



Ideals and Goals

Excellence vs. Equality

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Research Question

The underlying idea of the joint project “History of Education in East Asia 1365-2015” was the investigation of the different aspects of educational systems in the East Asian countries during the past 650 years. The subgroup’s “Ideals and Goals - Excellence vs. Equality” task was the analysis of accessibility of education/knowledge in The People’s Republic of China, Japan and South Korea. ‘Excellence’ in this case referred to limited access, whereas equality defined no limitations. While one of the project’s criteria prescribed the analysis’ time span to start in the year 1365, when the University of Vienna was founded by Duke Rudolph IV, our research subgroup decided that the most relevant time period for the following analysis embraces the XIX, XX and XXI centuries. Narrowing down the time span to the only relatively recent times was based on the premise that during these centuries many social, economic and political transformations took place, followed by shifts in approaches towards the education systems. Thus, this time span is sufficient to establish clear patterns and possibly similarities between the three countries.

State of the Art

The most influencing article for our research was written by Gidley et al. (2010), describing three very different models shaping attitudes towards education. It differentiates between admitting only elites to universities and allowing access to the broader masses with regards to fairness or empowerment for all. Paulsen and Smart (2001) mention that the funding of the educational institutions in the U.S. has quickly shifted from the state’s to the families’ budgets, implying decreasing accessibility to higher education for marginalized groups which cannot afford tuition fees. This view was shared by Ford and Harmon (2001) who also emphasize that candidates from ethnic/social minorities have limited access to education. Most of the other analyzed research papers also show access inequality to education, especially in the case of racial minorities (cf. Darling-Hammond 1995). The other perspective, referring to the potential broadening of access is growing but still only

modestly represented by for example Freeman (2010).

Methodology

The theoretical framework of our study has been built upon the theory described by Gidley et al. (2010), who addresses the fundamental question of whether the quality of higher education and a broader access to it are mutually exclusive concepts. According to this model the quality of higher education might be perceived as a result of money spent on it. Therefore, the more people have access to educational institutions, the fewer resources per capita (in this case per student) are left and hence the quality of education decreases. These assumptions correspond to the concept of excellence vs. equality relevant to our research. The framework embraces three main ideologies, which characterize different approaches towards the degree of accessibility to education and the underlying premises.

→The first ideology is **neoliberalism (NL)**, advocating a very limited access to higher education. It proclaims that the goal of educational institutions is to form human capital, which will serve as a driver for the country’s economic growth and contributing to its better performance in the competitive global market. Therefore only a limited number of students can excel at the expense of masses.

→The second approach is the **social justice ideology (SJ)**, proclaiming that social inclusion is a matter of human rights and therefore provides fairness for all.

→From the perspective of the **human potential ideology (HP)**, access to higher education means empowerment for all. According to this concept, all human beings, including those marginalized, should get a chance to achieve success, which would subsequently result in a broader cultural transformation.

Based on these ideologies there have been extracted relevant criteria allowing the necessary cross-analysis of the existing similarities and differences between China, Japan and Korea. It aimed at enabling the process of matching the three aforementioned theories with the countries and time periods.

China

In the **19th century** China’s education has still been primarily associated with civil service examinations, through which government officials have been recruited. There were no tuition fees and selected students even received stipends. Education was directed mainly towards the study of the classics and literature. Applied science was almost completely neglected until the Qing launched a self-strengthening movement via the foundation of a government school teaching European languages and science in 1861. It was only after the Sino-Japanese War that China launched a campaign to offer women’s education, marking the beginning of gender equality within education as 1895 (Lee 2006: 345).

The late Qing government in the early **20th century** was primarily concerned with using the new schools as a means to install loyalty to the dynasty. The 20th century’s view builds a great contrast to the traditional one, which associated education mainly with an official career. Chinese educators began to emphasize the importance of vocational education. Due to the failure of the Chinese Republic (founded in 1912), revolts were led against Confucianism and everything considered ‘old traditions’. After the PRC’s founding in 1949, China modeled itself on the former Soviet Union with the main objective of higher education to serve the construction of the nation and its economy. The Communist party disapproved of the humanities and social sciences; instead, education became highly specialized and technical. It was not until 1977 that China started its gradual transformation and since the 1990s universities started to offer comprehensive education again (Wang and Liu 2011: 224).

Chinese education in the **21st century** shows the impact of its governments economic revitalization plan in 1999 that included an “expansion from elite to mass higher education” in order to stimulate consumption after the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997. The expansion of higher education would create a demand in infrastructure construction and students’ consumption of educational resources, thus spurring China’s economic growth – and bringing the economy out of stagnation within a short period of time. However, without an advanced financial aid program, China’s move to increase mass higher education deprives potential students of opportunities to attend university because of

the tuition fees, which were increased by the government (Wang and Liu 2011: 224).

Japan

The **19th century** in Japan denotes the beginning for higher tertiary education as it is understood in western societies. Although the Meiji Restoration brought a lot of changes, the first universities were in fact founded thirty years earlier (Okada 2005: 32). In terms of accessibility, universities were closed by law to the female half of the population (Okada 2005: 35) as well as a huge part of the male population, as most families could not afford to send their sons away to study (Okada 2005: 32). The universities’ goal is described as ‘the teaching of, and fundamental research into, arts and sciences necessary for the state’ (Okada 2005: 33).

With a complete reorientation in the educational system under the US Occupation **after 1945**, girls and boys were educated together for the first time and compulsory attendance of school was raised from 6 to 9 years (Okada 2005: 37). University education was now open to every individual with the right abilities (Okada 2005: 40). Unfortunately after the Occupation ended in 1952 the conservative Japanese government undertook some changes that resulted in a change of education philosophies, which got strengthened by the booming economy (Okada 2005: 39). Humans were again seen as capital for the economy (McVeigh 2002: 81). The difference to the Meiji period lays mostly in the inclusion of women and lower income families (Okada 2005: 39).

Throughout the **last 40 years** numerous reforms of the educational system have taken place in Japan. None of these seem to include the goal of education. Japanese schooling has as its goal “training, grading and filtering productive workers, not necessarily expanding an individual’s educational horizons” (McVeigh 2002: 82). The increasingly high competition over places in the top universities also generated a parallel schooling system, which prepares students for the so-called ‘examination hell’. While formally open to all, only a small percentage of Japanese families have the financial means to use this parallel system to its full potential, categorizing students, and therefore graduates, into different classes by family income (McVeigh 2002: 92). In addition, it

has been shown that the meritocratic educational system prevents certain groups from successful participation: women are still struggling with structural and culturally based gender inequalities, while minority groups do not receive necessary specialized treatment under the uniformity emphasizing Japanese system (Breaden 2013: 27).

Korea

In the **19th century** the formal Korean higher education system followed the Chinese-type Confucian institution (Lee 2004: 8). It was mainly regarded as an institution for training future bureaucrats who then rose to political positions (Lee 2004: 9). Students consisted of descendants of public officials (Park and Weidman 2007: 30).

During Japanese rule (**1904-1945**) there were severe restrictions regarding admissions to the universities (actually basic education was all that was offered). (Postiglione and Tan 2007: 323). Japan created an educational system in Korea which was designed to “serve all the needs of the empire” (Postiglione and Tan 2007: 323). The U.S. Military government **between 1945 and 1948** not only endeavored to eradicate the remnants of Japanese education, but made radical reforms by introducing an American education system. The goal was to educate Koreans so that each individual could reach his or her full potential (Seth 2002: 124). **From the 1960s to the 1980s**, higher education expanded to meet the national demand for manpower in Korean society (Lee 2004: 12). The New Education Movement emphasized equal opportunity for all and the development of self-reliance and individual responsibility (Seth 2002: 190).

In the **21st century** Korea is stepping out of the traditional educational system. It emphasizes the emergence of a knowledge-based economy in which traditional academic performance is no longer relevant; but well-rounded, creative, and flexible capacities, which are conceptualized as key competencies are valued (Park and Kim 2013: 5). Kim Dae Jung’s Brain Korea 21 policy (1999) and Roh Moo-Hyun’s NURI Project (2004-2008) both aimed at developing human capital to compete in a diverse, information-based, globalized world (Postiglione and Tan 2007: 338).

Results

All three countries started with neoliberal ideologies until about the middle of the 20th century, when they evolved into social justice ideologies, while still retaining some of the premises underlying the neoliberal one. In case of Japan and Korea the most influential factor contributing to this change was the American occupation resulting in the implementation of the western values. China was impacted by the Communist party which was shaping the goals of education to serve economy, while also making universities accessible to the masses. None of the countries managed to move to the human potential ideology yet unlike Austria. One example is the University of Vienna, which is an institution not only serving the economic purposes of the state, but also giving access to all eligible candidates, immensely heightening their chances in achieving future success.

Country	century	NL	SJ	HP
	XIX	√		
	XX	(√)	√	
	XXI	(√)	√	
	XIX	√		
	XX	(√)	√	
	XXI	(√)	√	
	XIX	√		
	XX	(√)	√	(√)
	XXI	(√)	√	

Selected References

- Gidley, Jennifer M, et al. 2010. “From Access to Success: An Integrated Approach to Quality Higher Education Informed by Social Inclusion Theory and Practice.” *Higher Education Policy* 23: 123-147.

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