

# A Social Policy Analysis of Expanded Enrolment of China's Higher Education

## ANALYSE DE LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE DE RECRUTEMENT ELARGI DE L'EDUCATION SUPERIEURE DE CHINE

Gong Rui<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Since 1999, China's State Council has made a series of significant policy adjustments on the development of higher education. Among these the most important and profound one is a new deal of expanded enrolment. Meanwhile, this new policy has also raised a variety of policy dilemmas. This paper conducts an analysis of the expanded enrolment policy from the perspective of social policy, with a purpose of providing help for the research of China's higher education reform.

**Key words:** China's higher education, expanded enrolment policy, social policy analysis

**Résumé:** Depuis 1999, le Conseil des Affaires d'Etat de la Chine a pris une série de politiques significatives pour ajuster le développement de l'éducation supérieure. Parmi les plus importantes se trouve une qui vise au recrutement élargi. En même temps, cette nouvelle politique a causé aussi des dilemmes. L'article présent procède à une analyse de la politique de recrutement élargi dans la perspective de la politique sociale dans l'intention de donner une aide aux recherches de la réforme de l'éducation supérieure chinoise.

**Mots-Clés:** éducation supérieure de Chine, politique de recrutement élargi, analyse de politique sociale

### 1. THE BACKGROUND AND CURRENT SITUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EXPANDED ENROLMENT

China's reform and development of higher education has undergone three phases. The first phase is from the Third Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central to the issue of "The Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Educational Reform". This phase is a period of

"gestation" for China's educational system. The focus of this period is to expand the educational autonomy of universities and colleges. The second phase is from the issue of "The Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Educational Reform" to the 14th Party Congress, on which the goal of "establishing the new system of socialist market economy" was explicitly set. This is a period when the higher education system reform was in full swing. The third stage is from the 14th National Party Congress to the issue of "The Reform and Development Program of China", which was jointly authorized by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council of China. This opened up a new era of China's education system. (Deng Xiaochun, 2002)

**Table 1** Data is from the *Statistics Bulletin of National Education Development: 1999-2005*, Ministry of Education of P. R. China.

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Enrolment number (10,000)	159.68	220.61	268.28	320.5	382.17	447.34	504.46
The growth compared with previous year (10,000)	51.32	52.79	47.67	52.22	61.67	65.17	57.12
Growth rate (%)	47.4	31.45	21.6	19.46	19.24	17.05	12.77

According to UNESCO statistics in 1998, the gross enrollment rate of school-age youth for higher education was

averagely 18.18% worldwide, with 40.12% in developed countries and 14.11% in developing countries. In comparison,

<sup>1</sup> Graduate student, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Xi'an Jiaotong University, China.

\* Received 26 October 2006 ; accepted 21 March 2007

the figure was merely 7.16% in China. The conversion from elite education to mass education till the achievement of popularization of higher education has been an inevitable choice and inexorable social development trend. (Ji Baocheng, 1996)

Thus, in 1999 the State Council made drastic adjustments in higher education policy. In the new policy the most important content is the expansion of student's enrollment. (Table 1) From 1999 to 2005 there was a dramatic advance in the college students' enrollment.

## 2. EXPANDED ENROLMENT TRIGGERED NEW PROBLEMS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Values consideration holds a key position in making public policies. In the process of policy formulation and implementation, value embodies not only the realization of people's need, but also the pursuit of the certain objectives. In most cases, a public policy is produced as the result of an assortment of identification, comparison, differentiation, and coordination. This process reflects the relationship and interaction of various interests behind, and is in itself a gaming process involving various values and interests. This will inevitably lead to the conflict and tension between the single-objective-orientated policy and multiple values, because policy cannot guarantee the realization of the interests of each interest group. The actual results of expanded enrollment policy are inevitably different from its expected impact. The following issues will be triggered.

### 2.1 Expanded enrollment requires adequate

**Table 2** data from 2000-2004 Teacher-student's ratio, *Education Development Statistics Bulletin*, Ministry of Education

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
teacher-student's ratio	1 : 16	1 : 18	1 : 19	1 : 17	1 : 16.2

**2.1.3** Expanded enrollment triggered severe shortage of educational resources. (Liu Haifeng, Xie Zuoxu: 2003)

**Table 3** 1998-2001 area of teaching and administrative land (per capita)

type	1998 (m <sup>2</sup> )	2001 (m <sup>2</sup> )	rate (%)
4-year universities	13.5	10.3	-24
3-year colleges	18.0	12.6	-30

**Note:** both teaching and administrative space include: classroom, laboratory, administrative space and library.

**Table 4** 1998-2001 Value of teaching facilities (yuan per capita)

Type	1998	2001	rate (%)
4-year universities	13.5	10.3	-24
3-year colleges	18.0	12.6	-30

educational conditions, infrastructures, management models, and teaching methods. As the enrollment expanded too fast, most colleges and universities are confronted with the problems such as the lack of school area, classrooms, student dormitories, teaching equipment, and the supply of faculties:

**2.1.1** Some colleges and universities are blindly in pursuit of upgrading. In order to obtain more educational resources and a better ranking, many colleges and universities do everything possible to upgrade their identities. A survey showed that from 1992 to 2003, 53 3-year colleges were upgraded to universities, and 175 schools were upgraded to 3-year colleges. (Yan Guangfen, Shang Yingna: 2005). However, many of these universities are substandard. In 2004, the Ministry of Education released the list of universities which are forced to reduce their enrolment, in which 33 colleges are warned to reduce their enrollment, 26 universities failed to reach the set standard, including 11 4-year universities and 15 3-year colleges, accounting for 42.31% and 57.69% respectively. Another 7 universities failed to reach the standard due to the statistics error. In 2005, 60 universities and colleges were warned by the Ministry of Education. (From *The Notice of the List of Universities and Colleges to Be Ordered to Reduce Enrollment*, Ministry of Education)

**2.1.2** The teacher-student's ratio in some universities is very unreasonable. According to the regulations of the Ministry of Education, teacher-student's ratio is supposed to be 1:15-16. Table 2 shows this feature. The average ratio is reasonable nationwide, but some in colleges and universities, a teacher-student ratio is very low. In Guangdong this figure was 1:29.35 in 2004, and 1:43.92 if the number of adult students is taken into account. (Zou Lin, Guo Ruoping, Zhang Yiling: 2004) The education quality for graduate students was unavoidably degraded to the same level as undergraduates. Take the Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics for example, from 2000, the annual growth rate of graduate enrolment reached as high as 40%. In order to solve the problem of faculty shortage, the university allocates 30 million RMB to attract qualified teachers. (Yao Yujie: 2004)

**Table 5** 1998-2001 Volume of books (per capita)

Type	1998	2001	rate (%)
4-year universities	115	70	-39
3-year colleges	126	82	-35

(per capita refers to a calculated index. According to the Ministry of Education, a calculated index of per capita is as follows: undergraduate: 1; graduate: 2; foreign student: 3; non-degree student: 1; adult student: 1; correspondent student: 0.2. This is based on the statistics of national education development in 2001)

### 2.2 Expanded enrolment trigger educational loans policy

In June 1999, the State Council started a pilot project on national education loan in 8 cities including Beijing and Shanghai. This project, which was introduced to the whole country in 2000, aims to help impoverished

students to finish their college education. At present, we have established nation-wide multiple financial aid system including scholarships, student loans, fellowship and other financial assistance for students.(Lv Wei, Xiao Zhihua, Wang Ye:2004)

However, with the expanded enrolment, the national education loans seem to be inadequate to the actual needs of all students due to the increasing number of impoverished students.

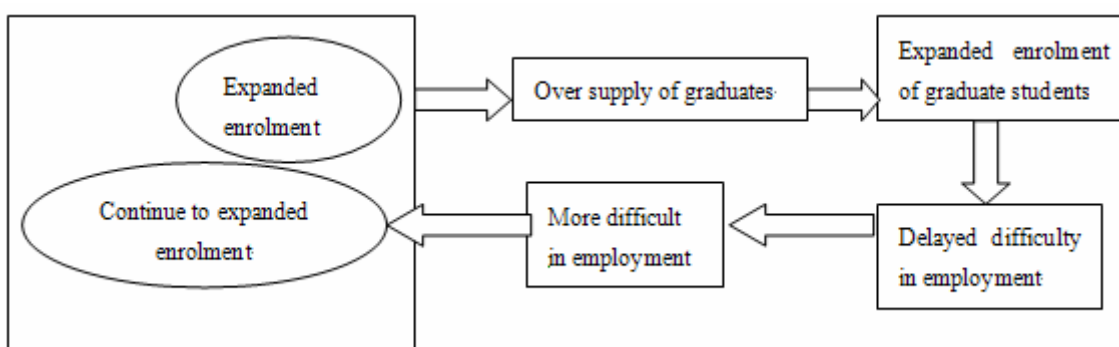
Currently the total number of students in universities and colleges is 903.4 million, if the poor students account for 20%, the number of students who need national education loans will reach 180 million. If each student is allocated 6,000 yuan, annually the required amount of national education loans will reach 100 billion yuan. However, in 2003 only 18.92 billion

was actually provided. (China Statistical Yearbook: 2003)

**2.3 Expanded enrolment increased competition for employment and further exacerbated the imbalance between supply and demand.**

**2.3.1** This problem arises due to the difference between the planned model in student’s enrolment and the market-oriented model in employment. The policy of expanding enrolment is implemented by the authority of government, while the employment process is decided by the force of market.

**The bizarre circle of expanded enrolment and employment (Wu Hongzhi: 2005)**



**2.3.2** The overall employment situation is characterized by more supply than the actual demand. The University graduates face fierce competition. Laid-off workers of state-owned enterprises, rural farmers and the college graduates constitute the main labor force, which exacerbates the fierce competition in the job market. From 2000 to date, our labor market has been under saturated situation, (Figure 1)

A new unemployed group, with the main body as university graduates, has formed. Between 2001 and 2005, the average employment rate of graduates of colleges and universities nationwide was only about 70%. According to the statistics from Ministry of Education, the annual growth in the number of unemployed college graduates is illustrated in Figure 2.

This “unemployment upon graduation” phenomenon is caused by various factors:

First, graduates have too high expectations towards employment: 1, from the geographical point of view, many university graduates intend to work in southeast coastal areas and larger cities, and very few choose rural and small towns. (Table 6) 2, the vast majority of graduates choose the government sectors as ideal working places. Investigation reveals that in 2003 in Beijing, 33.1% of the graduates choose foreign-funded companies; 27.4% choose large state-owned enterprises; 19.7% choose non-profit institutes; 13.5% choose

government agencies. 3, The expected salary level of college students is relatively too high. In 2002, the Institute of Higher Education of South China Normal University conducted a survey in Shanghai. The survey reveals that university graduates’ starting salary is 1600--2000 yuan, while their expectations are between 2000 and 4000 yuan. (Zhang Fuming: 2005)

Secondly, the traditional concept of employment of college students has seriously affected the employment expectations. At present, China’s cultural system and the educational system have not been adapted to the market need. Chinese family traditionally put all their hopes in their children. Although college students are supposed to be ordinary employees, the traditional concept that college students are the elite of people is not likely to be changed in a short period.

Finally, the students themselves lack necessary skills and competence for their position. Enterprises are organizations entirely operated in accordance with market’s need, so they need employees who can contribute to their value. If students fall short of their own high level of work requirements, no agreement will be reached between employers and students.

Figure 1

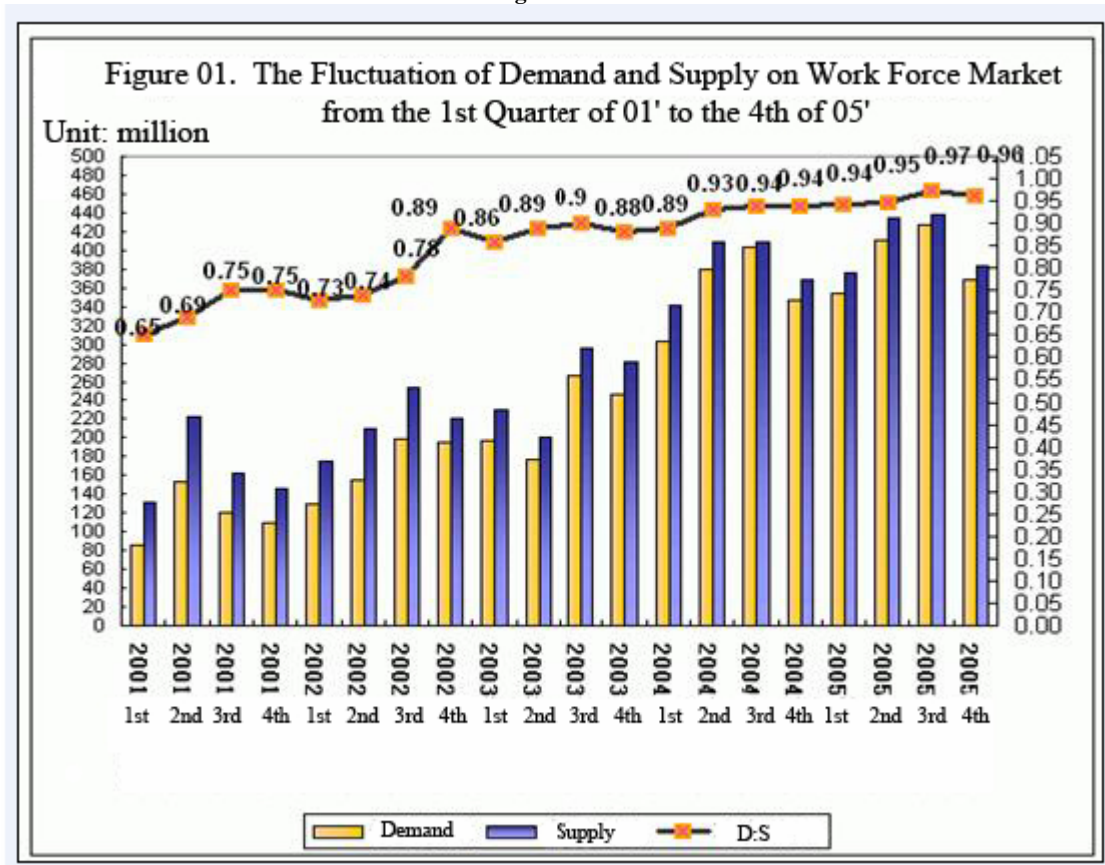


Figure 2

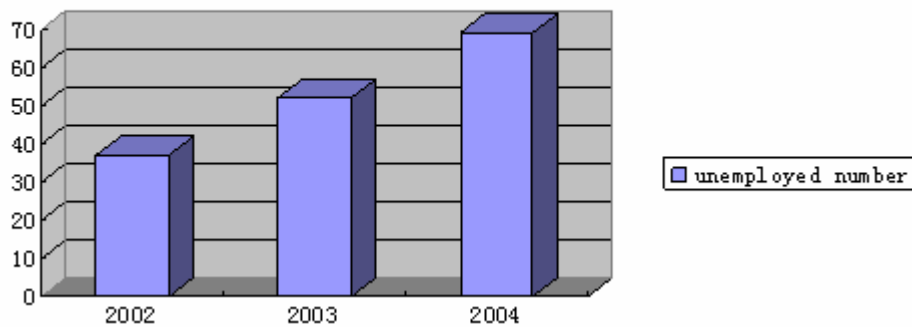


Figure 2 The number of unemployed college graduates  
Source: Statistical Bulletin provided by Ministry of Labor and Social Security

Table 6

Location preference for employment					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Eastern costal	103	67.8	67.8	67.8
	Inland area	44	28.9	28.9	96.7
	Western area	5	3.3	3.3	100.0
Total		152	100.0	100.0	

Table 6 from Survey on Northwestern University graduates, 2005(Lv Jmg: 2005)

### 3. SOCIAL POLICY ANALYSIS OF EXPANDED ENROLMENT

Each policy is aimed for a specific objective and intended result, and this is where the value of the policy lies. The purpose of expanding the enrolment is not only to offer more education opportunities for students as well as their parents, but also to provide the supply of talents for China's modernization. More importantly, this policy will in the long run serve as an incentive to the economic growth, and in effect it mitigates the pressure of unemployment on the society. To some extent, this policy contributes to a more rational and reasonable development of the level and stratum of higher education. (Liu Shaoxue : 1999)

#### 3.1 The fairness and efficiency of higher education policy

##### 3.1.1 Higher education efficiency is a prerequisite for higher education fairness

Since 1999, continuous expanded enrollment accelerated the process of popularization of higher education, with more and more people are able to enjoy higher education. Overall, this is conducive to the promotion of higher education fairness. However, the increasing number of enrollment will lead to the degrading of the quality and competence of students who are supposed to be employed. In that case, the popularization of higher education will not guarantee the fairness of the higher education level.

##### 3.1.2 Fairness of higher education is the purpose of higher education

The judgment of higher education efficiency is the degree to which it can satisfy the intended people's need. The acceleration of higher education and the increase of efficiency are to satisfy people's need for higher education. The fairness of higher education, which is the purpose of developing socialist higher education, is also the purpose of the efficiency of higher education.

##### 3.1.3 Higher education fairness and efficiency are not always contradictory

Higher education fairness impacts higher education efficiency and the efficiency of higher education in turn constrain higher education fairness. But they are not eternally opposite to each other. The confrontation between fairness and efficiency is not so much the inherent conflict inside them as it is due to the biased nature awareness.

#### 3.2 The fixedness of planned policy v.s. uncertainty of market

Policy is guidance and restraint aimed at the future social and market behavior. It is based on past and current realities and combined with social practice theoretical conventions. Therefore a policy must be well-planned. A fully-researched and properly-conceived policy is more adaptable to society and market.

China's economy is experiencing profound shift with a lot of uncertain features. Firstly we need to have a clear understanding of the general environment of market and summarize the historic experiences. Secondly, other country's practice can be utilized as valuable reference.

#### 3.3 The unintended policy result in the new era

The process of marketization and globalization will inevitably threaten the traditional industries. Newly emerged enterprises have more efficiency in using the talents and developing the ability of employees. In accordance, they have a higher requirement for the comprehensive competence of graduates. Generally, the comprehensive talents will have more advantage in job seeking. They are supposed to acquire a solid foundation in specialties, and they also acquire wide knowledge. A large number of mixed and intersected subjects also require more and more people of such talent and competence.

However, the rapid development of the market and globalization will significantly reduce the accuracy of the forecasts when making policies. So policy-makers should have more accurate sense of market and take a bolder attitude in predicting the market trend. Only in this way can we make the policies as accurate as possible and avert the potential negative effects. And this is also the basis on which a policy can be safely implemented and achieve its intended purpose.

#### 3.4. A new public educational policy must take into account all social aspects

The policy of expanded enrolment will exert a slow but lasting influence on the whole society. Actually whether the expanded enrolment policy can reach its intended purpose is to be decided by various other social factors, because education policies are inevitably related to many other fields in society. In many cases, an education policy, with a positive significance to the development of society, may not fully achieve its expected purpose due to the inadequacy of social and economic development level and the constraints of various laws and regulations. A supportive outside environment will favorably facilitate the implementation of education policies and the development of education. These include the improvement of social development and economy, the enhancement of ideology and awareness. Only a

circumspect and prudent policy can eventually benefit the development of education.

(Liu Shaoxue : 1999)

#### 4. SOLUTION IDEAS

##### 4.1. Government should be well informed in making policies

In the establishment of professional majors, colleges and universities should strengthen prediction, analysis and investigation of the job market, and effectively mitigate the contradiction between large scale and high quality, major development and market need. We believe that the speed of expanding the enrolment should be decelerated so that the overall education quality can be maintained. The policy should be implemented according to the social and economic development level both nationally and locally. The setting of so called cold-majors should be seriously considered to avoid the oversupply of graduates who will face difficult situation in job market.

##### 4.2 Making polices requires a scientific mechanism as support

For example, a policy for improving the quality of teaching requires a sound quality control system: First, the active training strategies should be chosen, and structure of teachers should be optimized. The degree level of university teachers should be enhanced greatly with a significant increase in the percentage of teachers with master or doctors' degree. The selection and training of senior and experienced teachers should be strengthened. In the meantime, some policies should be utilized in order to attract excellent teachers in order to enrich the faculty team. Secondly, systematic and scientific education appraisal should be implemented by the government authorities. Universities and colleges are encouraged to put a higher education quality at the first place under the constant and regular supervision system.( Yuan Chunli,Li Luping:2006)

##### 4.3 Compensation mechanisms

All the education policies aim to reduce the difference among social groups and individuals. This purpose can be achieved only through sound and mature compensation mechanism, which can provide more assistance, through legislation or policy-making, to those individuals or groups who have disadvantages in the allocation of opportunities, rights and resources in education. This will increase the overall level of fairness in the education system. Currently, these compensation mechanisms include the share of education cost, providing fellowship, scholarship, student's loan, and chances of part-time jobs for impoverished students.

##### 4.4 Continuous improvement and innovation of education policy

State educational loans policy is part of the solution to those impoverished students. It also facilitates the development of universities and colleges, and safeguards social stability. However, the majority of need-based students did not enjoy the benefit from this policy. In a way, this policy is far from its originally designed objectives, and far from the need of impoverished students. This raises high attention and emphasis of relevant departments, and the State Council authorized the "Guidelines on the further improvement of national educational loans" in January, 2004. This Guideline made a significant adjustment and improvement on the policy and its implementation mechanism, the aversion of risks, the organization and leadership on the national education loan, which is characterized by the newly introduced plan of risk compensation. It has the following features: first, the repayment period is prolonged from 4 years to 6 years; second, the loan interest is paid by the national financial fund during the students' studying period until he leaves school. Third, the government does not assign the financial institutes to implement the policy. Rather, bidding is introduced to this practice. Forth, the risk compensation fund is equally shared by the state's finance, the local finance and the school. Practices has proved that the loan is a significant measure to aid impoverished students and satisfy the wish of people who intend to enjoy higher education. Consequently, this policy contributes a lot to the stability and development of the country, to the establishment of a harmonious society in China. ( Wen Hongyan: 2006 )

##### 4.5 Higher education system should be suited to the development of the socialist market economy

Through sustained reform in the 1990s, China's higher education institutions have made great progress. However, from an overall point of view, there still exists a considerable gap between the current higher education system and the development of the socialist market economy. Therefore, in a fairly long period, the direction of China's higher educational policy is to continue to build and improve the market economy to the benefit of rapid development of higher education. And the establishment and perfection of the system of higher education lies in maintaining a positive response to the market, to maintain and enhance the flexibility and vitality of higher education institutions, higher education lies in the effective mobilization and use of all resources. To this end, the establishment of an efficient, structured and diversified school system, multi-channel and multi-institutional forms of financing, as well as scientific, standardized, and the rule of law,

self-discipline-independent management system, can promote equity and efficiency of higher education by

means of a “win-win” higher education policy choice.(Chen Bin: 2003)

### REFERENCES

Deng Xiaochun. *Higher Education Exploration*, Vol. 11, 26-33

Ji Baocheng. *China Education Daily*, 4th Ed.

Yan Guangfen, Shang Yingna. *Contemporary Education Forum*, No. 9

Zou Lin, Guo Ruoping, Zhang Yiling Yao Yujie.. *Shantou Daily*, 2004, Jan. 30.

Liu Haifeng, Xie Zuoxu. *Educational research developments at home and abroad*.

Lv Wei, Xiao Zhihua, Wang Ye. *China Statistical Yearbook*.

Wu Hongzhi.. *Education Development Research*, 2005, Vol. 2 14-19.

Zhang Fuming. *Chinese Market*. Vol. 11, 138-139.

Lv Jing. *Brief analysis on the difficult issue of the Chinese Graduate Employment*.

Liu Shaoxue. *Shanghai Jiaotong University Journal (Social Science Edition)*.

Yuan Chunli, Li Luping. *Gansu Technology Cooperation*.

State Council forwarded the Ministry of the People's Bank CBRC work on the further improvement of the national educational loans issued notice a number of observations [2004] 51.

Wen Hongyan. *China Education Daily*, Mar. 30.

Chen Bin. *Academic Journal of Higher Education*.

### THE AUTHOR

**Gong Rui**, Graduate student, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Xi'an Jiaotong University. China. The main research interests are educational sociology and educational policy.

E-mail: gongrui530@stu.xjtu.edu.cn