

Enlightenment of Development of Higher Education in South Korea to China

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Abstract

China and South Korea are two neighboring countries and are both developing countries. Furthermore, the modern and contemporary higher education of these two countries originates from the middle and late 19th Century, so there are a lot of similarities between the two countries. However, although the origination period of modern and contemporary higher education of the two countries is almost similar, the developmental speed of higher education in these two countries is not totally the same due to the different strategic measures taken by the two countries in terms of developmental mode of higher education. Thus, study on differences between the higher education of these two countries and refer to the experience of South Korean higher education is of great and important realistic significance to improve higher education in China and promote economic and social development. Through an analysis in the development history and educational system of higher education in South Korea, this article makes a comparison of the similarities and differences between China and South Korea in terms of the current condition and reform of their educational system so as to find out the gap between China and South Korea in terms of the higher education and explore a correct path for development of China higher education.

Keywords: South Korea, Higher education, Educational system, Development history, Enlightenment

In 1980, the number of students involved in higher education in South Korea was enlarged from 200 thousand in 1970 to 600 thousand and the gross enrollment rate of its higher education reached 14.7%, which indicated that higher education in South Korea almost entered a state of popularization. Nevertheless, by the year 1996, the proportion of university students among South Korean population achieved 37% and increased to the top position in the world. The government of South Korea promulgated a series of laws and regulations to push forward reform of higher education to a change to the social system of lifelong learning, namely, universal higher education and advocated a mode of school running with diversification, autonomation and characteristic, which promoted the mushroom growth of the scale of higher education. So far as educational reform is concerned, the high frequency of educational reform in South Korea can be said to be one of only a handful of the countries in the world. This is also one of the major reasons for the leaping development of educational quality in South Korea. Yet, it seems that we are, more or less, lacking in strength in this respect. Compared with South Korea, although differences exist between the two countries in terms of the social system, still similarity of problems encountered in the process of development of higher education in the two countries does exist. With reference to the developmental history of higher education in South Korea, this article aims to better develop the higher education in China.

1. Development History of Higher Education in South Korea

The higher education in South Korea went through four stages in its development from the end of the Second World War until the present.

1.1 The Expansion Period (1945-1960)

In 1945 when the Second World War was over, the illiteracy rate in South Korea was 78% and compared with higher education in China, the basis for higher education in South Korea was quite vulnerable. After the Second World War was over, there were only 19 colleges and universities, 7819 university students and 1490 full-time university teachers in South Korea. Among the 19 colleges and universities, only Seoul Imperial University was a comprehensive university which had almost 800 undergraduates, among which there were almost 330 students with a South Korean nationality. However, on one hand, with approaching to an end of the war, all walks of life were in a great need of a variety of talents. On the other hand, the investment by the government was quite limited which was difficult to satisfy the tremendous demand for development of higher education. As a result, non-government funded education got an opportunity for its vigorous development and this rapidly enlarged the scale of higher education and laid a solid foundation for school running by social power in the future to become the feature and superiority of higher education in South Korea. In 1952, the number of colleges and universities in South Korea was 49 and the number of university students was 46 thousand, increasing by nearly 5 times more than the number in 1945. Among all the 49 colleges and universities, there were 37 private colleges and universities which accounted for a proportion of 75.5%. And during the period from 1953 to 1959, the number of students involved in higher education in South Korea increased by 93%. However, since non-government funded higher education was deficient of a unified planning and control by the government, such issues emerged as repeated disciplines and professional setting.

1.2 The Rectification and Control Period (1961-1969)

During the period from 1945 to 1960, the scale of higher education in South Korea increased almost by 12 times and the number of university students was up to more than 100 thousand. Nonetheless, the blind expansion of the higher education also brought about a series of social issues, such as, low employment rate and singleness and repetition of school level and category. Thus, by the period of 60s in the 20th Century, development of the higher education in South Korea entered low ebb and the development speed slowed down and the higher education entered a rectification and control period. During this period, the government took the measures of rectifying the school category in a large scale, adjusting the hierarchical structure of the disciplines and controlling the number of students to realize the regulation, control and macro planning on the higher education.

