



## **BALTIC JOURNAL OF LAW & POLITICS**

A Journal of Vytautas Magnus University

VOLUME 14, NUMBER 2 (2021)

ISSN 2029-0454



Cit.: *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics* 14:2 (2021): 257-269

DOI: 10.2478/bjlp-2021-00020

### **Research on the development of the Chinese higher education system during the anti-Japanese war period, 1937-1945**

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#### **Abstract**

In 1911, the ancient dynasty was toppled and replaced by a new republic. China experienced significant progress in several spheres of life throughout the Republican era (1912–1949), except for the Anti-Japanese War. When the last Qing dynasty came to an end, China was in the early stages of developing a higher education system. China developed its contemporary higher education system during the republican era, comprised of public universities, private universities, and volunteer institutions. The war with Japan was undoubtedly the most significant event in Chinese history during the Republican era. Modernization of the state and modernization of higher education are inextricably intertwined. This is because higher education modernization is necessary and inevitable due to a state's modernization. Modern state requires modern individual. In retrospect, the higher education system contributed an adequate amount of workers to the country's economic and social. The analysis and historical data illustrate the Chinese system of guaranteeing higher education funds. Additionally, it entails the establishment of an effective and efficient institutional framework to ensure the development process's success. The Chinese higher education fund guarantee system was divided into government subsidies, society contribution, and school production. They all served to bolster the higher education system, erode individuality and enhance collectivism, supply

adequate talent for the Chinese revolution's final success, or fortify the relationship between the government and colleges. This demonstrates that China has achieved substantial strides in higher education during the last decades. Throughout the war, the method used to establish the Reformation era is thoroughly analysed. The war's new development has emphasised the importance of a higher education system. As a result, this article covers the evolution of China's higher education system between 1937 to 1945, during Japan's anti-war period. This research uses a descriptive methodology to obtain reliable results. Additionally, secondary data sources such as journals, peer-reviewed publications, books, and articles were consulted to acquire knowledge on the topic.

### **Keywords**

anti-Japanese war, Chinese education system, higher education system, western universities

## **1. Introduction**

The communist revolution necessitated the development of a new society that was diametrically opposed to what traditional communists referred to as conventional China's feudal system (Border, 2019). Individuals with new commitments, motives and collective life concepts were required in this new community. According to the dominant view, the higher education system is a system that coordinates and standardizes all practices of higher education institutions and transforms them into biological integrity, which reflects the development status of higher education institutions and the development characteristics of the era.

The Chinese Republic Movement of 1911 witness the fall of Qing empire while the Republic of China, led by Sun Yat Sen's Nationalist Party, arise (Qian et al., 2017). The Nationalist Party proceeded on a series of education reforms under the new administration. The Nationalist Party grew stronger in its fight against the warlords, Chiang Kai Shek's Northern Expedition and after defeating them in 1926, it regained political stability. As a result, educational reforms persisted, with the benefits of improved educational systems. In addition, during the Republican period, two forces contributed to the adoption of higher education: intellectuals engaging in the New Culture Revolution and the federal government reformed. The new century began with educational reform as the cornerstone of the last imperial dynasty's faltering attempt to save itself and the country from destruction (Bregnbæk, 2020).

Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that the Chinese recognized the importance of education as a constructive social component. Besides that, China has built a comprehensive set of academic subjects and programs. Education was essential to acquire desired positions in the public sector. Western higher education, especially Christian higher education, strongly influenced Chinese early

higher education (Zhong & Yanqiang, 2015). Returnees from the US, EU, primarily pragmatist academics, significantly impacted China's higher education. American-style colleges exploded with the combination of 2 styles: traditional schools, which provide teaching on core topics, and special university, providing training for basic skills (Perraton, 2016).

Chinese higher education has a long and glorious legacy, with major turning points that helped shape the nation's modern tertiary education system. A look back at this history uncovered that many factors, objectives, and circumstances are converged to build a system that is distinct in several ways, although sharing some traits with other national systems. Some are obvious while others are subtle. Thus, the critical role of education in achieving this transformation and growth was emphasized in this context. As such, this article was written to assess the evolution of China's higher education system throughout the anti-Japanese war period, 1937-1945. This research also looked into the historical and current worldwide implications of Chinese abroad migrants. In addition, the challenges that China experienced during creation of its higher education system during the anti-Japanese war were identified. And lastly, the evaluation of how China's higher education system contributes to the country's development was also addressed.

