

Faculty Life in China

By Kathryn Mohrman, Yiqun Geng, and Yingjie Wang

Kathryn Mohrman, a professor in the School of Public Affairs at Arizona State University, is the first director of its University Design Consortium. She was previously executive director of the Hopkins-Nanjing Center, a Sino-American joint academic venture based in China. A former president of Colorado College and dean at several institutions, she has taught in China and Hong Kong. A member of the U.S. Fulbright-supported New Century Scholars program, she is currently examining the world-class university phenomenon.

*Yiqun Geng is an associate professor in the Higher Education Institute, Communication University of China. She recently published *A Study of the Institutional Environment of the Academic Profession in American Research Universities*, and is now investigating academic ecology in China, supported by the Chinese National Social Science Fund.*

*Yingjie Wang is a senior scholar in comparative and international education at Beijing Normal University, a comprehensive research institution and China's leading teacher training and education research center. A former dean and vice president of the university, Professor Wang studied American higher education as a visiting scholar at Stanford and Harvard Universities. He is the author of *A Cultural Analysis of Tension between Academic Power and Administrative Power in Universities*.*

Chinese culture deeply engrains a dedication to learning in its citizenry. “The magic quality of writing is perhaps one of the reasons why the peoples of East Asia have tended to place a higher premium on book learning and on formal education than have the peoples of any other civilization.”¹

The Chinese also venerate education as a path to a government career. For more than 2,000 years, scores on a national examination—based on Chinese classics grounded in the works of Confucius—determined bureaucratic appointments. The study of literature, poetry, and

philosophy became *the* path to prestige and authority; education enabled men of humble birth to rise to the top.

This commitment—often manifested in a desire to study in the United States—may also account for the rise of Western-style universities in China. European and American educators and missionaries often drew on domestic models when founding colleges and universities in China, starting in the 1890s.

Chinese intellectuals experimented with different academic structures and curricula in the first third of the 20th century. Some academic

leaders wished to develop well-rounded citizens. Others advocated more practical goals such as learning modern science and technology to reform the nation and to counter Western imperialism. China, one scholar notes, struggled “to achieve the economic and social benefits of Western science and technology, while asserting its own patterns of culture and knowledge in ways that would maintain Chinese identity.”² The challenge: Only a small fraction of the Chinese population was literate and an even smaller percentage had advanced education for most of its history. The proportion of the relevant age cohort participating in tertiary education first exceeded ten percent in 1999.

The historic link between education and government service has played out in new ways. The Confucian tradition called for civil servants to expose the shortcomings of the regime while serving it. Students and faculty performed both roles by deposing the emperor and creating the Republic of China in 1911. After World War I, Chinese intellectuals were enraged at the treatment of China in the Versailles treaty. On May 4, 1919, students from Beijing area colleges and universities demonstrated in Tiananmen Square. The ensuing May Fourth Movement spawned new periodicals—many written in the vernacular to educate the masses—that debated the meaning of Chinese identity and values in the modern world. University professors and students played key roles in these efforts to unify and rejuvenate the nation.³

Higher education suffered in the chaos of political unrest and foreign incursions in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. During World War II, a number of universities decamped to western regions of the nation. These universities struggled to maintain classrooms, laboratories, and libraries far from their original locations. Higher education faced tenuous financial and physical conditions when the war ended and the People’s Republic of China was declared.

After 1949, China emulated the academic model of the Soviet Union, with its highly

specialized universities, mostly dedicated to practical subjects needed for national development. Students applied for specific majors. The Beijing government decided who would attend which universities and controlled virtually all curricular details. Students took an academic program in a single subject with no room for electives. China also created academic institutes that conducted research, separate from universities where teaching programs predominated. This bifurcated structure continued until the Cultural Revolution closed all colleges and universities from 1966 to 1973 and limited contact with most of the world.

A new era in Chinese higher education began in the late 1970s with a priority on “reform and opening up.” Government leaders and academics recognized that developing the human talent necessary for China’s success in a rapidly changing world required absorbing cutting-edge knowledge and skills from other countries. The vehicle: improving and expanding higher education. Chinese universities experienced a revolution.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Between 1980 and 2010, Chinese higher education changed dramatically in size, structure, philosophy, and international orientation.

Elite to Mass. Perhaps the most noticeable change in Chinese higher education is its sheer size. Formerly an elite system enrolling less than five percent of the age cohort, the tertiary system now includes a quarter of that cohort in regular universities, vocational and technical colleges and schools, and adult education. The system includes substantial public and private sectors. The system grew by nearly 700 percent between 1986 and 2006! Today China has by far the world’s largest enrollments: 26 million students in 2007; the United States enrolled 18 million students in that year.

New Curricula. Government officials and academics alike realized that the Soviet-style highly specialized programs were too narrow for a rapidly changing world. Many of the most

Table 1. Chinese Higher Education Statistics, 2008

	Institutions	Faculty and Staff	Students
INSTITUTIONAL TYPE			
Regular Institutions of Higher Education	2,263	2,051,029	
Offering Graduate Degrees ¹	479	—	
Offering Full Undergraduate Courses	1,079	1,473,856	
Offering only Specialized/Shorter Courses	1,184	570,651	
Adult Education Institutions	400	89,892	
Private Institutions of Higher Education	866	40,261	
Other	77	6,522	
STUDENT CLASSIFICATION			
Doctoral Students			236,617
Master's Students			1,046,429
Regular and Adult Undergraduates			13,395,039
Undergraduates and Adults in Specialized Courses Including Vocational and Technical Programs			12,298,159
Students in Distance Education			3,563,884
Other			3,219,021

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China 2009, <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/2009/html/U2001e.htm>;
<http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/2009/html/U2011e.htm>

¹ 317 research institutes also offered master's and doctoral degrees.

prestigious universities responded by broadening departmental offerings and individual courses and by introducing general education requirements. Students on some campuses did not have to declare a major until completing their first year of college, a huge change from the prior rigid system. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has encouraged the use of up-to-date foreign textbooks and teaching content courses in English. The Chinese undergraduate curriculum is looking more like the American model.

