

# *A Study on the Education Alienation of Higher Education in China*

**Li Hao**

*School of Marxism, Tibet University, Lhasa, China  
843507492@qq.com*

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**Abstract:** The phenomenon of alienation in higher education in China is rooted in the imbalance and inadequacy of economic and social development, as well as the imperfect education system and insufficient social understanding of higher education. Higher education has led to a disconnect between talent cultivation and social demand. To address this issue, it is necessary to increase economic and educational investment in under developed areas, provide more employment opportunities, improve educational infrastructure, and narrow the education gap between regions. At the same time, improving the education system, including optimizing the education structure, improving the education evaluation system, strengthening the construction of teaching staff, and strengthening education supervision and guarantee, is the key to ensuring education quality and promoting education equity. In addition, improving the correct understanding of higher education in society, establishing correct educational values, and encouraging diversified successful models are crucial for building a fair, high-quality, and diverse higher education system.

## **1. The phenomenon of educational alienation in higher education in China**

Marx used "labor alienation" to summarize the relationship between workers, their labor products, and labor itself under private ownership conditions. He believes that labor is the essence of humanity, but under private ownership conditions, labor is alienated.<sup>[1]</sup> When we extend this "alienation theory" to the field of education, we will find that in the past few decades, with the development and progress of society, China's higher education has made significant achievements. However, with the rapid development of higher education, there have also been some worrying phenomena, one of which is the alienation of higher education.

### **1.1. Alienation of educational purposes**

Marx once said, "Education is the foundation of human social progress and the only way to cultivate well-rounded individuals." This statement emphasizes the fundamental role of education in human social progress and also points out that the goal of education is to cultivate well-rounded individuals. Essentially, higher education should strive to cultivate students' critical thinking, independent research abilities, moral judgment, and social responsibility, laying the foundation for

their comprehensive development and lifelong learning. <sup>[2]</sup>However, with the development of the market economy and the intensification of competition in the job market, the purpose of higher education has gradually been alienated into the pursuit of practicality, professionalization, and instrumentality. This transformation has greatly affected the quality of education and the personal development of students.

### **1.2. Alienation of the educational process**

The alienation of higher education process is particularly reflected in the transformation of educational content and methods. With the deepening development of the market economy, higher education has begun to overly emphasize the practicality of knowledge and the cultivation of vocational skills, while neglecting the education of basic subject knowledge and humanistic literacy. This transformation has made the education process increasingly seen as a preparation for direct involvement in the job market, rather than cultivating well-rounded individuals. Education content and services are often designed around the needs of the job market, rather than the intrinsic value and long-term goals of education.

### **1.3. Alienation of educational outcome evaluation**

The alienation of educational outcome evaluation reflects the shift of the evaluation system from measuring students' comprehensive development and learning process to an excessive reliance on scores and transcripts. Under this evaluation system, students are often encouraged to pursue high scores rather than true understanding and application of knowledge.

## **2. The Reasons for the Alienation of Higher Education in China**

The essence of higher education alienation is the imbalance of economic development, and at the same time, higher education is also constrained and influenced by the education system and social awareness.

### **2.1. The imbalance and inadequacy of socio-economic development are the fundamental reasons for the alienation of higher education**

Marx said that "the economic foundation determines the superstructure", which reveals the profound impact of social and economic structure on education, especially higher education.<sup>[3]</sup> In a country or region, the prosperity and decline of the economy, the adjustment and transformation of industrial structure, and the activity and stagnation of technological innovation will directly or indirectly affect the investment, quality, and direction of education. The imbalance of economic development has led to unfair distribution of educational resources, unequal educational opportunities, and imbalanced educational evaluation systems, thereby exacerbating the phenomenon of alienation in the field of education.

Firstly, in economically developed regions, schools often receive more financial support, provide better teaching facilities, recruit more outstanding teachers, and carry out more diversified teaching activities. On the contrary, schools in economically underdeveloped areas face problems such as insufficient funding, weak teaching staff, and low education quality. This imbalance directly affects students' learning conditions and educational opportunities, exacerbating regional disparities in educational outcomes. Secondly, the imbalance in economic development also leads to an overemphasis on the cultivation of skills and knowledge directly related to economic needs in the education system, while neglecting the cultivation of humanistic education and critical thinking

abilities. In the context of pursuing maximum economic benefits, education is seen as a tool for cultivating labor and promoting economic growth. This concept leads to the instrumentalization of educational goals and content, where students are encouraged to study majors with high market demand and good employment prospects, rather than pursuing comprehensive development based on personal interests and social needs. In addition, the alienation of the education evaluation system is also related to the imbalance of economic development. In the face of economic pressure, schools and educational institutions may excessively pursue educational achievements that can be directly converted into economic benefits, such as college entrance examination scores, university rankings, and graduate employment rates. The bias of this evaluation system not only overlooks the essential purpose of education, but also leads to the alienation of the educational process, such as the universalization of exam oriented education and the externalization of learning motivation.

## **2.2. The imperfect education system is the main reason for the alienation of higher education**

The imperfect education system is a major reason for the alienation of higher education. This imperfection is reflected in multiple aspects, including resource allocation, educational evaluation, and teacher training. Firstly, higher education institutions in economically developed regions often receive more financial support, more advanced teaching facilities, and richer teaching resources, while higher education institutions in economically underdeveloped regions face the problem of resource scarcity. This uneven allocation of resources not only limits the development potential of some higher education institutions, but also affects the opportunities for students to receive high-quality education. Secondly, the singularity and excessive emphasis on academic performance in the education evaluation system often overlook the cultivation of students' personality development, innovation ability, and practical skills, and overly emphasize the output of exam scores and academic papers. This bias leads both students and teachers to focus their attention on exam oriented education and academic achievements, neglecting the essential purpose of education, which is to cultivate well-rounded talents. In addition, the construction of the teaching staff is also a key factor affecting the quality of higher education. Some higher education institutions face problems such as insufficient teaching staff, inadequate teacher training, and outdated teaching methods. As the direct implementers of education, teachers' professional qualities and teaching abilities directly affect the quality of education and the learning outcomes of students. The lack of a high-level teaching team not only limits the updating of educational content and the reform of teaching methods, but also affects the cultivation of students' innovation ability and practical skills. Finally, the education system and management models are rigid, lacking flexibility and adaptability. Not conducive to timely adjustment of the education system according to the needs of social development, but also limiting innovation in educational content and teaching methods. In a rapidly changing social and economic environment, the rigidity of the education system may lead to a disconnect between higher education and the times, making it difficult to effectively cultivate talents that meet future social needs.

## **2.3. Insufficient understanding of higher education in society is an important reason for the alienation of higher education**

Insufficient understanding of higher education in society can affect the understanding of the educational process, educational objectives, and values among learners. These misconceptions are also an important reason for the alienation of higher education.

Firstly, there is a common belief in society that higher education is a necessary path to achieve career success and social status enhancement. This concept prompts individuals and families to prioritize access to higher education, leading to an extreme pursuit of higher education resources. As

a result, higher education institutions are increasingly required to meet market demand and employment indicators in their enrollment, teaching, and evaluation processes, rather than focusing on knowledge transfer and personality development. Secondly, in many societies and cultures, individuals with higher education are endowed with higher social status and respect. This phenomenon exacerbates the excessive emphasis on academic qualifications in society, while neglecting the essential purpose of education and individual practical abilities. The symbolic role of education leads to the externalization of learning motivation, where students pursue degrees and certificates rather than actual mastery of knowledge and skills. Finally, the definition of success in society is often too singular, emphasizing external indicators such as economic income, job position, and reputation. The singularity of this success concept has promoted the development of higher education towards serving economic interests and career preparation, neglecting the role of education in promoting comprehensive personal development, cultivating critical thinking and social responsibility.