## **2. Research Objectives**

- To explain the development of the higher education system during the anti-Japanese war (1937-1945).
- To identify how Chinese higher education system contributes to the development and modernisation of China.
- To determine the challenges faced by China during the anti-Japanese war in developing the higher education system.

## **3. Significance of Study**

China flourished slowly during the first two decades after the Republic of China was established and boomed between 1927 and 1937 (Day, 2021). Their increasing pace for vocational and regular education remained sustained until the end of the 1940s, followed by a sharp drop during WWII. The study summarized China's higher education system development from 1937 to 1945, during the anti-Japanese war. This research will be useful for teachers, scholars, and students interested in recognizing China's higher education system. This study results will also help to understand the evolution of the Chinese higher education system during the Anti-Japanese War.

#### 4. Literatures Acquisition

##### Higher education system of China (1937-1945)

During the war of resistance against Japan, the Republican government created a reasonably solid system of sending students overseas by strengthening the governance of officially-sponsored skilled migrants and imposing strict control over those who were self-supported to cultivate wartime talents and save foreign currencies (Du, 2020). Following the victory of war, the government encouraged abroad students to return to serve the country while also standardizing the system by selecting and sending self-supporting and government-supported students on a national scale.

Following the beginning of the war, the government prioritised battling Japanese soldiers. Therefore, other social objectives, such as educational endeavours, had to work in concert with this commitment (Zhao, 2021). As a result, several education initiatives were issued during wartime. The Ministry of Education issued "Temporal Measures for Restricting the Sending of Overseas Students" in 1938, which focused on the selection criteria and the disciplines that might be studied. As a result, the number of students sent overseas during the war period declined dramatically compared to the prior period.

Foreign countries	1938			1939			1940			1941			1942		
	t	g-s	s-s	t	g-s	s-s	t	g-s	s-s	t	g-s	s-s	t	g-s	s-s
t	92	31	61	65	24	41	86	20	66	57					228
Britain	40	22	18	26	24	2	--	--	--	3					46
France	8	3	5	--	--	--	--	--	--						--
Germany	22	4	18	---	--	--	1	--	1	--					--
Belgium	2	--	2	--	--	--	--	--	--	--					--
America	15	2	13	39	--	39	85	20	65	54					170
Canada	4	--	4	--	--	--	--	--	--	--					--
Philippines	1	--	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--					--
India	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	12	--	--

Figure 1: Number of students sent abroad from 1938 to 1942  
(Source: L. Chen and Huang (2013))

During this era, the process of sending students overseas was more controlled, with a set of rules imposed on the selection of not only government-funded but also self-funded students and the subjects in which they decided to specialize (Gao, 2015). According to the Implementation Program: those student studying abroad who is government-sponsored candidate should be graduate of universities, vocational or technical colleges, or high schools. All government-funded or self-supported candidates should be subjected to an evaluation by the authority-in-charge related to their academic performances and their remarks and behaviour in the foreign country. At the same time, the importance of a wide range of subjects, primarily in natural and applied sciences, was highlighted.

Besides that, it has been noticed that by enhancing the management of sending students abroad, the government can did rescue operations to assist those overseas students who had lost their hometowns in the war, and thus their sources of tuition payments. Consequently, the circumstances turned in China's favour in the year 1943. According to Ryan (2019), the Republican government decided to eliminate restrictions on self-supporting students going abroad. However, to maintain the accuracy of those overseas students, the policy shifted from placing restrictions to strengthening their management and prioritizing intelligent people for the nation's future restoration.

The number of students eligible to study abroad increased in 1943 due to encouragement from Republican government but declined dramatically again in 1945. This is mainly because the government has acknowledged the urgent need for standardisation and institutionalisation of this practice and decided to prioritize the development of educational institutions within the country, rather than sending students overseas as a secondary means of producing talents in various fields.

Table 1: The number of students who studied abroad between 1943 and 1945

<b>Countries</b>	<b>1943</b>	<b>1944</b>	<b>1945</b>
America	358	149	5
Britain	1	155	2
Austria	358	305	6

The Republican government's educational reforms were primarily focused on the following factors:

- a. Education goals and curriculum must be adjusted with the Developed world
  - A series of rules and regulation regarding higher education was approved, stating clearly that higher education aimed to foster scholars engagement in enhanced studies and train skilled workers in sciences and technology fields.
  - During this time, the entire curriculum system was borrowed from Western higher education institutions, and many Chinese universities and technical colleges used authentic textbooks from Western universities. This helped modern Chinese higher education institutions to keep up to date with Western syllabus layout and teaching methods.
  - However, it also disconnects between what was taught and China's realities.
- b. Enhanced global educational and academic exchanges
  - Under the leadership of Nationalist Party's, China's higher education was opened to an incredible scale. This made it a priority to spread Chinese culture to the Western world, trying to attract students from the United

Kingdom, Germany, the Soviet Union, Japan, Belgium, and Vietnam, and to offer Chinese culture courses, Sino-French relations, Chinese law, Chinese language and literature, and Medieval history.

- Exchange visits by scientific researchers, experts, or professors between China and other nations were also part of academic connections at the higher education.

These reforms and adjustments have shaped the characteristics of China's higher education and research systems in a noticeable and significant manner.

Further, in 1949, Chinese higher education ushered in an era of rapid development states (M. Zhang & Hayhoe, 2017). It has been found that the communist higher education system was built largely on the Soviet model of a highly centralised and planned institution. Mergers were utilised as a policy measure to reform the higher education sector, among other things. During the early reforms, the key goals for using mergers were to benefit from economies of scale, cut costs, improve efficiency, and improve academic quality.

Besides that, the government established these plans to revive the country through science and education and cultivated educated people to help prosper the country. The government had also intensified its efforts to create a large number of engineers who could work in various professions (L. Zhang et al., 2017). Furthermore, it has stepped up its attempts to modernize China's higher education system.

### **Challenges faced by China during the Anti-Japanese War**

Schools were closed for long periods, extending from months to years in the case of secondary schools, and years in the context of universities and colleges. When schools were in service, the quality of education provided was poor since old teachers had been sent away or kept but refused a license to teach, resulting in teachers who were often ineligible or underqualified to teach classes. In addition, poor facilities are often associated with poor teaching quality at the foundation phase, particularly in rural areas (Liu & Kang, 2021). There are two reasons why teachers are denied: (1) teachers were rated third from the bottom among professionals, providing little motivation to enter the field; and (2) teachers were sometimes publicly humiliated and exiled to remote places, tortured and possibly killed. As a result, many people who want to teach are concerned that the job assignment process will be employed to send them to remote rural locations.

It is also observed that there are many areas where inequality exists within the Chinese educational system. Inequality based on race, gender, and geography is some to be named. Lopes (2021) pointed out that having a sibling especially a brother lowers the likelihood of a female enrolling in education. When both a brother and a sister are in school, the parents are more likely to help the son by assigning fewer duties which can impact the future educational

prospects. This could be a perception by parents of a potential return on the investment, as boys are more likely to earn money in the work and will be the ones to care for their parents as they retire.

The development of educational infrastructure is another key concern. A university is frequently cut off from disciplines that it does not teach. Chinese institutions are often concentrate on one discipline. Besides that, removal of textbooks also posed a severe challenge. Poor communication between schools, colleges, and research units also causes issues: work, expensive equipments, and knowledge that could be synergy in nature are not shared sufficiently. All these have leads to the deteriorating of scarce resources.

The government expects that studying abroad will give students a greater grasp of conditions and issues. However, there has been much concern over the students who extend their study abroad, but choose to stay abroad rather than return to China to continue their roles in society. These could be due to the problems of intellectual freedom, low salary, poor benefits, and low status. This issue has becomes one major concern in China's modernization effort. This is one of the reasons why China struggled to provide public education while simultaneously developing the professionals needed to carry out its change.

Y.-f. Chen (1986) critiqued that education was a strong harmful Western influence during the revolution. The knowledge and training of the cultivated were considered a strong destructive of Western influence. Consequently, western education progressively gained a foothold in China, largely because of teachers employed by Christian missionaries. While the majority of the Chinese gentry was humiliated and suspicious of these advancements, a few more pragmatic and liberal-minded officials saw this as a balanced approach to teaching, with Confucian classics remaining at the core and supplemented by a component of Western technology.

Another issue is inadequate of curriculum standards. While many experienced and skilled instructors opt to work in large cities, those in rural parts of the country have more difficulties in successfully implementing new curriculum due to a lack of resources. Teachers' workloads have also risen due to new curriculum's demands and specifications. Despite these setbacks, China has developed one of the world's largest higher education systems. However, in the coming decades, the Chinese higher education system is expected to emerge through a range of techniques with new objectives. Chinese higher education will be pushed to meet new difficulties and expand its learning and adjusting capabilities in order to deal with more complex scenarios (Yonghu & Zhanjie, 2015).

