



REPORT ON MASTER THESIS

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Study program: Public and Social Policy

Title of the master thesis: Tuition fees in Chinese public higher education and their implications for equity of access

Supervisor: Mgr. Jan Kohoutek, Ph.D.

Name of the referee: Doc. PhDr. Arnošt Veselý, Ph.D.

The master thesis deals with the educational inequality in China caused by the increase in university tuition in the last two decades. Given the number of tertiary education students in China (3,2 millions), this topic is very important not only in China but also globally. Despite its importance, this topic is absolutely under researched. The current thesis thus provides one of the very few insights into the problem.

The thesis is optimally structured. It includes all parts that master thesis should have. It starts with introduction of the research topic, followed by research questions, theoretical background and methodology. The essential part is formed by empirical analysis of Chinese higher education tuition system that is based mostly upon case studies of three universities. All parts of the thesis are sufficiently linked one another. The questions initially asked have been as follows:

1. How does the system of tuition fee collection function in Chinese higher education?
2. Why and by how much did the tuition fees rise within the system of Chinese higher education?
3. How does the system of tuition fee collection affect the equity of access to higher education in China? How much cost ratio is reasonable for the students and families to share?
4. Is there a more reasonable system of tuition charge applicable to the Chinese higher education system?

I do not think that all questions asked in the part two have been fully answered. Especially, the question 3 remains rather open because of data limitation (data of socio-economic background of the students are not provided). Nevertheless, the author provides at least some tentative (and probably the first) evidence that it access of education must be seen as a huge problem when two socio-economic groups are contrasted. The author, for instance, found and calculated that in 2014, the tuition accounted for about 19.35% in urban residents' per capita income as compared to 53.2% in rural resident's per capita income. It means that if a rural family have 2 or 3 children, the per capita income of a rural family would be \$3224 in 2014, and 2 or 3 university students need \$1716



or \$2574 and thus the higher education tuition costs would account for 53.23% or 79.84% in rural family's annually income which is absolutely unaffordable.

The context here is very important. The Chinese approach is strongly market-driven, and influenced by neoliberal ideas. As the author put it: "In China, students are consumers and buyers of higher education. In western countries, students tend to do part-time job or loan to the cost of higher education. While in China, because of long term of the dependence of the children to parents, parents pay the cost of education for their children in most cases. Therefore, the tuition actually mainly impact the parents. In the higher education expenses, parents not only afford the tuition, but also pay all of the living cost including accommodation fees, textbooks and other expenses." (p. 86).

I appreciate the general critical thinking approach to the situation in China. From the public policy point of view, the argument about the lack of voice of students and their parents in tuition is crucial. Nevertheless, many arguments made seem to be not sufficiently developed. The author, for instance, suggests that entrance to the higher education should not be based upon the secondary exam (Gaokao) as it favours students from particular socio-economic background. But then how the students would be admitted to particular universities? This is very radical interpretation of educational equity. It perhaps should have been avoided if the theories of educational inequalities are dealt in more depth, including their policy implications.

The least satisfactory aspect of the master thesis is the formal one. The English is far from excellent. There are many grammatical mistakes and not clearly put sentences. It substantially complicates reading and understanding of the text. Also, the references are not unified. In general, however, the main theses and arguments are clear and understandable. It is also necessary to take into account not only that English is not a first language of the author but also that the overall academic writing style is quite different from what the student is familiar with. The attempts to express original ideas are valuable and have priority over formal aspect. The formal style is distracting, but in a given context it is – at least partially – tolerable.

Nevertheless, in general the thesis provides some new insights and has enough originality, though much more could have been done. In this respect, the self-criticism is sympathetic and may be interpreted as a sign of reflexivity (" I feel there are the understanding of some questions may not very clear , maybe some of the argument is not yet mature, some views and opinions remains need to be discussed.", p. 100).



Conclusion: I recommend the master thesis for defence and I suggest grading it as “satisfactory” (“3”).

Suggested questions for defence:

1. On page 35 you claim that university tuition have positive and negative effects upon educational equity? What do you mean by these *positive* effects?
2. What policy measures to increase equality in access to higher education in China should be taken first and why? Are these measures politically feasible?

Date of evaluation: June 9, 2016

Referee Signature: