



**UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE
FAKULTA SOCIÁLNÍCH VĚD**



Institut sociologických studií
Katedra veřejné a sociální politiky

MASTER THESIS ASSESSMENT REPORT

Assessment type: assessment by Master thesis supervisor

Author of thesis: Daiwei Zou

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

Author of assessment: Mgr. Jan Kohoutek, PhD.

This Master thesis, submitted to defence, takes up the theme of tuition fees within publicly funded higher education in China. More specifically, the thesis aims at exploration and analysis of the mechanisms guiding organisation of measures for setting/collecting tuition fees at public Chinese higher education institutions (HEIs) and their implications for equity of access to these HEIs. This theme is a relevant and pertinent one also from a European perspective, not least due to the recent surge of bilateral cooperation on economic grounds between China and several European countries (particularly manifested and identifiable in the Czech Republic). The goals and research questions put forward to accomplish this main aim are also relevant and clearly formulated. To elucidate the guiding mechanisms, the thesis builds upon a multiple case study design including three publicly funded HEIs in three different areas in China (all with above-average renown and some sort of comprehensive profiling).

From a conceptual standpoint, the thesis utilises the corresponding and appropriate concepts, namely equity of access, human capital theory, and cost-sharing. All these concepts are present to a sufficient extent. Methodologically, the thesis makes use of secondary data analysis (review). Although the absence of any sort of primary data, as well as some types of crucial secondary data (namely distribution of applicants', entrants' and graduates' by place of residence (rural vs. urban), distribution of financial study support by type in relation to students place of residence (rural vs. urban)) is definitely felt and detracts from the depth of analysis, such absence is no fault of the author. This is because author's tireless efforts put into making queries for richer datasets were repeatedly ignored/not reacted to both by the official authorities. The same can be said about personal contacts. Hence, in situation of data scarcity (generally pertinent to scholarly works on Chinese higher education published in the West), the author should be credited for amassing a great deal of available information from a variety of scattered but still publicly available sources. The thesis has a logical structure and the background information on higher education development including access and tuition fee policies is sufficient.

The major asset of the thesis are the empirical findings on the design and practical measures of setting up levels of tuition fees at the three analysed HEIs. The findings clearly show the discrepancies between rural and urban-seated families as to the percentage of the family average income spent on tuition fees. This finding clearly applies to all three case HEIs. Beyond such findings documenting inequity of access and study at HEIs by the area of residence (poorer rural vs. richer urban), the author should also be commended for drawing inferences and presenting quite valuable analysis of contextual factors aggravating the notified access inequity, be they the national system of HE entrance examinations (Gaokao), (supposedly) public hearings on setting up the enrolment quotas (HEI enrolment plans), fragmented system of student financial support or disequilibrium in governmental funding channelled to HEIs in question. In all these areas,



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clear examples of ill-conceived policy designs are found and discussed, thus giving the thesis further added value.

On the other hand, the thesis shows two limitations. The first, minor one, lies in not explicit answering of the research questions in the final part(s) of the thesis. The answers are however relatively easy to reconstruct from the text which is relevant enough and, to emphasise again, also contains valuable contextual analysis using a number of literature sources. The second, and a far more significant obstacle, is the language as well as formal issues (wrong use of spaces, some typing errors). The significant amount of grammatical and stylistic mistakes makes the text difficult to read and understand the flow of an otherwise well-put argument. Still, despite these limitations, the thesis presents a valuable contribution to current debates on (re-)introduction and (re-)designs of higher education tuition fee systems beyond Chinese borders.

For the defence, I recommend the author of the thesis should discuss (limitations in) opportunities of primary data acquisition and avenues for further research in the area the thesis is focused upon.

From the above stated reasons, I recommend the thesis be submitted for defence and assessed as “Very Good”.

Date: 7 June 2016

Signature: