

# *The Comparison between China and Western Education Policy about Applying Universities*

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**Abstract:** In recent years, higher education has been developing towards internationalization, and the education policy about applying the university in various countries are changing within times. The purpose of this article is to collect data through interviews and questionnaires as well as using comparative analysis method to compare the differences between China and the West university entrance policies. This article explores the advantages and disadvantages of the two kinds of policies, thereby providing useful suggestions and complements for policy development.

## **1. Introduction**

China's college admission examination reform has been undergoing a process of continual investigation, improvement, and development in tandem with the development of Chinese society. Increasing number of scholars did numerous studies on the policy, including substance evaluations and analysis of its pilot results. However, there are still some research gaps. The analysis of these topics is particularly relevant to the global convergence and continued growth of China's college admission exam policy.

Consequently, we performed this mixed and comparative study comparing the Chinese and Western university admissions processes, collecting data from domestic and overseas students via questionnaires and interviews. This research aims not only to learn from each other's strengths and experiences, which will aid in raising educational standards and quality while also realizing the modernization of education in both China and the West, but also to promote cross-cultural communication among various nations and contribute to greater cultural understanding and respect.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1 Literature Review**

At home and abroad, the evaluation of the college entrance examination system has a variety of perspectives and attitudes. Tiezhi<sup>[1]</sup> viewed preferential policies as effective in guaranteeing ethnic minority students' education rights, opportunities, and resources, particularly by lowering higher education admission scores. Wang<sup>[2]</sup> stated that college entrance examination policies aim to distribute and regulate higher education opportunities equally. Bodis<sup>[3]</sup> thought that English scores in the Gaokao were necessary for admission to Western universities. Bai, C. E., and Chi, W.<sup>[4]</sup> also

supported Gaokao with its function of predicting undergraduate GPAs for all four years in college. Regarding the literature in China, numerous academics have recently studied the new Gaokao policy after its evolution and have also adopted a favorable viewpoint of it. For instance, Pan Zhenyu and Tong Wensheng<sup>[5]</sup> discussed the national policy that permits the children of migrant workers to take the college admission test in the city where their parents work and live; Li Muzhou and Ye Xiaofang<sup>[6]</sup> used literature and content analysis to review the policy evolution of the college entrance examination establishment in the past 70 years and elaborate on its four bright development trends; Du Fangfang and Jiang Heng<sup>[7]</sup> examined the value direction and thematic changes of the new college entrance examination reform policy. Wang Jiaming<sup>[8]</sup> carried out surveys and interviews in pilot provinces to ascertain how well-liked the Gaokao policy is among the general public; and Wang Xinfeng and Xu Dongpo<sup>[9,10]</sup> both looked into the various sources of the policy. Yet, a few international experts have disapproving opinions of the Chinese Gaokao. According to Kirkpatrick and Zang<sup>[11]</sup>, exam-oriented assessments, for instance, might restrict a student's inventiveness, creativity, and sense of self—qualities essential for a child's ultimate success both inside and beyond the classroom. Among examples of Gaokao's drawbacks, Davey, G., De Lian, and Higgins<sup>[12]</sup> cited the enormous exam pressure it puts on students, the ease with which some students can enroll in universities, and corruption. Based on the finding that female students consistently do worse on exams and don't get the chance to enroll in the best institutions in the Gaokao system, Cai, X., Lu, Y., Pan, J., & Zhong<sup>[13]</sup> suggested that Gaokao should lessen its competitiveness and admissions should be more diverse. In a word, from these foreign literatures, we learned about Chinese students' negative attitudes on the Gaokao examination, the adverse influence of exam-oriented education on Chinese high school students, etc.

To recapitulate, every research largely focuses on just one country's college entrance policy — China. Also, fairness is mostly evaluated among all the essays. However there are still certain intellectual gaps that need to be filled. For instance, all the aforementioned foreign researchers held negative attitudes toward the conventional Chinese college admission examination policy without knowing and assessing the new one after its evolution in 2014. In addition, publications from Chinese researchers just focus on the content of the new domestic policy without consideration of people's judgments generally as well as the western college admission policy, which is not beneficial for improvement and integration with the international community.

## 2.2 Methodology

This case study "contributes to policy formulation, implementation, and modification" in both qualitative and quantitative ways. Within this approach, in order to better grasp the topic under inquiry, the writers first critically analyzed the body of material already written about the Gaokao examination policy. The authors gained a greater understanding of the Gaokao system and the significance of the Gaokao examination for the Chinese government and people by taking the critical literature assessment into consideration. This knowledge accompanied the authors throughout the entire inquiry process and facilitated fruitful discussions with students about the Gaokao examination policy and associated topics. The conversations aided the writers' preparation of structured interviews and questionnaires.

### 2.2.1 Questionnaires

The authors surveyed 109 students, instructors, and parents from China and the West online (64 questionnaires from China and 45 questionnaires from the West). The background information sourced from the online questionnaires included participants' identification, location, occupation, and educational background, including what kind of education policy was in place when they

applied to institutions. It has been established that the majority of the survey participants have encountered, respectively, domestic and international enrollment policies. This shows that the author's investigation has a certain degree of authenticity and reliability.

When collecting the location of the participants, we found that the domestic participants came from 20 provinces (there are 24 provinces in total). For Chinese questionnaires, the province from which participants are admitted to college (which is usually also where they completed high school) is included since in China different areas offer different standards and local policies for applying to domestic universities. Western respondents covered four main countries. The reason for expanding the survey to such an extent is to ensure the accuracy of the findings. After all, our survey covers the West and China. And the above-mentioned major Anglo-American countries are typical of the Western education system. The questions in the Chinese and Western survey questionnaires range from single-choice to multiple-choice before going in-depth with short answer questions. This is done after mastering all of the aforementioned basic information about each participant.

### 2.2.2 Interviews

Eight students from various backgrounds were invited to participate in our structured interviews after the authors collected and analyzed data from questionnaires and before applying theme analysis to deal with the material. They came from different universities and locations in order to prevent bias and assure the reliability and validity of the interview data. In addition, the structured interviews are effective in reducing interviewer effects, improving interviewer uniformity, and increasing the standardization of questions.

All in all, both the questionnaire and structured interviews mainly analyze the similarities and differences, advantages and disadvantages, of Chinese and western college entrance policies from multiple dimensions such as fairness, pressure, ability cultivation, preparation, and significance.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Questionnaire in China and abroad

First of all, due to the questionnaire collected from students studied in China and abroad respectively, some clearly comparison of the policy about applying universities have been made. It has been proven that most of the people participating in our survey have experienced domestic and foreign enrollment policies respectively. This indicates that the author's investigation has a certain degree of authenticity and credibility.

To examine students' attitude towards college entrance examination, the author accurate the data analysis. Our questionnaire results show that 62.5% of students in China have the possibility to be forced to study subjects they do not like according to the science-humanities division. There are only about 37.5% of the students who may have the chance to choose the subjects that they are really good at. Through passing the exams of the subjects they have learnt about, they may have the opportunities to enter the University. In contrast, according to the participants' learning experience abroad, there are 82.22% of the students who apply universities with course average grades which also called the GPA instead of taking part in the exams of science-humanities division subjects

Additionally, another significant survey question was about satisfaction and the fairness. It is shown that only about 37% of the participants in China are somewhat satisfied with the educational policies of applying universities and more than 45% believe that it is just so-so. (pie chart 1) A large quantity of reasons of unfairness and improvement suggestions has been given by the respondents, like changing the regional inequality, English speaking test should be added and so on. It is impressive that more than 75% of the participants think the western policies is somewhat fair.

After investigation of fairness and improvement, the issue of stress arises. It is surprising that more than 85% of the participants feel stressful when applying universities. The data have shown that students are surrounded with different kinds of stress when they are applying for the university. The origin of Chinese students' stress was diverse due to the differences between students when applying universities. (graph1). Meanwhile, although the entry policy abroad is somewhat fair, it is still stressful. The participants also mentioned different kinds of stress, like requirement grades, language approval includes IELTS and TOFEL, and also other staff like reference letter and research project experiences just like that in China.

### 3.2 Interview in China and abroad

To ensure the reliability and validity of the interview data, eight students from different backgrounds were invited to accept our interview. The four participants in China have all taken the Chinese college entrance examination. Due to the question of happy and bad memory during high school life, the author could conclude that the feelings are about two aspects: friendship and score.

Student Yuqui Liu says like this “I think the best memory is to have lunch with my classmates every day. The biggest feeling is that I don't work hard enough. Finally, I didn't get the ideal result in the college entrance examination. This is also a small regret in my high school career.”

Compared with the thoughts of Chinese students and students who study abroad, their answers are quite different. They don't mention much about examination. Vivian and Elaine both think that “the western educational policy of applying universities is suitable for them and they believe that applying universities with academic transcripts, IELTS score and also reference letter could be a fairer way to evaluate a students' learning abilities rather than simply a difficult examination with all subjects they learn during high school”.

According to thoughts about fairness, most of them think the policy in China is somewhat fair and there could be many improvements. Student Guangyi Qiu says that “It is not perfect. Because the compulsory division of students into arts and sciences is generally beneficial to students' development, but some students are forced to choose some subjects that they don't like very much.” While the student abroad called Jacob thinks that “both Chinese way and Western way of applying universities are fair but they are different because of the national situation. Chinese Entry Examination provides students with equal chance to participate in the exam and have the equal chance to get higher education.”

Talking about the stress when applying universities, four participants all think that Chinese national Entry Examination is more stressful than western policy of applying universities. The reasons are various. Vivian says that “students spend a whole year preparing for the examination, it doesn't make sense. It seems to prepare every Chinese student for examination rather than become a citizen that could adapt the society.”

### 3.3 Comparison

According to the questionnaires and interviews, the author is going to compare them in four aspects: The form of entrance exams, fairness, stress levels, and students' understanding of each other's exam forms. Firstly, the form in China is called ‘Gaokao’, which means to take an exam on each subject by taking a test paper, and finally decide which school to apply for based on the score line. In the West, most applications are based on a system in which students evaluate various materials and indicators to determine whether they are eligible to enter the university they are applying for. What's more, for the matter of fairness, the students in the two places do not hold much distinctive opinions. Then, the extremely obvious difference is that Chinese students experience greater academic pressure than Western students.

Nevertheless, these two systems have both merits and demerits. The author supposes that they should learn from each other, China's reform needs to learn more from the West, and the West can also learn from the good aspects of the college entrance examination.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1 Differences between Chinese and western education policies**

In terms of applying to universities, there are some variations between Chinese and Western educational policies. First is about educational goal. The aim of exam-based education in China is to pass multiple tests in order to gain admission to a better university and improve one's chances of finding employment. The development of pupils' creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and social skills is the primary focus of education in the West. The second reason is that Chinese and Western teaching styles are different. Teachers in China typically teach through lectures, and pupils are expected to learn and recite a lot of material. Teachers like to encourage independent learning in the West by using discussion, engagement, and experimentation. Moreover, one important aspect of education policy is evaluation methodologies. Exam results are the primary tool used in China to assess students' academic performance, and test results are frequently used to choose and admit students. In the West, there are alternative assessment techniques to tests, including as essays, group projects, presentations, etc., which provide a more thorough assessment of students' skills and attributes. Also, the academic requirements in China and Western nations are different. Chinese students typically have to study a wide range of courses, including a number of test-taking subjects like science, math, and history. Contrarily, in the West, students can select the topics and fields of study that are most relevant to their interests and future aspirations.

### **4.2 Western policy's Pros and Cons**

Depending on how they differ, each education policy for applying to universities has advantages and disadvantages of its own. Western educational policies regarding admission to colleges are fair and evaluate pupils by looking at various factors. The admissions policies are often reviewed based on academic performance, standardized test results, reference letters, and interviews. This makes the admissions process more equitable. Selectivity is the second element. Students can apply to many schools via the application system, and once accepted, they can select the institution that best meets their needs by comparing all of their possibilities. Also, the application process may draw candidates from many countries, regions, cultures, and backgrounds, fostering diversity and intercultural dialogue at the school. The university admission process stresses student autonomy and initiative, encouraging applicants to actively engage in their studies and pursue their own unique interests in order to best position themselves for future employment. Yet there are also negative aspects to western educational strategy. The admission process is complicated, so candidates need to get ready for a variety of requirements, including reference letters, GRE/GMAT scores, as well as the IELTS and TOFEL English language tests, which might be challenging for certain students. Cost in application process typically involves paying application fees, test costs, etc., which could add to students' financial burdens. In addition to being influenced by exchange rates, international students pay substantially more in tuition than domestic students.

### **4.3 Chinese Education Policy Pros and Cons**

However, same situation happens in Chinese education policy of applying universities. First is about fairness which is same as western countries. The examination has strict regulations on test

content, time, and environment to ensure that all candidates are tested under the same test conditions, thus ensuring fairness. The last point is Reflective of education standards. The examination system reflects the quality of teaching and learning at all levels of education and has a positive contribution to promoting the improvement of teaching quality.

However, problems also exist in Chinese education policy. The first concern is with the single educational subject. Exams for students primarily test academic knowledge, excluding questions about the students' general character, personal growth, and interests. Excessive pressure is the second. Students may experience significant test pressure from a variety of sources, including family, school, and society, as a result of the system having a significant impact on their exam performance. This can easily result in psychological issues. Also, there is a problem with the Distortion. The exam could result in an imbalance in the way educational resources are allocated and a disconnection between social reality and exams.

#### **4.4 Possible Solutions of Improvements**

After doing this research and addressing the issues and problems that exist in Chinese education policies, there are some possible ways of solutions. Reforming the exam system comes first. The emphasis on tests in Chinese education is one of the most important problems. Policymakers might think about implementing other assessment techniques, like project-based learning, essays, and oral presentations, to solve this. Students would be encouraged to think more critically and creatively as a result of this. Expanding Educational Opportunities is the second. In China, education is frequently considered as a way out of poverty, yet a lack of access to advanced education might impede upward social mobility. To promote more educational equality, the government may spend more money on educational resources and scholarships for low-income households.

Also, Encourage Diversity is a beneficial way to improve policy. In recent years, there has been a push for greater diversity and inclusion in Chinese education. The Promote Diversity is another useful strategy for enhancing policy. There has been a drive-in recent year for more inclusion and diversity in Chinese education. The government may keep funding programs that favor diversity, such providing bilingual schooling and employing more teachers from various ethnic backgrounds. Next, it's crucial to talk about workload. Chinese students frequently feel stressful with course workload. The government might think about limiting the amount of schoolwork given to students and establishing regulations to make sure they have enough downtime. In addition, teacher training needs to be enhanced. Teachers are essential to the development of the educational system. Providing more comprehensive and ongoing training for teachers could help them better understand the diverse needs of their students and develop teaching methods that encourage critical thinking and creativity.

And finally, educational institutions have the responsibility to provide a positive learning environment. For students to succeed, a helpful and encouraging learning environment must be established. The government may fund programs that help students' mental health, such counseling services, and push schools to implement measures that discourage bullying and encourage good behaviors.

#### **5. Limitations and Conclusion**

Our research aims to compare education policy of applying universities and colleges in China and Western countries. The purpose of our research is to learn from each other's strengths and experiences, which is helpful in raising educational standards and quality while also realizing the modernization of education in both China and the West, but also to foster cross-cultural communication between various nations and contribute to greater cultural understanding and

respect. We use the mixed methodology with literature review, questionnaire and interview. The results of our research demonstrates the difference between China and western countries which also relates to the fairness and stress among different countries. We figured out the problems and possible solution to improve Chinese policy of applying universities.

However, there was sampling bias in our study. The majority of our participants are Chinese students. Due to insufficient sample size, it is more difficult to prove significant relevance of the study content using limited data. It also may affect the reasonableness of the study.

In the future, related scholars can further expand the sample size and check the proper process of data collection to facilitate in-depth research on this topic. In addition, there is still a large gap in the comparative study of Chinese and Western graduate school admission policies, and subsequent scholars can continue to explore this aspect.

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