### **Contribution of education system in the modernization of China**

Yan and Cai (2019) reported that, in the ten years leading up to the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War in 1937, Chinese students studying abroad



underwent a tremendous transformation, marked by the uniformity of selection criteria and regulations in the entire selection process. Indeed, a great number of Chinese students were capable of achieving their goal of receiving higher education in a foreign country due to the continuous efforts of Republican government. As a result, a large number of enlightened and progressive talents have been nurtured, all of whom are poised to make significant contributions to the development of a powerful and wealthy China.

McCann (2015) stated that the value of education was highlighted as a key factor in achieving modernization. It was important for the government to acquire sophisticated science, technology and managerial skills from the other countries which, as he famously put it, education should be prepared for the needs of modernity, the future, and the world. Besides that, while many Chinese students moved to the United States to pursue a master's degree, so do many international students come to China. This is much due to China's strategy of reform and opening-up (X. Wang et al., 2020).

The academies have made significant contributions to China's academic and development. It is found that missionaries have established some schools and colleges in and around the missionary stations to provide a western form of education, mainly to the children of foreigners residing in Chinese port cities and to newly converted Chinese Christians. As per Cheong (2021), during the colonial era, the western form of the current education system was brought to China. The integration of math, physics, history, and other affecting factors of knowledge into the syllabus and the publication of standardised textbooks by Christian missionaries for their schools and universities was a huge step forward in China's academic development. Besides that, the medical science in the country is benefited greatly from the access to modern conceptions of morphology, physiology, operation, diagnostics, and so on from the west missionaries. Many great texts were converted into Mandarin, allowing the Chinese scholastic civilization to learn about western society's sophisticated thinking in different fields of knowledge. Many immigrants from the west were brought to China's treaty major ports by imperialist invasion, and most of them helped develop parts of China's deprived neighbourhoods (Lawson, 2015). Consequently, the new education system is good for Western-styled disciplined knowledge, but it is not conducive to Chinese classical knowledge.

Furthermore, in terms of education, public primary schools were the most important contributors to the modernization of China (C. Wang et al., 2015). They dominated the community around the twentieth century and rose to prominence. Between 1937 to 1946, public primary schools contributed to about 95% of all enrolments, illustrating the primary role of public primary schools in developing mass education in China throughout the mid-twentieth century (*Refer appendix 1*).

Meanwhile, the decline in public secondary education's role coincides with what we've seen in primary education, since secondary education was mainly



fuelled by private provision and demand. Similarly, the number of colleges and universities did not expand substantially, although the proportion of public universities ranged from 50% to 71%. China's increased access to higher education during the Republican eras was mostly attributable to the growth and expansion of public schools. Besides that, more crucially, in opposed to Imperial China's approach, limited public financial resources were mainly dedicated to lowering education to create a bigger pool of literate personnel; while the private sector aided the advancement at secondary and university levels. These factors have also aided China in its modernity.

China's open-door policy has indeed highly beneficial to its Chinese higher education. Returnees have brought back cutting-edge scientific, technical, and professional knowledge, which have been successfully disseminated and utilised in China (Chu, 2021). Funding is ensured through the development of the financial models that improve over time and contributions to the education system. As a result, the 211 Projects and the Double World-class Scheme have emphasized dozens of leading Chinese universities, narrowing the gap between worldwide leading universities. Seeing the potential benefits of new educational institutions, the Chinese were more prone to create Western education and move towards the modern Western educational model.

## **5. Methodology**

The research method used in the study is the descriptive method. All the factors and facts of the ancient Chinese education system during the anti-Japanese war were critically analyzed. The secondary data such as books, articles, journals, peer-review articles and etc. were used in the research to gain a better understanding and fruitful conclusion.

## **6. Results and Discussion**

It is clear from the aforementioned findings that colonialism had a significant impact on the development of Chinese higher education. To some extent, the war had impacted the Chinese society to favourable establish a modern education system and technology, among other aspects. However, these favourable effects were limited to a few treaties' major ports. This paper suggested that the era of 'self-strengthening' was the China's first step toward engaging with Western reform and modernization of their educational system. The Chinese were more inclined to cultivate Western learning and move toward a modernised Western education system after seeing the potential that Western institutions might provide.

Despite the success of the reform, many challenges have emerged, especially as a result of the expansion of higher education. Problems and dilemmas came as a result of the developments of the higher education system, including low teaching conditions and quality, a lack of capacities for nurturing

excellent and talented staff, a gap between the skills taught at universities and the demands of the sector, as well as unsteady and insufficient conditions for the long-term development of higher education. These challenges particularly disrupted China's higher education system. These difficulties have wreaked havoc on China's higher education sector in particular.

## 7. Conclusion

During the evolution of Chinese higher education's, there was evidence of international links nearly from the beginning of Chinese history, followed by further development and a range of educational changes. Both contemporary and modern higher education took the same path from, studying and integrating the Western expertise to striking a new direction for independent development. However, during the Japanese invasion, Chinese higher education has faced a significant blow as it progressed along a contemporary track.

China's higher education has tremendously evolved and internationalised as a result of learning from sophisticated educational systems, management mechanisms, curriculum setting, and introducing foreign professors and lecturers. For the first time after the imperial war, Chinese society comes in contact with western civilisation. education, science, philosophy, way of life, cultural aspects, and other European ideas and concepts at a rapid pace. It has also been identified that there are many challenges and difficulties, including ensuring educational equality, bad teacher status, poor facilities, unskilled teachers, irrelevant coursework, low family economic status, cultural tradition, religious beliefs, etc.

Despite these obstacles, China's higher education system has made significant progress during the decades. China has succeeded built one of the largest higher education systems in the world as well as in establishing the world's top institutions. Besides that, the educator's knowledge and expertise were seen as a major factor of Western influence although the majority of the Chinese aristocracy were humiliated and wary of these developments. Western education gradually gained a grip in China, due to the Christian missions' teachers. A highly narrow focus might arise due to a lack of interaction between students and lecturers from various fields.

China has struggled to deliver public education while also training the specialists required to carry out its transformation. However, in order to respond to the changing situations, the Chinese higher education system is likely to develop a variety of ways with new goals in the coming decade. Chinese higher education is forced to tackle new challenges, and improve its learning and adjusting capacities in order to deal with more complicated scenarios. Furthermore, Chinese higher education has also been forced to a slew of education-related legislation, regulations, and guidelines. Nevertheless, China's higher education system is far from perfect. A gap still remains between Chinese

higher education and the world's most advanced education system. The current study is far from comprehensive in terms of covering all aspects of Chinese higher education. More study in this area is expected for future research.

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**Appendices**

Appendix 1:

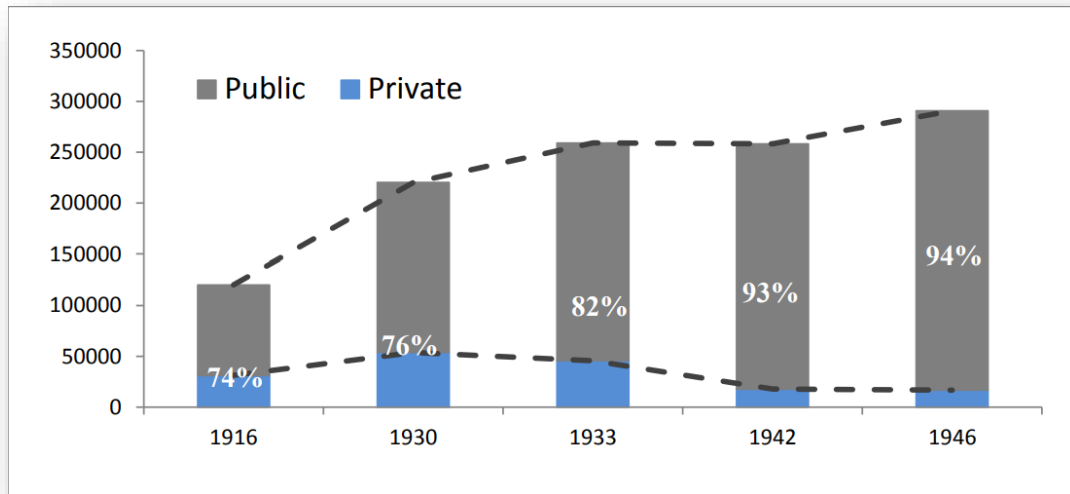


Figure 1: Public vs. private  
(Source: Gao (2015))