Structural Change. In the 1980s, the MOE encouraged, and sometimes forced, specialized universities to merge into larger comprehensive institutions. The ministry hoped to encourage interdisciplinary conversation not possible on narrowly defined campuses. The MOE also scaled back its own role. Relinquishing control of the entire system from the

capital, it transferred responsibility for many colleges and universities to provincial and municipal governments. It also granted greater decision-making authority to individual campuses, though an accountability framework still requires substantial bureaucratic consultation on finances and programs. Governments at all levels replaced a policy of 100 percent of financial support for higher education with a program of university self-support, including tuition payments, fundraising, and competitive research grants.

Internationalization. Since the 1980s, China sent hundreds of thousands of students overseas, especially to the United States. Desiring to gain up-to-date knowledge for modernization, the government hoped that returning graduates would address national priorities, from engineering to economics to languages. The percentage of returnees was disappointingly

low, though the numbers have increased markedly in recent years.

China is also an educational destination, especially for young people from other Asian countries seeking a program unobtainable at home. China enrolled almost 240,000 foreign students in 2009; the goal is 500,000 by 2020.

A New Form of Elitism. Today the central government has direct control of fewer than 100 universities—provincial and local authorities govern the rest—though it still sets education policy for the entire system. Directly controlling the oldest and most prestigious universities, MOE enhanced these institutions by creating the 211 Program in 1995. Aiming to build the 100 top universities for the 21st century, the government gave chosen universities extra funding for key disciplinary areas, facilities, improved Internet, and institutional capacity building. The government created the 985 Project in 1998, aimed at creating a small number of world-class universities. Initially only Peking and Tsinghua Universities received 985 funding; today 39 universities receive support. The amounts of money are staggering. In 2007 Tsinghua received \$260 million from the

985 Project above and beyond its regular subsidy—about 20 percent of its total annual operating budget. These additional resources allow 985 universities to develop faster than non-985 peers, which are clearly relegated to second-class status.

Chinese faculty and staff members live and work in this environment of rapid growth, curriculum reform, new governance structures, and increasing internationalization.

FACULTY DEMOGRAPHICS

In 2008, China had approximately 2.3 million faculty members in tertiary education, mostly in regular institutions of higher education. Vocational colleges, adult education, and private institutions accounted for approximately 13 percent. A 2007 international survey provides basic demographic information on *The Changing Academic Profession (CAP)*. The survey included 3,600 Chinese faculty members from 68 universities—a five percent sample of faculty in all 720 four-year institutions in China (Table 2).⁴

The CAP survey results and the national statistics differ because Table 1 includes data for hundreds of other higher education institutions

Table 2. Statistics, by Percentage, of Highest Degree Earned, Academic Rank, Gender, Marital Status, and Age

Survey	Highest Degree Earned ¹			Academic Rank ²					Average Age	
	Bachelor's	Master's	Doctor	Full Prof.	Associate Prof.	Lecturer	Assistant Lecturer	Others		
CAP	27.8%	41.5%	30.6% ³	23.5%	33.9%	28.3%	11.3%	3.0%		
National ⁴	57.6	29.5	10.0	13.4	29.6	32.4	19.8	4.8		
Survey	Gender ²		Marital Status		Age ¹					
	Male	Female	Married	Single	≤30	31–40	41–50	51–60	>60	Average Age
CAP	63%	37%	88%	12%	20.1%	38.3%	32.3%	8.1%	1.2%	38.7
National	57	43	—	—	30	35	25	9	1	(36.3) est.

Source: Shen, 2008.

Notes:

¹ National surveys for highest degree earned and age are based on faculty in 1,867 Regular Higher Education Institutions (RHEIs).

² National surveys for academic rank and gender are for faculty in 720 RHEIs.

³ CAP responses show 5.7 percent of those with doctorates have post-doctoral awards.

⁴ National surveys for academic degrees show 2.7 percent of faculty have sub-degree qualifications.

offering short courses, vocational training, and diplomas. In contrast, CAP surveyed only four-year degree-granting institutions. The dramatic growth of Chinese higher education required many new entrants to the professoriate. This growth helps to explain why Chinese professors are younger on average than American faculty. Another factor: China requires women and men to retire at 55 and 60, respectively, though universities can make case-by-case exceptions. The Cultural Revolution also affected the age differential; closing schools and colleges deprived a “lost generation” of opportunities for higher education.

Chinese faculty members are oriented toward science and technology; 52 percent of surveyed professors worked in these fields, roughly the same proportion as students enrolled in these disciplines. The Chinese government fostered economic development by assigning large enrollment quotas and many faculty positions to these priority areas. This orientation may also help to explain why the proportion of males is relatively high. More than 40 percent of the CAP survey respondents hold master’s degrees; 31 percent have doctorates. These proportions reflect heightened emphasis on graduate training—especially in science and technology. Faculty members in the CAP survey average a 53-hour workweek.

A study of the educational backgrounds and career paths of 3,200 professors in 22 universities, undergraduate colleges, and vocational institutions in Greater Beijing found:

- Prestigious universities tend to have a larger share of associate and full professors. In contrast, more than half of the faculty members at ordinary universities and vocational colleges are associate professors and lecturers.
 - The academic profession tends to be stagnant. More than 60 percent of faculty members are promoted in the same institution.
 - Faculty members who start in prestigious institutions tend to remain at those institutions. Faculty starting in mid-level universities often seek to move upwards.
- About 26 percent of faculty members have work experience outside the education system. This experience includes short-term appointments in government agencies, research institutes, business, and public organizations. More faculty move from outside to inside the university than vice versa.
 - Few faculty members change disciplines.
 - The Chinese academic profession is less mobile than counterparts in other nations.⁵

To summarize: Higher education is a growth industry; the proliferation of positions results in a relatively young professoriate. Government priorities result in a greater proportion of faculty in science and technology than in the United States. The most important difference is in faculty mobility. Professors, as government employees, were traditionally assigned to their jobs, often where they studied, but today the government no longer determines where a person works. By one estimate, no more than five percent of faculty members switch institutions, and fewer than ten percent leave the professoriate—a condition characterized as “stability to the extent of immobility.”⁶

FACULTY GOVERNANCE

It is hard for Americans to imagine the old Chinese system of government assignments and faculty immobility. Over the last 30 years institutions have gained significant autonomy and power, but the government continues to exert substantial control by making top leadership appointments. Depending upon level of control, the central or provincial government appoints the President and the Secretary of the Communist Party at each institution. Dual responsibility to the government and their institutions often places Chinese university presidents in contradictory positions. A president, for example, may focus on visible short-term changes at the expense of long-term planning. In addition, because presidents serve fixed terms, turnover in the top leadership may result in new priorities and directions. This

external power of appointment often interferes with routine work, thereby diminishing institutional autonomy.

Professors discuss faculty recruitment at the department and college/school levels. The college/school recruitment committee, typically chaired by the college or school dean, usually includes the relevant professors and the department chair. The committee makes recommendations, but the university personnel office makes the final decision, based on the candidate's merit and on the needs of the disciplines throughout the institution.

Faculty members—formerly with little say in curriculum matters—now have the freedom to decide what to teach. Professors design the curriculum at the departmental level, and they choose which courses to teach. The curriculum then needs the approval of the college or school and the provost's office (for undergraduate curriculum) or graduate school (for graduate curriculum). Administrative involvement ceases unless low enrollments result in course cancellations, or unless a faculty member receives a low score on student evaluations, faces collegial disapproval, or attacks the central government in the classroom.

A Conference of Faculty Representatives discusses the mission and development of the campus. The conference, a consultative organization, can only make recommendations. The Higher Education Law requires all institutions to establish an academic committee to decide on important academic affairs, such as the strategic plan for academic development, plans for the different disciplines, and adding or deleting majors or programs. A degree committee at degree-granting institutions decides on awarding academic degrees and reviews degree applications. The university president chairs both committees and nominates the faculty representatives. Some universities are experimenting with a faculty senate to promote shared governance. But most faculty members focus on academic affairs, not institutional management.

CHANGES IN FACULTY RECRUITMENT

Most Chinese colleges and universities are public institutions, and their professors and administrators are government employees. In 1978 when universities resumed operations after the Cultural Revolution, the national government restored the traditional system of academic ranks (teaching assistant, lecturer, associate professor, and full professor).

In 1985, as the reform movement began, the function of education shifted from serving political purposes to social and economic development. As part of this movement, the Ministry of Education piloted attempts to establish a faculty appointment and contract system to break the so-called "iron rice bowl" of guaranteed lifetime employment. Faculty members—no longer government cadres—started to work under fixed-term contracts and to earn merit pay. In 1999, when the great expansion of higher education began, the ministry gave all Chinese colleges and universities three years to adopt the appointment and contract system and to use salaries to reward achievement.

Most universities attempted to enhance faculty quality and productivity by adopting new recruitment and promotion procedures. The hiring process looks more like the American system, with active faculty participation and with ability and achievement as the main hiring and firing criteria. Many top universities adopted an American-style tenure system, though only a few senior professors have tenure while all others work under annual or three-year contracts. Faculty members were no longer confined to one institution for their entire careers but actual faculty mobility remains negligible. These reforms, in short, changed the principles governing the faculty personnel system, though not necessarily the practices.

The desire for the best graduates to become junior faculty at their home institutions led to generations of academic inbreeding. A survey of 17 top Chinese universities found that 604 of 987 faculty members in economics and finance (62 percent) taught at the universities

where they earned their highest degrees.⁷ But, in another survey, only 29.8 percent of teachers at local colleges and universities answered, “Yes” when asked, “Did you receive your highest degree from the institutions where you are teaching?”⁸ Few local institutions grant doctoral degrees.

Today the top universities try to promote variety in training and outlook by engaging faculty from other Chinese and leading overseas universities. In 2004, Peking University announced that, in principle, it would not hire new faculty from among the same-year graduates of colleges, schools, and departments with a single academic lineage. Beijing Normal University (BNU) also limited the number of new faculty hired from among its graduates. It would henceforth recruit, first, graduates with doctoral degrees from top foreign universities; second, those with doctoral degrees from other top domestic universities; and third, excellent graduates with doctoral degrees from BNU.

Some observers ask if foreign university graduates exceed domestic degree holders in quality. Giving preference to foreign degree holders, these observers argue, may limit the development of domestic talent. Foreign-trained professors, they note, do not always adjust easily, even when returnees lived and studied in China for part of their lives. Universities, they add, should allow returnees to adjust in a supportive and cooperative domestic setting. Many top universities now recruit new faculty members internationally as faculty recruitment has become more fair and open. But each institution should develop a talent strategy to meet its own needs.

Greater autonomy in hiring and reduced inbreeding have improved the quality of Chinese colleges and universities. But Chinese institutions must still address problems created by the household registration (*hukou*) system. Established in the late 1950s, the *hukou* system requires all citizens to register in a specific city, town, or village, and offers few opportunities to change residency. The *hukou* system—a major

means of controlling population mobility and determining eligibility for state-provided services and welfare—is under widespread debate. Recently, the Beijing municipal government announced that talent could move freely within the cities of Beijing and Tianjin, as well as Hebei province. This policy helps to develop a sound nationwide academic labor market, but the government must still clarify exactly who qualifies as “talent.”

FACULTY SALARIES

Faculty salaries in China include fixed and flexible components. The government and the institution are the two key sources of funds. But faculty members often supplement their pay by engaging in non-institutional activities, including consulting and outside lecturing.

The Chinese government created a national system of faculty ranks that determine base salaries. Gradations within the ranks of lecturers, associate professors, and full professors are based on years of experience and level of service.⁹ The annual salary for a given rank and a given level within that rank is the same at all colleges and universities, with adjustments for regional differences in the cost of living. Salaries increase significantly when faculty members are promoted between ranks, but the salary difference is relatively small when faculty members move between levels within a rank. Faculty members receive the full amount of base pay unless they fail to meet the minimum job requirements, including teaching a certain number of courses.

The institution and its units provide the second (flexible) portion of faculty pay. Each college and university sets this portion autonomously, depending upon available resources and faculty performance. The institutional portion can (but does not always) include cost of living adjustments, variations based on number of courses taught, and bonuses for publications and research grants. Professors also receive allowances for major holidays such as National Day and Teachers’ Day. Institutions

also often reward their professors for participating in continuing education for the public, including adult education and correspondence courses.

Individual schools and colleges may also provide bonuses based on the unit's revenue. The school or college usually shares with faculty the revenue generated through consulting, service to local governments, research for businesses, and continuing education.

The institutional portion of faculty salaries now exceeds the base pay funded by government at many of the better universities—up to 60 percent of a professor's annual pay, depending upon institutional affluence and individual performance. Pay still rises with rank, but increased flexibility creates instances in which associate professors with excellent performance at the top of their rank earn more than recently promoted full professors.

This multi-faceted system leads to dramatic differences in faculty salaries and in their purchasing power. Base pay goes further in smaller cities and rural areas. The higher cost of living in places such as Shanghai requires a larger proportion of base pay for living expenses, even with regional adjustments. But the institutional portion of faculty salaries at colleges and universities in big cities is likely to be greater. More important than region, top universities derive money from a more diversified revenue stream and can pay their faculty more than colleagues at less prestigious institutions.

Entrepreneurialism also plays a part. Universities, colleges, schools, and departments that seek consulting, service, and research projects are likely to generate more revenue to be shared with faculty. The characteristics of the unit can outweigh its reputation. A local college of education that generates significant revenue from active in-service training programs, for example, might pay its faculty more than a similar college in a major research university.

Disciplinary opportunities are another reason for differences in faculty pay. Certain academic fields lend themselves more readily to

external projects. Law and business schools tend to have more money for the institutional portion of faculty pay than many humanities departments. Thus, faculty pay varies widely by institution, region, status, discipline, and entrepreneurial behavior.

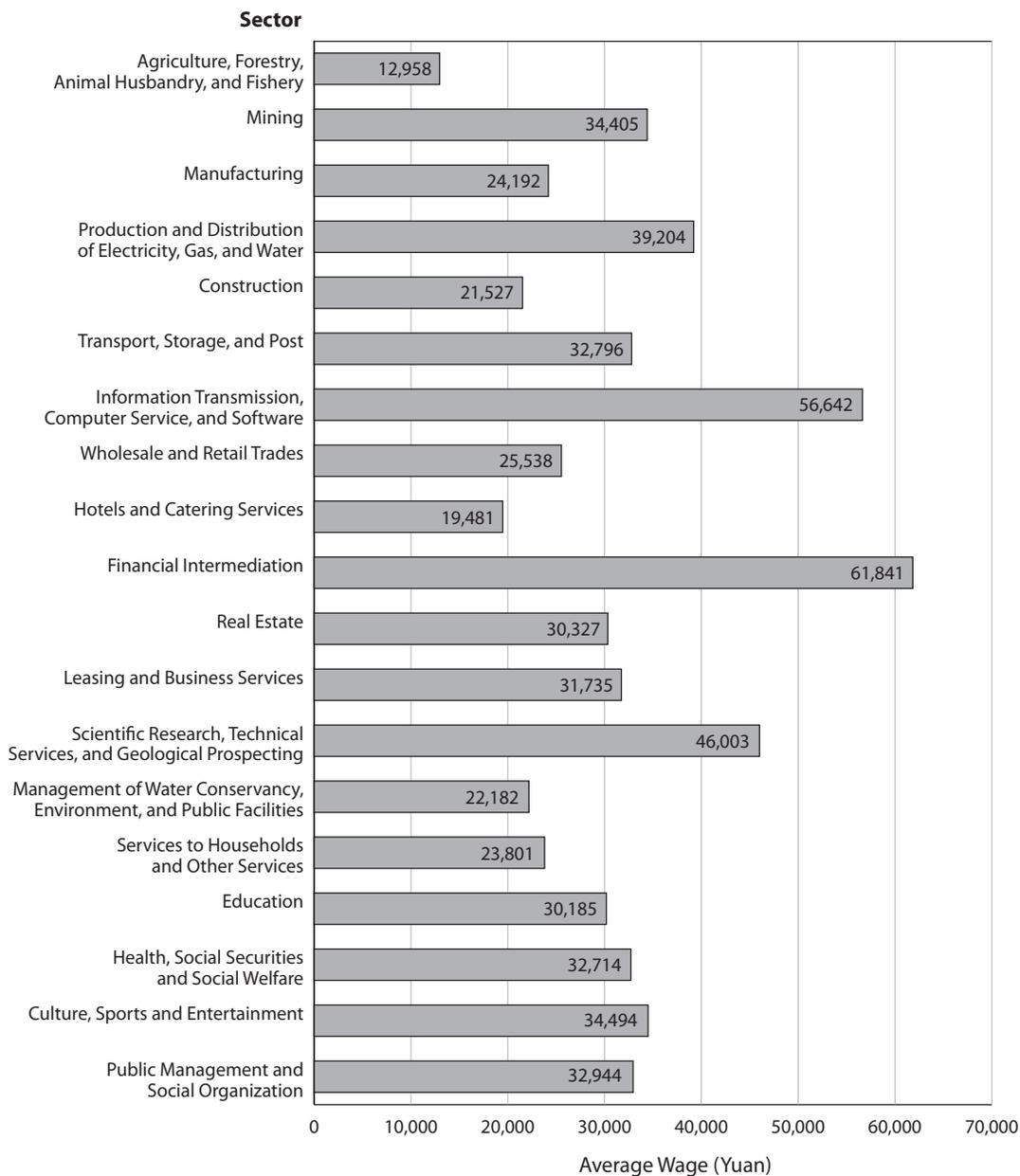
The "marketization" of higher education is not all positive. Some individuals and units devote too much time to making money while neglecting their fundamental academic responsibilities. But the government counteracts the allure of the marketplace by raising faculty salaries to retain top professors and to attract excellent graduates to the academy.

The range of faculty salaries is one reason for a "brain drain" from west to east within China and from China to other countries. In 2005, the president of Lanzhou University, located in Gansu, a poor Western province, complained that the number of good faculty members leaving the university in the previous ten years could populate the equivalent of another Lanzhou University. An estimated 700 highly trained professionals left Gansu Province annually for East China between 1996 and 2000.¹⁰

Brain drain also occurs as professors move from local to top universities. Of the faculty who left local institutions, 97 percent were less than 45 years old; 72 percent were lecturers and associate professors, and 59 percent held master's and doctoral degrees.¹¹ Local universities—the institutions educating most of China's college students—were losing their best young faculty.

Faculty salaries are still relatively low, though the complexities of the compensation system make comparisons difficult. Other organizations also provide both government and institutional salary streams, and supplement base pay with bonuses. National comparative statistics may therefore be based on the government portion of salaries alone, not total pay.

Beijing faculty members earn less than civil servants despite salary reforms in 2006.¹² Educators ranked fourth in a 2005 report comparing salaries in machinery manufacturing,

Figure 1. Average Wage of Staff and Workers by Sector in China, 2008

Source: *China Statistical Yearbook*, 2009, Table 4-26.

As of January 2011, one yuan equals approximately \$0.15.

electricity and gas, information software, wholesale and retail, financial sector, and engineering research.¹³ Professors, teachers, and staff in education at all levels earn less than workers in 11 of the 18 other sectors (Figure 1).

Professors earn more than other teachers and workers in education. CAP survey respondents reported average annual incomes of \$6,318. This amount sounds low to American ears, but education workers overall earned \$2,885 in the same year (2006). CAP professors did well

by that standard; they also fared better than persons employed in information technology (\$5,991) and finance (\$4,896).¹⁴

The demand for faculty will rise as the higher education sector grows, but so will the competition for highly educated professionals. Chinese colleges and universities and the government must support faculty salaries generously for the continued improvement of the higher education system.

CONTRACT SYSTEM

Private colleges and universities have flourished since 1990, growing to more than 2,000 today, though the Ministry of Education has yet to permit them to award degrees. Their faculty members sign contracts for one semester to several years, and the heavy workload of full-time faculty members often includes administrative and teaching responsibilities. Many faculty members work part-time; they are paid on hours of teaching and are not expected to interact with students outside of class. The graduation rate and the number of students passing the Chinese National Adult Self-Study Examination—resembling the GED exams in the U.S. but at the tertiary level—determines salaries and promotions at most private institutions.

Many public institutions now employ the contract system for all current faculty members except a few tenured senior professors, and for all new faculty members, apart from highly talented senior personnel. But public institutions maintain an informal tenure system by assigning most non-reappointed colleagues to other positions.

FACULTY EVALUATION AND PROMOTION

Issues of quality assurance in teaching and research came to the forefront as Chinese higher education expanded. Faculty evaluation informs personnel, budget, planning, and resource allocation decisions while improving performance.¹⁵ Most Chinese colleges and universities emphasize quantity over quality: the number of courses taught, publications,

or research grants. Service, though a factor in evaluation, has a lower priority than teaching and research.

Expectations for Teaching

Since 1993, the Ministry of Education attempted to raise the quality of teaching by placing the most experienced faculty in the classroom. It now requires all professors to teach some undergraduate courses. Evaluation of teaching includes the number of courses and students taught, advisees including graduate students, and new courses developed. Student questionnaires assess the quality of teaching. The weights accorded to factors used in evaluations vary by institution. Research university faculty members usually teach fewer courses than colleagues in provincial and local institutions. Professors at the Communication University of China—a 211 Program member, and considered one of the top 100 institutions nationwide—are expected to teach at least two main courses independently every five years, and should teach a minimum of 96 credit hours every year. Full professors at local institutions are often expected to teach three courses a semester. Young faculty members usually teach more courses than senior colleagues, regardless of institutional status.

Chinese universities require little face-to-face peer evaluation of teaching. Most institutions have a committee composed of retired faculty that observes and evaluates teaching. The committee offers feedback when necessary, but its observations are not part of the formal evaluation and promotion process. Self-evaluations on teaching appear only in the annual statements submitted by faculty members.

In many institutions, the provost's office gathers feedback from students at the end of each semester, usually for undergraduate courses only. Students can either fill in paper forms anonymously or click online to evaluate their professors' teaching. Sometimes the results of the students' evaluation are given to the faculty as feedback to make improvements in their

teaching. There are few teaching evaluations at the graduate level, though the graduate schools in some universities are starting to introduce teaching evaluations to assess program quality. Student responses may be influenced by a gradual shift in attitudes. Traditionally professors were seen as the supervisors of the academic program and the sources of knowledge, but today many students want their professors to be their friends, not their academic “parents.”

Many Chinese universities grant special awards for teaching. About 500 professors nationwide received the National Outstanding Teacher Award between 2003 and 2009. Promotion committees take teaching evaluations seriously and reward recipients of local and national awards.

Expectations for Research

In contrast to the evaluation of teaching, research is much easier to evaluate. Faculty provide evidence of research productivity with information about manuscripts accepted, in press, or published; research grants or awards received; conference papers presented; and performances given. Consultative reports to government agencies also count as academic research work in faculty evaluation. In many colleges and universities in China, research work of faculty is evaluated quantitatively rather than qualitatively, by counting the number of published articles, especially those appearing in such international indices as *Science Citation Index*, *Social Science Citation Index*, and *Arts and Humanities Citation Index*, or the Chinese equivalents. Indicators of educational attainments in terms of international rankings across countries, publications of papers, and citations feed directly into annual performance indicators for Chinese faculty.¹⁶

A study of the science research activities in China's institutions of higher learning in recent years indicates that there is a major connection between current instances of corruption and academic dishonesty in scientific research and the faculty evaluation system at many colleges

and universities. Often faculty evaluation is too formalistic with excessive emphasis on the number of publications and grants, and relies too much on partial evaluations for quality control.¹⁷ This emphasis on quantity of research also puts greater power in the hands of administrators rather than scholars.

A “publish or perish” environment has evolved as China has become more competitive internally and internationally, putting more pressure on faculty and fierce competition among professors in the same field and on the same campus. The rapid expansion of the higher education system has exacerbated the problem, since more professors are competing to publish in the same journals. As a result, the average length of time for promotion from lecturer to associate professor on many campuses has extended from five to eight years. Even in most local universities, faculty are required to conduct research and publish articles in order to be promoted, despite the heavier teaching loads in such institutions.

Zhongshan University in the south of China has developed a new evaluation policy in order to stimulate greater creativity through a more relaxed environment for research. The university will not evaluate some 200 distinguished professors every year, giving them the freedom to pursue their research work on a longer-term basis in the hopes that they will address more significant academic issues in more creative ways as a result.

The present system of faculty evaluation in China results in higher pressure on young faculty. They have to teach relatively more classes than senior faculty. At the same time, they are required to publish more in order to be promoted. The phenomenon of job burnout is very common among young faculty, and impedes the creativity of the faculty as a whole.

In general, there are few effective plans for faculty development in Chinese universities. Administrative relations with professors are often focused on supervision and control, and less on support and development. Even the

concept of faculty development is not familiar to many administrators. Although many colleges and universities have training programs for young faculty, such programs are usually shorter than a month, and there is little follow-up.

With the rapid expansion of higher education, faculty evaluation and faculty development must become more closely related. A majority of the nearly 5,000 respondents to a recent survey expressed dissatisfaction with the training and development systems at their institutions: very unsatisfied=13 percent; unsatisfied=40 percent; satisfied=39 percent; very satisfied=three percent (Figure 2).¹⁸ These statistics underscore the urgent need for Chinese universities to strengthen their faculty development programs.

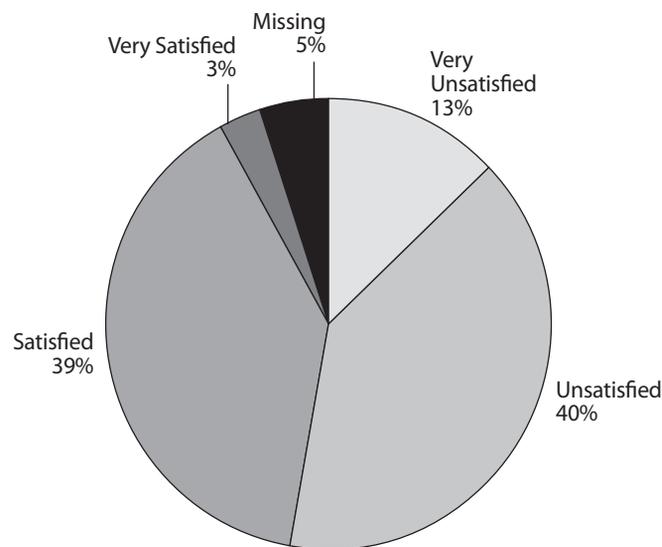
Changes in Promotion

The politics of faculty promotions changed dramatically after 1978. From a system of total government control, China now permits each institution to devise its own promotion policy,

as long as institutional procedures are consistent with the national Law of Higher Education and the Law of Teachers. This devolution of authority has allowed faculty members to participate actively in the promotion process. The administration organizes a department, school, or college faculty promotion committee that usually consists of senior faculty members, department chairs, and school or college deans. The committee makes promotion recommendations to a university committee that includes the university president (who serves as the chair), school or college deans, and faculty representatives. A senior professor, chair, or dean may serve on both the first-level and the university-level review committees.

The university committee makes the final decision at top universities that have the right to confer the title of professor. Institutions without this right must submit the university committee recommendation to the local government education authority. This authority forms a committee of experts from different institutions to make the final decision.

Figure 2. Attitudes of Full-time Faculty in Regular Four-Year Higher Education Institutions towards Faculty Development Programs



Source: Xinshiji Jiaoxue Yanjiusuo, 2010.

Job Satisfaction

Chinese professors are generally happy with their work, though not with all aspects of their jobs. Professors in the CAP survey reported satisfaction with their working conditions, especially physical facilities and teaching technology (Figure 3).¹⁹ Their biggest complaint: the lack of research funding. More than 60 percent responded positively to the question: “Since you started your career, have the overall working conditions in higher education and research institutes improved?” More than three-quarters said they would become academics if given the choice again.

Chinese professors report higher job satisfaction than academics in other countries.

Close to six in ten faculty reported high (53.5 percent) or very high (4.2 percent) job satisfaction; 34.3 percent expressed moderate satisfaction. Faculty members in local institutions were less positive than colleagues in research universities. In five newly established four-year local colleges and universities in Guangdong Province, 57 percent of the surveyed faculty members expressed satisfaction with their working conditions and environment; 43 percent were not satisfied (Table 3).²⁰ A survey of professors in the southern city of Guangzhou corroborated these findings. The average response to an “overall satisfaction” question fell between “basically satisfied” to “middling.”²¹

Figure 3. Evaluation of Working Conditions by Faculty in China, 2007

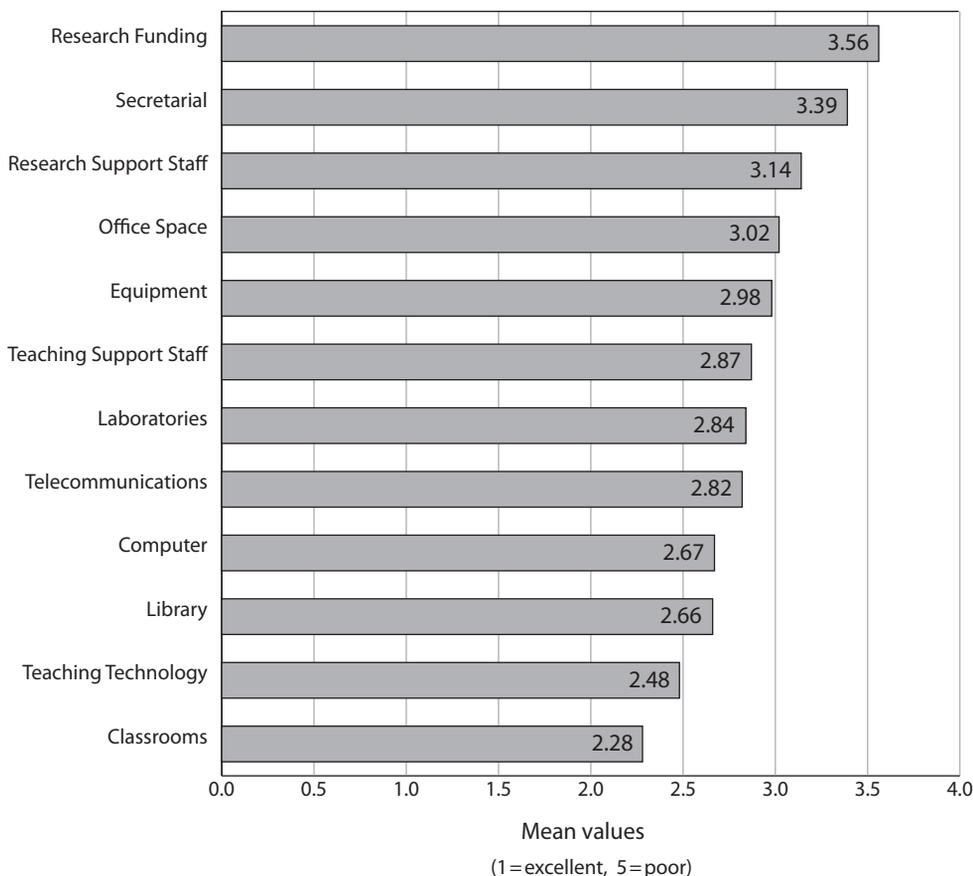


Table 3. Faculty Attitude: “Working Environment and Working Conditions,” Guangdong Province.

Faculty Attitude	Percent
Very Satisfied	7.95%
Comparatively Satisfied	25.57
Satisfied	23.29
Comparatively Unsatisfied	36.93
Very Unsatisfied	6.25

Source: Zhao et al., 2007.

Most Chinese faculty members feel increased pressure to teach well and conduct quality research, and the annual evaluation system adds to their stress. But decent salaries, high social status, stable employment, and the intellectual challenge of academic life helps to explain the priority that college graduates accord to the academic profession and their job satisfaction once hired.

FACULTY-ADMINISTRATION RELATIONSHIPS

The administrative role has expanded in most Chinese colleges and universities. The bureaucratization of higher education makes it difficult for faculty to exercise their independent academic judgment and authority while meeting administrator demands. Administrators, in turn, are becoming more involved in personnel and curricular issues, thinking that professors alone cannot make decisions with university-wide consequences. Faculty-administrator conflicts have therefore increased.

The Teachers’ Law gives faculty members the right to teach, do research, participate in academic societies and in institutional governance, and to express and exchange academic ideas. Faculty members now decide what and how to teach, choose their research topics, determine where to publish, and participate in appointment and promotion decisions. The establishment of academic senates on some campuses bodes well for expanding the still-limited

faculty role in shared governance and for reducing faculty-administrator conflicts.

Many faculty-administrator conflicts arise from an incongruity: administrators hold professorial rank but conduct little academic work. Many would-be administrators—desiring the perquisites of office—write low quality essays or ask others to conduct research and write articles for them. Once in leadership posts, administrators often have an advantage when competing for awards and research grants. In 2009, 90 of the 100 recipients of the National Outstanding Teacher Award held administrative positions.

This situation is changing. Some institutions plan to distinguish clearly between administrators and faculty, and the “de-administrationization of the university” is a key focus of higher education reform. In July 2010, the National Education Conference of China approved the Outline of China’s National Plan for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020). Colleges and universities, the document states, should strengthen the power of the faculty—at the expense of administrators—by enhancing the role of academic committees and councils in governance.

THE INFLUENCE OF MARKETS ON FACULTY

Like many nations, China is attempting to promote competition and enhance efficiency by applying market principles to its colleges and

universities. The national government has created a differentiated system of higher education. The Ministry of Education required universities belonging to the 985 and the 211 Projects to supply plans for achieving world-class teaching and research status, thereby injecting competition into a traditionally top-down system.

In the 1980s, the government changed its funding policy from providing all of the costs of higher education to promoting diversified revenue flows. It required students to pay tuition and institutions to seek income from collaborative research projects with businesses, consultation services to local governments and for-profit organizations, and spin-off companies.

Seeing students as consumers is new to Chinese higher education. Tuition-paying students and their families expressed concern about the benefits of a college education because the number of college graduates grew faster than the number of jobs. Many higher education institutions therefore changed their array of departments and majors to be more career oriented, often threatening the fundamental disciplines.

These changes significantly affected the lives of Chinese professors who must now do more teaching and research. The government, not individual institutions, still sets enrollment and professorial quotas. But the number of faculty positions has not kept pace with the rapid expansion of student slots. Even when enrollments are limited, constraints on new faculty hiring result in greater teaching loads. Hiring caps, current faculty members argue, diminish academic quality. Compounding the workload problem: annual faculty evaluations heavily emphasize publications, so professors feel great pressure to write articles and publish research results every year. Many faculty members turned from time-consuming basic research projects to inquiries that achieve immediate results, at the expense of creativity.

The emphasis on university-industry collaboration has mixed consequences. Industry support for research brings in new revenues and

promotes practical work. But few universities regulate this research, and some faculty members neglect their basic teaching and research responsibilities to concentrate on moneymaking. The prospect of industry support also leads some institutions to prioritize moneymaking disciplines.

CONCLUSION

Experimentation and reform continue as China turns from growth per se to quality enhancement. The nation, its government has declared, intends to build a modern university system espousing academic freedom and autonomy, and providing greater support for teaching and research. Universities will be independent entities, not government units; they will accord greater recognition to faculty and academic work. De-administrationization will increase faculty involvement in campus governance and further safeguard academic rights. Higher salaries and greater stability will make the academic profession more attractive.

But Chinese faculty members face significant challenges despite these optimistic goals. Salary, evaluation, faculty development, intellectual freedom, innovation, creativity, shared governance, and academic integrity require serious and sustained attention. The quality of the current workforce varies across different institutional types and geographic regions. China needs more professors, yet the best universities face stiff competition for top graduates. Local universities and institutions in poor areas face even greater challenges in attracting and retaining faculty to aid in regional development.

China has dramatically transformed its higher education system in size, quality, and impact over the past three decades. All will benefit if China continues to develop its higher education system in the same direction.

NOTES

¹ Reischauer and Fairbank, 1960, 43.

² Hayhoe, 1999, 29.

³ Spence, 1990, 310-313.

- ⁴ Hong Shen, 2008.
- ⁵ Yan and Chen, 2008.
- ⁶ Shen, 2008, 261.
- ⁷ Gu, 2006.
- ⁸ Beijing shifan daxue jiaoyu xueyuan, 2010, 49.
- ⁹ There are no gradations within the rank of teaching assistant.
- ¹⁰ He, 2008.
- ¹¹ Deng, 2009.
- ¹² Miao, 2009.
- ¹³ China Statistics Press, 2005.
- ¹⁴ Shen, 2008. It is not clear if the CAP respondents reported the governmental *and* institutional portions of their compensation. The national statistics probably only provide the governmental portion.
- ¹⁵ Miller, 1987; Romney, 1971.
- ¹⁶ Li, Whalley, Zhang, Zhao, 2008.
- ¹⁷ Wu and Jia, 2006.
- ¹⁸ Beijing shifan daxue jiaoyu xueyuan, 2010, 69.
- ¹⁹ Shen, 2008.
- ²⁰ Zhao, et al., 2007.
- ²¹ Lu, 2005.

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