary schools in Shanghai, Ma advocated a new curriculum that included a strong emphasis on Chinese classical literature and history as the basis, supplemented by advanced studies in Western mathematics, languages, and philosophy, following Jesuit patterns (Hayhoe, 1996b, p. 38). In 1876, Ma Xiangbo left the Jesuits, in protest against what he saw as the arrogance of the French Jesuits towards China. From 1876 to 1898, he took several minor positions in diplomatic and industrial circles, and worked closely with Li Hongzhang, who served as premier in the late Qing Dynasty. In 1885 and 1887 Ma Xiangbo toured the United States and Europe.

Seeing first-hand the development of these two continents, he was convinced that the educational systems in American and European universities empowered national development, success and prosperity. Having learned from the Western educational emphasis on classical languages, culture and sciences, Ma saw that “education is the foundation of a nation and of its people” and this deepened his vision of a new type of Chinese higher education that would integrate studies in the humanities and sciences as a means of empowerment (Ma, 1996b, p. 135).

Because of the Qing government’s corruption in the late nineteenth century, Ma Xiangbo gradually lost confidence in its ability to transform China into a modernized nation. Determined to further modernization through education, he established Aurora University in 1903, funded mainly by his personal endowment. He then established Fudan University in 1905. Nevertheless, neither of these two universities fulfilled his ideal of educating students with fundamentals of Chinese and Western knowledge. With the help of his friend Ying Lianzhi, he co-founded Furen University in 1925. He likewise attempted to establish a national academy of science on the model of the *L’Académie française*. This project failed because of complicated social and political issues. Later on, however, Ma’s student, Cai Yuanpei, founded the Academia Sinica in 1929.

The Idea of Jesuit Education

The classical Greek model has been a dominant paradigm globally in liberal arts education (Flannery & Newstad, 1998). The Greeks assumed that truth is both universal and accessible, and emphasized that the pursuit of truth through reason is the ultimate end of education. A curriculum for seeking truth, knowledge, and wisdom was established and consisted of two categories: the trivium (logic, grammar, and rhetoric) and the quadrivium (mathematics, geometry, music, and astronomy). Though based on the classical Greek pattern, the humanistic tradition of liberal arts education that developed during the Renaissance places more emphasis on seeking truth to gain freedom, cultivate morality and civilize students (Glyer & Weeks, 1998). Absorbing the great books enables one to be cultivated, civilized and a good citizen, for example, as seen in Socrates’ value of “the examined life,” and Aristotle’s idea of “reflective citizenship” (Nussbaum, 1997). This view of education greatly influenced the Jesuits’ educational tradition (O’Malley, 2008).

In order to understand Ma Xiangbo’s view of education, it is necessary to take a look at this Jesuit tradition of education. In the middle of the sixteenth century, Ignatius Loyola, a Spanish soldier from a noble family, founded the Society of Jesus, a religious order which came to dedicate enormous resources to education.

By the early eighteenth century, it had more than eight hundred colleges and universities in both the Old and New Worlds (O'Malley, 2008). What made Jesuit institutions of higher education unique and successful was that "they wedded the views of the humanists, grounded in the classical conception of rhetoric as training in clear thinking and expression, to a methodical pedagogy that the first Jesuit had learned at the University of Paris" (The Boston College Jesuit Community, 2008, p. 39).

The Jesuits published the first edition of their *Ratio Studiorum*, or plan of studies, in 1599. The general purpose of the *Ratio* was the balanced development and integration of intellect and will, of mind and spirit, to prepare the educated person, regardless of social and economic background. In addition to mastering the Latin and Greek languages and literatures, students in Jesuit schools had to spend one year studying rhetoric and two years studying the humanities: poetry, history, philosophy, ethics, math, science, and theology. The *Ratio* aimed to cultivate the mind and push students constantly to produce, to express themselves, and to practice the art of language. It intended to help keep students active and thinking critically, educating them in human, social, academic, spiritual and moral integration.