1.3 The Reform and Development Period (1970-1990)

By the year 1970, illiteracy was almost cleared away in South Korea. The enrollment rate of entering colleges and universities and junior colleges from the senior middle schools was 26.9%. In the 70s of the 20th Century, economy in South Korea entered a period of growth with a high speed and the country began to transfer its industrial development focus to substitute its import. Its expedition in development of the heavy chemical industry and training on the technical workers required further expansion of the higher education. In relation to the change of the industrial structure, the government of South Korea began to carry out reform of the higher education. Under the propelling of the educational reform, the scale of the higher education in South Korea also got high speed development. By the year 1980, the number of students engaged in the higher education in South Korea had been enlarged from 200 thousand in 1970 to 600 thousand and the number of university students increased by more than three times, with an annual growth rate of 12.4%. The gross enrollment rate of the higher education reached 14.7%, which indicated that the higher education in South Korea almost entered a stage of popularization. The higher education went through expansion on a large scale and control on its development scale and then expansion again. It can't be denied that some new issues appeared in the transition of the higher education in South Korea from popularization to universalness. For example, the situation of low employment rate of graduates seriously affected development of the higher education.

1.4 Transition from Quantity-based Development to Quality-based Development (1991-Present)

In the 90s of the 20th Century, the South Korean Government set up the Council for Education to take the responsibility of establishing and carrying out a long term comprehensive educational reform program. Implementation of a series of educational policies has greatly facilitated improvement of quality of the higher education in South Korea. As the 21st Century approached, the South Korean government placed special emphasis on improvement of quality of the higher education and proposed transition of the higher education from quantity-based development to the quality-based development track. For this, the government promulgated a lot of significant policies to steadily propel reform in the universities and advocated the school running mode of diversification, automation and characteristic so as to promote rapid development of quality of the higher education.

2. Characteristics of Development of the Higher Education in South Korea

2.1 Diversified School Running System in the Higher Education

University in South Korea includes the two kinds of state-run (or public) university and private university. Private universities account for more than 85% of the total universities, which indicates that the higher education in South Korea is mainly private. Quality of education can both be guaranteed regardless of state-run university or private university. Under certain circumstance, the education level in a private university is a notch above. According to the Education Act in South Korea and the decrees concerned, both state-run and private institutions of higher learning have to be subordinate to supervision by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education is responsible for handling and controlling the quota of students, examining and verifying the qualification of teachers, setting the curriculum and approving the condition for degree conferring as well as specifying unified curriculum, etc. It is mostly graduates who graduate from a brand university and who also have an experience of studying abroad who are qualified to teach in a university in South Korea. Teachers with a title of lecturer and above in the university are mostly PhD graduates who have been awarded with a PhD degree overseas and who have returned to the country.

2.2 Implementing the Teaching Idea of Combination of the East and the West and Highlighting the Concept of “National Characters”

The change of education in South Korea in the past 60 years from growing out of nothing and expanding from a small to a large force and to be treated by the western large powers in education with increased respect is owing to its tradition in the national culture of respecting teachers and focusing on their teaching and its antecedence to other countries in Asia in realizing the importance to learn advanced western educational ideas. Combination of eastern and western teaching ideas has not led to chaos of national culture and ideas. Instead, it has been accepted by all the nationals who self-consciously participate in education, volunteer to accept education and spontaneously support the education career. The South Korean people attach great importance to education of the traditional culture in the country. Some universities and social associations often organize a variety of voluntary activities to let students come to understand and deeply experience the traditional culture of South Korea. Teachers also frequently integrate the traditional culture of South Korea in their teaching into the curriculum. Even in the processing of teaching of a newly born profession, the teachers are also able to direct the students to skillfully combine the traditional elements with the modern elements and bring the traditional cultural factors into the modern scientific form. The effect of education in South Korea on the economic development not only lies in its cultivating a lot of qualified and excellent professional talents and technical talents for the national economic development of South Korea, but more importantly, forms a kind of “national spirit” that is characteristic of South Korean people, namely, taking the big picture into consideration for the cause of the country and the nation and constantly striving to become stronger. Under the large background of national education, South Korea educates all of its people to support in offering all-round spiritual education on the university students in terms of economy, morality and justice, which has the unique feature of skillful combination of the East and the West.

2.3 The Curriculum Setting of “Professionalism and Individualism”

All of institutions of higher learning in South Korea advocate the idea of open and internationalized school running, highlight cultivation of the ability of “global employment” among university students and emphasize “professionalism and individualism” in curriculum setting to meet different needs and interest of students. The discipline structure and professional setting of universities in South Korea adhere to orientation of social need. Except for some basic research, the professional setting in institutions of higher learning generally concentrates on professional setting so as to satisfy social need and the demand in the market. Higher education is closely connected with the social and economic development in its professional setting and curriculum arrangement and adds or changes, in time, the profession and curriculum in accord with the need of social development so as to make the higher education always imbued with vigor. The school examines the rationality of professional setting of the discipline and, in due course, makes adjusts on the profession of the discipline with reference to the social survey and the information of feedback by graduates on their employment. For instance, Chongju University is an “institution of cultivation for human resources of sunlight industry” that is identified by the Ministry of Knowledge Economy in South Korea. In order to adapt to the need of students for a diversified learning and in combination with the “sunlight research project” entrusted by the government, this university has specially set up “sunlight project curriculum”, including such engineering courses of electronics and semi-conductor. The students are able to take these courses as an elective course ever since they enter the university and acquire an appropriate credit, which has not only satisfied the need of students who have an outstanding learning capacity, but has also cultivated professional talents for this industry. In order to foster the balance capacity of students in all fields and promote students’ all-around development,

Silla University combines the requirement of the times and specially sets up courses of teaching in the four fields of internationalization, informationization, human nature and leadership in addition to the professional curriculum so as to adapt to the cultivation requirement for talents of internationalization.

2.4 Introduction of Assessment System into the Higher Education

Assessment on university is upgrade and guarantee of the teaching quality. In view of this, South Korea has brought into the assessment mode of US and has adopted new university assessment system, including the three types of assessment, namely, university financial assistance assessment, comprehensive university assessment and academic assessment. The result of university financial assistance assessment will be regarded as an important evidence for the appropriation budget of the government. The new assessment mechanism has enabled the condition for running a school in South Korea to take a large change. For example, the educational facilities and the material environment condition of ratio of teachers and students has been improved, which adds to the autonomy and initiative of reform in the university. In addition, "The Brain Korea 21 Project" has also brought the college of law, the college of medicine and the MBA college into the scope of policy reform and has planned to enhance the assessment system in the higher education and set up high quality supervision system with the help of higher education assessment institution.

2.5 Higher Education Promoting Economic Growth

University is a "roll booster" for the contemporary social development. The South Korean government has fully realized the significant importance of the higher education in the national development, so the government has promulgated a great many significant policies, such as, reform in the system of the university, incorporating state-run universities, amending university entrance system and academic research promotion plan, and steadily propelling reform in the university to strengthen its competitive force. The sustainable and rapid development of the higher education has made enormous contribution to the economic development in South Korea. During the period from 2000 to 2008, the average annual economic growth rate drastically increased and took a leap to become one of the countries in the world that had the fastest economic growth. Expansion in enrollment of higher education has not only satisfied the social need and demand of the people, but has also increased the employment positions for education and educational service and has created new employment opportunities for the society. The higher education can also facilitate continuous optimization of the industrial structure from a lower level to a higher level. The continuous optimization of the industrial structure requires the laborers to continue to enhance their quality, especially employees involved in the fourth industry (knowledge industry and information industry). It is difficult for them to become a qualified employee without accepting the higher education.

2.6 Obvious Tendency of Internationalization

By the end of the 80s in the 20th Century, international exchange and cooperation in the higher education in South Korea had been significantly increased. Ever since the 90s in the 20th Century, internationalization of higher education in South Korea has mainly included the following content: educational and cultural exchange by means of participating in signing the exchange program of bilateral agreement by the government and participating in the exchange activities by international organizations, international flow of scholars, teachers and students, internationalization of profession and curriculum content, support of South Korean research overseas, initiating the education market and propelling transnational education.

3. Enlightenment of Development of Higher Education in South Korea to China

3.1 Completing Establishment of Laws and Regulations in the Higher Education and Strengthening Guidance on the Higher Education and Providing the Function of Assurance

Although China has, so far, continuously promulgated a lot of laws and regulations concerning the higher education, it has failed to completely make appropriate adjustment and amendment in accordance with the change of a specific situation in the process of implementation of the laws and regulations. South Korea has been quite successful in construction of the laws and regulations, which deserves our efforts to learn. With regards to the situation of development in the higher education in China, the department concerned should further consolidate construction of laws and regulations in the higher education and make the system of laws and regulations in the higher education perfect day by day, so as to further ensure rapid and orderly development of the higher education.

3.2 Broadening the Financing Channel for the Higher Education, Vigorously Develop Private Higher Education and Expediting the Progress of Popularization of the Higher Education in China

By the end of the 20th Century, South Korea had entered a stage of universalness of the higher education on which private universities had exerted tremendous effects. The quality of private universities is, not in the least, inferior to

the quality of state-run and public universities, which deserves our reference. In order to strengthen the power of the higher education, it is a must to resolve the current issue of insufficient investment in the higher education. Investment by the government has always been the major source for funds of running a school in the higher education in China and this single fund collection mode makes the universities depend too much on the government. On one hand, limited investment in education by the government leads to slowed development of the higher education. On the other hand, too much dependence on the government weakens the autonomous right of the universities and the national finance in fund investment in education is limited. We have start with the reality, carry out some policies that encourage the enterprises and the social associations to make an investment in the education and support the education and further facilitate development of the private higher education. First of all, the government has to strengthen its legislation to support the private higher education and encourage school running with the social power through its policies. Then, we have to change our concept of not entering a non brand-name university, not pursuing a degree below the undergraduate and not studying in a non-state-run university and select a university that is suitable for ourselves according to our realistic level and practical interest.

3.3 The Leading Direction Based on Social Need

Rapid change in the employment field and employment mode in the modern society further facilitates close connection between higher education and production department, strengthens the vocational education function of higher education, serves the social political and economic need, and promotes gradual transition from the social orientation with the tenet of improving development of social productivity and the living standard of people to the leading orientation of school running of higher education. The orientation of social demand is the leading direction of professional setting in higher education. The real reason for the phenomenon of difficult employment among university students is that the level of the students is low, but that most professional setting and curriculum system break away from the reality and are deficient in practicality. The higher education in China should, on one hand, popularize the higher education, and, on the other hand, strengthen the features of professional talents and cultivation of their advantages. Only when education adapts to and satisfies the demand of the society on talents, can it exert its maximum functions on development of economy, science and society. Thus, we have to change our concept, keep pace with the times, do the utmost to set up a higher education school attendance system to suit with the social demand, highlight advantage of each students, formulate different student evaluation standards according to different features of different students and really carry out the school running idea of “human orientation”.

3.4 Establishing Quality Assurance System in the Higher Education and Ensuring the Quality of the Higher Education

To set up and improve the national higher education quality assurance system is a strategic procedure to comply with the development trend of the global higher education, meet the challenges and grasp the development initiative. Construction of higher education quality assurance system has to depend on the common efforts by the government, the university and the whole society. Especially education administrative departments at all levels and the vast majority of institutions of higher learning have to stand on the height of the times, come to full realization of the importance and urgency of higher education quality assurance system under the guidance of scientific outlook on development, get a clear understanding of the target, seize the direction, know clearly about the responsibility and speed up in constructing and forming a higher education quality assurance system that is led by external quality assurance of the government, and has the subject of internal quality assurance of the university, with complement of social quality assurance, promoting internal aspects with external aspects and with combination of internal and external aspects.

3.5 Speeding up the Internationalization Progress of Higher Education in China

Higher education in South Korea has realized a great-leap-forward development on the basis of adhering to the guiding idea and the strategy of school running of “internationalized school running” and has achieved an achievement that strikes the attention of the world. The internationalization of Chinese higher education is not as high and its direction of internationalized school running of higher education has not yet received due emphasis. Especially, a lot of local institutions of higher learning are still at a low level in terms of the internationalized development of higher education, which not only is goes against improvement of the school running quality of higher education in China, but also is unlikely to provide sufficient human resources for China to develop into a world power. Hence, in order to accelerate the progress of internationalization in the higher education, we have to follow the following seven aspects, namely, positive development of education of overseas students, strengthening exchange with teachers, conducting academic exchange through a variety of approaches, facilitating internationalization of curriculum, developing education development assistance, attempting international

cooperative school running and intensifying foreign language teaching.

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