Reflections on Inequality in Education:

Really Inevitable?

Kailing Wang 521030910356

*Abstract*—In this essay, I reflect on our class discussions about educational inequality and organize my own thoughts about spatial inequality.

Keywords—China, Education Inequality, Higher Education.

# Class review

In our class, we analyzed the inequality in education in **Qing**, **Republican** **China** and the **People’s** **Republic** **of** **China.**

## Education In **Qing**

We started with social mobility and focused on the family of Wang. We classified families in society by social status and used official positions to represent social status. According to the research of Ho[1], families can be divided into four categories. Most of the chin-shih were form families of higher social status in Qing.

## Education in **Republican** **China**

We looked into the information from the China University Student Dataset-Republic of China, and found more universities allow girls during this period, and the percentage of girls majoring in STEM is rather high. Unlike in Qing where most of the educated are from the bureaucratic class, 60% and more of the students are from merchant and scholar family. However, the spatial inequality problem is severe, which inspired my further thought.

## Education in the **People’s Republic of China**

We divided the timeline into four period and after the second period——the Cultural Revolution, the problem of educational inequality in terms of family background and gender, according to a research on the source of students in two universities[2]. But geographical distribution is still a significant dimension of inequality in Chinese society.

# INDIVIDUAL THOUGHTS

## Possible Solutions to Educational Inequality

In contemporary China, boys and girls from any family can go to school, which is significantly different from before. So how did we fight these inequality?

The policy is a leading factor. In ancient China, most parents could not afford their children’s schooling. In 1945, around 80% of the population in China were uneducated, and the government promoted compulsory education. In fact, compulsory education began in 1911 during times of Republican China, but it was until new China was founded that the uneducated rate began to fall[3]. This is the first time in China's history that worker and peasant education has been put on the national agenda.

The so-called Literacy Campaign also made people really believe that education can make life better, which means, people were willing to be educated. Though educational resources differ, all people have access to school, which reduced inequality.

Kailing Wang. Freshman. ID:521030910356

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As for gender, the old patriarchal ideology is hard to eradicate, but since 1949, a series of laws were promulgated to ensure women's political participation and other rights, and equality between men and women is written into the constitution. Also thanks to the advanced thought and feminist movement, gender equality is the mainstream nowadays.

In conclusion, policies, laws and advanced thought can improve equality, but I wonder if it would work for spatial inequality.

## The Situation With Regard To Spatial Inequality

Here spatial inequality include two aspects. One is that students in different part of China receive different education resource, and the other is the education resource, here I mainly mean top universities, are located unequally.

As the college entrance examination system develops, more and more students from the west of China enters top universities, and there are additional policies supporting students from poor areas and minority areas. Even before 2000, the statistic[2] was promising: the trend is that the first inequality is likely to disappear soon.

Now what’s really puzzling is the second one. The distribution of universities is extremely unequal.

Just like the example we raised in class: SJTU and XJTU. In 1959, most staff of SJTU was moved to XJTU to support the development of the west, but now SJTU still ranks higher.

First, I looked into the policy. The government has tried to help develop university in western China. But, the truth is, it seems that even if we send the best teacher, student and equipment to the west of China, it’s still hard to form top universities.

Next, I thought about people’s thoughts. People from poorer areas tend to enter big cities. According to a report based on Fifth Census, people tend to move from rural areas to urban areas, and from middle and western China to east China. The situation with students is the same. So, what for?

Classmates said the local economy is the leading factor, and I mostly agree. Maybe this is the so-called “ Man struggles upwards” . What’s more, university itself needs money. SJTU developed quickly after Reform and Opening Up, the same time point after which the economy took off. In 2022, SJTU plans to spend over 17.5 billion yuan on research. Supporting a top university requires a good local economy and working environment, and unless wealth for all is realized in China, it’s unlikely that top universities appear in the west of China.

International communication is another factor. There are still much technology we need to learn from the outside world, and international cities are best choices of university location for it’s convenient for scholars oversea to visit and communicate. As some top universities set down in these cities, other universities tend to gather in the same city, for communication between universities is also beneficial for both. Typical cities are Shanghai, Beijing and Nanjing.

Simply moving a university as a whole is useless. The area must develop itself first to gain the ability to hold a top university. Human resources and industrial company instead should be moved according to the local situation, and we may also discover the charm and beauty as well as employment prospects of the developing areas to persuade local students to enter local college.

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