The Jesuits created an international and intercontinental system of liberal arts education. Graduates from these schools—Descartes, Molière, and Voltaire, to name just a few—played a central role in the evolution of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thought in Europe and in the New World. Following the Latin and Greek tradition of liberal arts education, Jesuit higher education rooted its pedagogy in the view that the humanities develop moral goodness, devotion to truth, and a disposition to act for the civic good and social justice, through the studies of language, poetry, history, rhetoric, logic, mathematics, the sciences and the philosophy of nature. Through these studies, the Jesuits hoped that the curriculum would open minds, deepen human sympathy, develop clarity of thought, and develop students who would be forceful in expressing themselves. While a liberal arts education was complementary to traditional Catholic scholastic education, Jesuit educators esteemed the potential of poetry and oratory in the liberal arts education to elicit and foster noble sentiments and ideals in their students (Scaglione, 1986).

According to Wiest (2002), Jesuit education influenced Ma Xiangbo in three ways. First, Jesuits emphasized education as a key force for sustainable social development. They fully intended to transform society through education and shoulder the responsibility to educate citizens. Before attending St. Ignace College in Shanghai, Ma Xiangbo had been educated solely in the Chinese classics and was never taught any Western ideas. His studies at St. Ignace and his life experience as a Jesuit had opened up Western education and technology for him and thus brought East and West together in his thinking. For example, in

drafting the Fudan University Constitution he stated that one of the purposes of education was to train talented graduates for the nation (Ma, 1996a, p. 50). Secondly, Jesuit education emphasized classical studies and whole-person integration, which influenced Ma Xiangbo's view of how to develop creative and innovative talent, and is manifested in his curricular reform. Ma Xiangbo's mentor, Fr. Angelo Zottoli, the principal of St. Ignace College in Shanghai, not only taught him science, philosophy and classics, but also encouraged him to serve his country whole-heartedly and selflessly with creativity, critical thinking skills and a sense of responsibility. Third, the Jesuit emphasis on science also influenced Ma Xiangbo. With Eastern and Western elements to his educational background and having lived for some years as a Jesuit, Ma Xiangbo understood that science not only helped in the advancement of society but also trained moral citizens with a sound world view. Hence, in the earliest constitution of Aurora University in 1902, Ma Xiangbo established three core policies: "to place a priority on science, to emphasize liberal arts and to avoid any religious dispute" (Ma, 1996f, p. 1107).

The Development of Aurora, Fudan, and Furen Universities

Chinese classical education was established as the core educational content after the Han Dynasty (202 BCE–9) until the Tang Dynasty (618–907) and remained the predominant curricular content throughout feudal times (Hayhoe, 1989). Although the Confucian classics dominated curricula and the social hierarchy, some aspects of Daoism, Buddhism, and Neo-Confucian ideals from the Song Dynasty (960–1278), were assimilated into the Chinese education system. These expanded traditional Confucianism adding elements that were canonized and adopted as standard content in the civil service examinations that qualified people to become scholar-officials within the imperial bureaucracy. As Peterson and Hayhoe (2001) state: "ever since the era of Confucius (551 BCE–479 BCE) Chinese thinkers had stressed the importance of education as a means of self-cultivation and recruiting of 'men of talent' to administer the affairs of the state. The value that Chinese culture traditionally placed on education, both for self-enlightenment and the service of the state, was greatly strengthened following the appearance in the Song Dynasty of a revived metaphysical strand of Confucian moral philosophy incorporating elements of Daoism and Buddhism known as *Daoxue* and today as Neo-Confucianism" (p. 2).

From the mid-nineteenth century until the early twentieth century, Western Protestant missionaries established educational institutions at different levels in China in order to create a religious environment and cultural context for spreading Christianity. Although Ma Xiangbo was a devout Catholic, his purpose

in establishing educational institutions was different from that of the Protestants. In 1903, he founded Aurora University, called *Zhendan Xueyuan* (Zhendan Academy) in Chinese. In classical Chinese, “zhen” refers to the Orient and “dan” represents the sun rising over the horizon. Wiest (2002) states that in Ma Xiangbo's mind, “the name Zhendan symbolized the beginning of a bright future for China like the morning light in the East announces the dawn of a beautiful new day” (p. 9). The establishment of Aurora drew attention from numerous sectors. Liang Qichao, the famous reformer in the late Qing government, wrote an essay praising the school as the first comprehensive and rational private school for pursuing real Western knowledge (Liang, 1903).

Aurora University offered a curriculum that focused on basic science and Western classical literature. His vision enabled Chinese youth to gain a fundamental understanding of Western thought, in both the natural sciences, and literary and humanities studies, in order to create a context for a critical and self-reflexive approach to nation-building (Hayhoe, 1996b). Lu (1996) noted that Ma set down three essential policies for Aurora: “to place a priority on science; to emphasize liberal arts; and to avoid any religious dispute” (p. 160). In 1905, because of conflicts and misunderstandings between Ma and the French Jesuits, Ma left Aurora and founded Fudan University with the intention of continuing his vision and ideal of Aurora University for educating Chinese youth.

According to Hayhoe (1996a), “neither of these two institutions fulfilled [Ma's] ideal of a university that would educate Chinese youth in the fundamentals of both Chinese and Western knowledge, and bring together the most valuable aspects of both traditions” (p. 4). Therefore Ma and his colleague Ying Lianzhi—a well-known scholar in China—petitioned Pope Pius X in 1912 to establish a Catholic university in China that would serve as a model for the whole nation for introducing Western science and revitalizing Chinese culture. In 1925, with the cooperation of American Benedictines, Furen Catholic University was founded in Beijing. Its early curriculum, designed by Ma, was divided into five areas: theology and philosophy, Chinese and foreign languages, natural sciences, sociology and history, and mining and architecture.

Ma's vision of a modern Catholic university for China and his concern for the holistic education of youth placed basic knowledge in philosophy, the humanities, religion, and the sciences at the center of the curriculum and emphasized the integration of Western and Eastern traditions. As a former Jesuit, well-trained in theology, philosophy, humanities, Western classics, and Chinese literature, Ma's vision of education was to improve people's qualifications and to cultivate useful talent (Lu, 1996). Unlike his student Cai Yuanpei, who advocated replacing religion with aesthetics, Ma strongly believed that religion “was central to the individual's life, to the order of a society, to the prosperity of culture and to the formation of morality” (Lu, 1996, p. 196). He quoted the famous chemist

Jean-Baptiste Dumas who said, “science does not know where life has come from; science does not know where life is going to,” thus, “religion is the only solution to the problems of human life” (Ma, 1996d, p. 273). His commitment to dialogue in the Chinese-Western tradition through education, culture and religion not only made a great contribution to his time, but also can serve as a reference point and vision for contemporary liberal arts education in China.

Curriculum Development

As we have seen, the purpose of establishing Aurora University was “to place a priority on science; to emphasize liberal arts; and to avoid any religious dispute.” In other words, Ma Xiangbo wanted Aurora University to focus on two major academic categories: science and liberal arts. Ma himself designed a curriculum that reflected both the character of Jesuit education and his emphasis on integrating Western knowledge, and Chinese culture and tradition. As outlined in Table 1, the earliest curriculum of Aurora, in 1903, clearly manifested Ma’s Jesuit-based educational ideas.

Table 1 Aurora University Curriculum of 1903

Liberal Arts	Science
Core courses: ancient languages (Latin, Greek), modern languages (English, French, German), philosophy (logic, ethics, metaphysics and psychology)	Core courses: arithmetic, geometry, natural philosophy, algebra, trigonometry, chemistry, descriptive geometry, mathematics, mechanics
Related courses: history, geography, political science (sociology, economics, international law)	Related courses: astronomy, zoology, botany, geology, agriculture and horticulture, hygiene, book-keeping, drawing, singing, gymnastics

Note. Adapted from “复旦大学志” (第一卷, 1905–1949) [*The History of Fudan University*] (Vol. 1, 1905–1949), by Historians of Fudan University Collective. 上海, 中国: 复旦大学出版社 [Shanghai, China: Fudan University Press], p. 29.

Ma often spoke about the importance of the sciences and liberal arts. One of his early students recalled that he had said: “if we want to save the country, we must study sciences; to study modern sciences, we must first learn Western languages. Those who are willing to learn foreign languages in order to study sciences and save the country, please come to me” (Ma, 1996e, p. 599). In admitting students, Ma Xiangbo preferred those who had already demonstrated a commitment to the modernization of their country and had a good knowledge of traditional Chinese learning. This preference was manifested in three areas: (a) mastery of the classics and refined linguistic skills, which would contribute to the

rendition of beautiful and accurate translations; (b) broad knowledge of books in Chinese and familiarity with current events, which would facilitate the selection of those Western works whose translation into Chinese was most needed; and (c) proven good study habits, which were necessary to cope both with intensive class sessions and extensive independent study periods (Wiest, 2002).

The school offered a two-year curriculum. Students were required to study Latin in depth and to specialize in one modern European language: French, English, German or Italian. All language classes emphasized the reading of ancient or modern Western literary classics. Textbooks included Shakespeare and Cicero's works. In Ma Xiangbo's view, language study was a means of understanding Western culture. He even compiled a textbook, *Lading Wentong* (A Latin Primer), for teaching Latin literature. Students were expected to expand their knowledge beyond the field of literature. Those who studied liberal arts were asked to master works from all branches of philosophy and other disciplines, such as history, geography, politics, sociology, economics and international law. Those who studied science were asked to become competent in physics, chemistry, mathematics, and astronomy. Students in both areas were required to learn how to think for themselves. Unlike other religion-based schools, Ma Xiangbo did not include religious doctrines as part of the curriculum at Aurora. However, when he co-founded Furen University in 1925, he helped to design the curriculum in five categories: theology and philosophy, Chinese and foreign languages, natural sciences, sociology and history. In Ma's view, theology and philosophy were the foundations for understanding the world and for respecting life. In addition, theology and philosophy could also help in investigating the valid sources of all human knowledge. After the founding of the Chinese Republic, Ma Xiangbo also wanted to establish an academy of science on the model of the *L'Académie française* which comprised three major curriculum categories (see Table 2).

Table 2 Major Curriculum Categories of the Chinese Academy

Mathematical and Physical Sciences	Moral and Political Sciences	Literature and Fine Arts
Mathematics proper, mechanics, astronomy, general physics, chemistry, mineralogy, botany, rural economy, anatomy and zoology, medicine and surgery	Analysis of sensations and ideas, social sciences and legislation, moral philosophy, political economy, history, geography	Grammar, ancient languages, poetry, antiquities and monuments, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, declamation

Note. Adapted from “Standing between two worlds: Ma Xiangbo’s educational thought and practice,” by Y. L. Lu, 1996. In R. Hayhoe & Y. L. Lu (Eds.), *Ma Xiangbo and the mind of modern China 1840–1939* (pp. 143–203). Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, p. 180.

Contemporary scholars argue that although professional education is useful it is

insufficient, because technical training can be used for good or ill. By contrast, a liberal arts education seeks the formation of the whole person by examining life's important questions concerning truth, justice, beauty and service (Flannery & Newstad, 1998). Ma designed liberal arts courses which prepared students not merely for excellence in their professional careers but also to contribute to a more humane, just, and democratic society. Influenced by his Jesuit liberal education, Ma was also strongly committed to foundational democratic principles and understood democracy both as a system of government and as a way of life. Furthermore, he clearly stated that the purpose of education is to help the student develop intelligence of mind and perfect the personal traits that contribute to the culture of humankind.

In Ma's view of education, modern Chinese universities must have the administrative autonomy to innovate and instigate curricular reform. Hence, during his time at Aurora and Fudan, he introduced a remarkably democratic style of governance. The students were to decide among themselves each semester what their tasks should be and who would be responsible. They then elected several representatives to form a committee to take responsibility for all the administrative work of the institution. All university members enjoyed complete autonomy and academic freedom. Ma Xiangbo believed that the university should be a place where democratic principles are put into practice and where students are helped to develop and integrate themselves, to become not only excellent in their academic discipline, but also psychologically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually balanced (Zhu, 1996).

The Teacher's Role

Altbach (2009, April 30) notes that one of the key elements of liberal arts education is the teacher's commitment. Ma Xiangbo always hoped that Aurora University would adopt the style of a European academy. He also wanted to shape it on the basis of one of the oldest Chinese educational systems, that of the *shuyuan*, a traditional learning institution that can be traced back to the Tang and Song dynasties. At Aurora University, Ma had an important personal and informal teaching role. He saw his role as that of a guide to help students find the right way to knowledge, and he emphasized the need for the student to cultivate his ability to seek knowledge independently. Ma acted like the master of a traditional shuyuan, who tried to make students understand fundamentals and methodology in order to direct them to discover their own forms of research. Students were like disciples and young scholars who enjoyed a master-disciple relationship. Common courses were essentially introductory courses in theory to present students with the basic elements and rules at the core of each academic area. Ma himself also acted as a tutor to guide students to apply theory to the more complicated elements of their

areas of study. This helped to create the strong “family spirit and belongingness” that characterized Aurora University (Jiang, 2011, pp. 32–33).

Emphasizing the creativity and critical thinking skills of students, Ma was against the traditional method of memorizing without understanding and the traditional transmission methods. The teachers' role was not merely to pass on piecemeal knowledge but to accompany students' growth and development. He advocated teachers' whole-hearted engagement in the development of students, so as to shape talent with a balanced personality for the nation as well for society. Hence, despite his busy schedule, Ma also took time regularly to join students' activities, meals, tours, and meetings in order to guide them. With the influence of his personal example and his tireless commitment to students and to liberal arts education, Ma Xiangbo influenced numerous others, for example, Li Denghui, Cai Yuanpei, Huang Yanpei, Shao Lizi, Li Shutong, Yu Youren, Zhu Kezheng, and Tong Dizhou, who were also quite influential in social, cultural, educational and scientific circles. Training character and will, overcoming selfishness and lack of concern for others, and developing the freedom that respects others and accepts responsibility, all these characteristics should be fostered by teachers committed to the development of their students according to Ma Xiangbo. As Ma stated, “teachers are the symbols of social conscience, they are not only discussing academic issues and passing on knowledge, but also responsible for the nation's moral reconstruction and development; they bear the mission of educational and cultural achievement. Teachers must integrate their words and deeds to guide and to inspire students” (Ma, 1996g, pp. 1146–1147).

In Ma's view, learning is a life-long process. Growth in the responsible use of freedom is facilitated by the personal relationship between student and teacher. Teachers and administrators are more than academic guides. They should be involved in the lives of the students, take a personal interest in the intellectual, affective, moral and spiritual development of every student, and help each one to develop a sense of self-worth and to become a responsible individual within the community. In these and other ways, the adult members of the educational community guide students in developing values that lead to life decisions that go beyond “self,” that include a concern for the needs of others.

The Jesuit principle of *cura personalis* (concern for the individual person) remains a basic characteristic of Ma Xiangbo's idea of education (Jiang, 2011). For Ma Xiangbo, *cura personalis* is not limited to the relationship between teacher and student; it also affects the curriculum and the entire life of the institution. Li Denghui, the president of Fudan University after Ma Xiangbo, was a prominent leader who inherited and integrated Christian educational values, Jesuit pedagogy, and Chinese and Western traditions of science and knowledge. Li advocated the idea of sacrifice and service to the community among the students, and exhorted them to serve society and to be ready to sacrifice for others (Jiang, 2011).

Despite his extremely busy schedule as the president of Aurora and then later of Fudan University, Ma followed the Jesuit tradition in advocating oratorical training for students, which was not commonly practiced in traditional Chinese society. Oratory with the aim of training students to think clearly and creatively as they formed their arguments was an important subject in the Jesuit tradition of education (Chapple, 1993). Every Sunday morning, Ma would call a meeting for oratory, and students were asked one by one to give a speech on a pre-assigned topic, usually a contemporary issue about which others would comment or debate. This helped students to learn how to express themselves effectively and clearly. These public debates became very popular among students (Wiest, 2002). Educated in both Chinese and Western traditions, Ma wanted to bring together these traditions and to provide students with an international environment in which to grow. Indeed, Aurora and Fudan Universities, to his way of thinking, were to be places where students could freely pursue knowledge of both Western and Chinese cultures and civilizations, and this would empower the nation's modern development (Lu, 1996). Besides weekly training in contemporary issues, Aurora University offered military training three times a week and encouraged students to take on administrative roles in the institution. These features, according to Wiest (2002), reflected Ma Xiangbo's educational philosophy of saving the country by modernizing it. For instance, debating modern issues helped students to apply their studies to China's contemporary problems. Military training prepared students to make sacrifices for their ideal of a modern China. Sharing administrative duties prepared students to apply the same democratic values to more important tasks in the larger society. This notion of education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was new and unusual, and had a great impact on Ma Xiangbo's prominent student Cai Yuanpei, the German-educated Chinese scholar who became president of Peking University in 1917. He adopted and implemented the Humboldtian university ethos, and combined it with the educational ideas of Ma Xiangbo. This can be seen in his experience at Peking University and his aim of creating a curriculum with Chinese characteristics and especially requiring all students to take some courses in the core discipline of philosophy (Hayhoe, 1996b). The new curriculum in Peking University initiated by Cai Yuanpei was designed to train and develop students with a comprehensive knowledge in the arts, sciences, humanities, military science, morality, aesthetics, and other disciplines in order to shape well-balanced personalities and strong character.

The Importance of Morality in the Liberal Arts

In the early nineteenth century, a number of factors began to change the

dominance of the classical liberal arts curriculum. One was the growing influence of the German university model, which emphasized research, especially in the applied sciences. Despite this, Western universities did not ignore the importance of liberal arts education (Nussbaum, 1997). Chinese society has a long tradition of bringing glory to one's family through excellence in the academy. Ma considered this as a superficial achievement and held the view that although the sciences are important subjects for modernization, the moral dimension in liberal arts is also a core value for social and personal development (Zhu, 1996). If a society or a person lacks moral education and commitment, then education simply becomes the means—not the end—and thus loses its commitment to educating responsible and moral citizens. He once complained loudly that everyone talks about science, but not about conscience and religion (Zhu, 1996). With respect to students who study only for a career, family or personal glory, Ma stated that a student is known as a university student, not because of big university buildings, nor the age of students nor the teacher's high income, but because of the profound value of morality for each student. Therefore, students in university should deepen their moral and spiritual development (Lu, 1996). He also argued that the nation's level of civilization was not simply a matter of the level of the people's knowledge but also of their moral standards. These included social ethics and standards of behavior that were required of all the people before the society could be regarded as ethical (Ma, 1912, October 29). For Ma, without a moral basis, society would be corrupted, as it was in the late Qing Dynasty. The emphasis in education should be on morality, the spiritual aspect of human life. In a letter he submitted to Yuan Shikai concerning the Academy for Humanities and Sciences, Ma stated that "traditional morality is the soul of the nation.... if we are to revive traditional morality, we must support traditional learning" (Ma, 1996c, p. 234).

From Aurora University to Fudan University and then to Furen University, Ma Xiangbo sought to build an institution where he could implement his educational ideals, nationalism, moral values, and spirituality. During his years in Furen University, the spirit of Catholicism became a moral guideline for his educational views on the modernization of China. The famous historian Fang Hao showed that Ma Xiangbo strongly believed that education, nationalism, and morality are interdependent (Wiest, 2002, p. 37).

Due to political, financial and academic problems, the Chinese Academy initiated by Ma Xiangbo was only later established by his student Cai Yuanpei in 1929. Ma's vision for establishing the new Chinese Academy focused not only on the promotion of knowledge for modernizing China. Its essential purpose was to contribute to the moral transformation of the country. In his letter submitted to the central government in 1914, Ma wrote that traditional morality is the soul of the nation (Ma, 1947). From the late Qing Dynasty to the time of Republic, Ma

Xiangbo was deeply disturbed by the moral corruption in government and in society. One of the important tasks of education, he thought, was to pursue moral values at the personal and the social level (Wiest, 2002). Ma believed that morality is the soul of the nation and the level of civilization of a country is not just measured by the accumulation of knowledge, but is also reflected in the moral standards of the people. Ma hoped that education would take responsibility for overall cultural and ethical change and promote classical learning in order to revive traditional morality. In Ma Xiangbo's view, the purpose of education is not only to shape a person who can speak or do things but also to form a person who seeks the ultimate meaning and value of life in various perspectives of culture, science, morality, spirituality, emotion, and intellectuality. From policy to structural change, implementation of new curricula, and classroom instruction, Ma Xiangbo's educational ideals were rationally and tightly centered on students and their social roles and responsibility. Tu Weiming (1998) believes that learning from Chinese classics can help to nurture the social responsibility and spiritual development of students. Although China has progressed rapidly in educational reform in the last decades, it is still far from implementing a type of learning that absorbs the best from traditional Chinese culture and that presents the spiritual values of the West, which Ma Xiangbo tirelessly advocated.

Ma Xiangbo's contribution to higher education thought and practice can be summarized as follows. First, the curriculum he designed brought together both Chinese and Western liberal arts traditions, in particular integrating humanities and sciences/technology. Second, he insisted that an institution of higher learning has its own mission and should be independent from the church and civil authority. Third, he introduced a democratic administration for school leadership. Fourth, he emphasized educating students with a thorough understanding of China and the West, particularly in moral reasoning. Fifth, he believed that religion (particularly Catholicism) was central to the individual life, to the order of a society, to the prosperity of culture, and to the formation of morality (Jiang, 2011; Wiest, 2002).

Contemporary Concerns

Ma Xiangbo's educational thought and practice, as well as those of highly respected educators such as Cai Yuanpei, Mei Yiqi, and Zhu Kezheng, greatly influenced Chinese higher education during the Nationalist period (Chen, 2008). By 1952, the Chinese higher education system duplicated the Soviet model in administration, teaching methods, textbooks, and classroom design and aimed at training technical and vocational experts to attain academic excellence accompanied by socialist political ideas. Within a centralized educational system

and structure, the government played a dominant role and was responsible for policy making, school planning, administration, personnel assignment, curriculum arrangement, textbooks, funding and policy-setting legislation.

The pressures for rapid economic development and industrialization after years of war, strife and revolution created a situation in which the highly specialized Soviet model seemed to be the only way to build a socialist economy quickly, and in that situation general or liberal education became totally neglected. Hence, it was not China's ideal choice but a result of the pressure and sense of haste of the time (R. Hayhoe, personal communication, March 5, 2010). Since China has moved towards a market economy and capitalist development in the last three decades, its society and higher education system have experienced rapid change and reform. While China has numerous top universities of international prominence and has shifted from elite to mass education, these changes also have been at the cost of declining quality in undergraduate education. Much evidence suggests that specialized or professional education programs have not yet met the demands of China's global and economic development, and that university graduates often lack leadership ability, creativity, critical and innovative thinking skills, and the capacity for moral reasoning (Altbach, 2009, April 30).

Curriculum reform and development are tactical decisions within the larger context of teaching and scholarship. Whatever decision is made, the content of a curriculum should conform to the university's mission, its animating vision, and accepted standards regarding scholarship and the objectives of education. Despite tremendous progress, many good academic practices and traditions from the Nationalist period are not well embedded in the contemporary Chinese higher education system, due to various cultural, market and social factors (Jiang, 2011). Contemporary Chinese universities and policy makers have much to learn from the educational experiments with the liberal arts of the Nationalist period. At that time, due to the efforts of scholars such as Ma Xiangbo, Cai Yuanpei, Li Denghui, Mei Yiqi, Zhu Kezheng, and many others, China's universities had considerable autonomy and built a university model that highly valued liberal arts education (Chen, 2008). In other words, Chinese universities and their higher educational system need to draw inspiration and insight from the Nationalist period, and from Ma Xiangbo's educational thought in particular.

New developments and reforms in the Chinese higher education system have brought great progress in expansion of access since the 1990s. In the context of a market economy and the ambition to build world-class universities, many leading Chinese universities have become more utilitarian-oriented and have overemphasized research products, university rankings, infrastructure construction, and advanced laboratories (Chen, 2008). Although the government and universities at different levels have made great efforts to promote liberal arts

education, its implementation through policy reform, revision of teaching plans and curricula, and faculty involvement will continue to remain challenging (Jiang, 2011). The question raised by the famous scientist Qian Xuesen, father of the Chinese missile, will continue to echo: “China is still not fully developed, and one reason is that no university in China has been operated in a way to educate creative and innovative talent for science, technology and humanity. The universities have no unique qualities that enable students to cultivate talent. This is a big problem” (Jin & Qi, 2009, December 5, p. 1).

Conclusion

Under the pressure of exam-oriented education and transmission teaching methods, faculty and university administrators have been unable to embrace liberal arts education whole-heartedly. Relatively narrow professional studies still dominate the curricula of most Chinese universities and colleges. China’s advance to the world stage through science, technology and education has become of central importance to its government and universities, and a goal that the entire nation is eager to achieve. From Aurora to Fudan, and from the Chinese Academy to Furen, Ma Xiangbo tried to integrate both Chinese and Western cultures, both liberal arts and science, and his educational thought is characterized by traditional and liberal terms that emphasize the intrinsic value of learning and scholarship, and student-centered, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary studies. Although his dream was never fully realized, it gives us some insight into understanding his idea of education and what is missing in China’s contemporary education system. Altbach (2007) observes that the infrastructures of many Chinese universities are more advanced than those of Western universities, yet Chinese students’ comprehensive qualities, i.e., their creativity, critical thinking, moral reasoning, commitment to social service, and their sense of civic responsibility, lag far behind the standard of their peers in the West. If Chinese higher education institutions just respond to the market or to economic needs while ignoring larger educational values, then they fail in their mission of education.

In general, contemporary Chinese universities emphasize research more than teaching, and focus on providing human capital for market needs. Contemporary Chinese society, educational theory, cultural values, and science are at a crossroad; social values and morality have deteriorated (Jiang, 2011). Hence, Ma Xiangbo’s educational thought and practice, directed at the education of the whole person, are still relevant. They can inspire contemporary Chinese higher education to educate citizens with creativity, critical thinking skills, the capacity for moral reasoning, and a sense of social responsibility. Universities need to

develop structures and incentives to encourage continuous conversations at the intersections of the varied disciplines in the university, the academic community, and the larger society. Chinese policy makers, educational leaders, and faculty members will have to redefine the content and strategy of education in response to current and future demands.

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