### **3. Measures to alleviate the alienation of higher education in China**

Based on the reasons for the alienation of higher education mentioned above, we will propose measures to solve or alleviate the problem of alienation of higher education from three aspects: socio-economic, educational system, and socio-cultural.

#### **3.1. Vigorously developing education in underdeveloped areas**

One of the fundamental ways to alleviate the phenomenon of alienation in higher education in our country is indeed to increase investment in education in underdeveloped areas. By balancing the allocation of educational resources in various regions, promoting educational equity, and expanding the employment market demand in underdeveloped areas, we can achieve balanced development of the education system and comprehensive progress of the social economy.<sup>[4]</sup>

Firstly, increasing investment in higher education in underdeveloped areas is the key to alleviating the phenomenon of educational alienation. Through the support of national finance and policy tilt, increasing investment in higher education in underdeveloped areas can effectively improve the basic conditions of educational institutions in these areas, enhance the quality of education, and create a more equitable learning environment for students. Secondly, balancing the allocation of educational resources across regions is crucial for achieving educational equity. This not only involves the allocation of financial funds, but also the sharing of high-quality teacher resources, teaching and research facilities, and advanced educational concepts. National and local governments can establish mechanisms for sharing educational resources, promote cooperation and exchange between higher education institutions within and outside the region, and adopt methods such as distance education and online teaching to ensure that high-quality educational resources cover a wider range of regions. In addition, encouraging and supporting excellent teachers to teach in underdeveloped areas and promoting balanced distribution of educational resources through talent mobility are also effective measures to achieve balanced development of education. Furthermore, promoting educational equity is the fundamental way to address the phenomenon of alienation in higher education. Educational equity not only means providing equal educational opportunities, but also includes ensuring that every student has access to the educational support and resources they need. This requires the formulation and implementation of education policies to fully consider the specific needs of different regions and groups, and implement differentiated education strategies. Finally, expanding the employment market demand in underdeveloped areas is equally important for alleviating the phenomenon of education alienation. Improving the economic development level of underdeveloped areas, attracting and encouraging enterprise investment, and creating more employment opportunities

can effectively enhance the attractiveness and practical value of higher education. Through policy support and economic incentives, promoting industrial upgrading and economic structural adjustment can not only provide broader employment prospects for local higher education graduates, but also help retain talents, promote regional economic development and social stability.

In summary, increasing investment in education in underdeveloped areas, balancing the allocation of educational resources in various regions, and expanding the demand for employment in underdeveloped areas are the fundamental ways to alleviate the phenomenon of alienation in higher education in China. Through the implementation of these measures, it is possible to effectively promote the rational allocation of educational resources, safeguard the educational rights of each student, achieve fairness and quality improvement in education, and ultimately promote balanced development and harmonious stability in society.

### **3.2. Building a high-quality higher education system**

Building a high-quality higher education system is a direct way to alleviate the phenomenon of alienation in China's higher education. This process involves key measures such as optimizing the education structure, improving the education evaluation system, strengthening the construction of teaching staff, and strengthening education supervision and guarantee.

Firstly, optimizing the structure of higher education means adjusting and reforming the discipline setting, curriculum system, and educational level within the education system to better adapt to the needs of social and economic development. This includes adding applied, technical, and vocational education courses, promoting interdisciplinary integration, and encouraging the construction of career education and lifelong learning systems. Through these measures, it is possible to cultivate composite talents with innovative abilities, practical skills, and good professional ethics, meeting the diverse talent needs of society. Secondly, improving the evaluation system of higher education is an important way to improve the quality of education and promote the comprehensive development of students. The existing evaluation system often overemphasizes academic performance and research output, while neglecting the individual development, innovation ability, and social practice skills of students. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a diversified and comprehensive evaluation system, which should include students' academic achievements, innovative practical activities, social services, moral qualities, and other aspects. In addition, strengthening the construction of the teaching staff is a key guarantee for improving the quality of higher education. Strengthening the construction of the teaching staff involves improving the professional competence, teaching ability, and research level of teachers. This not only requires increasing investment in the professional development of teachers, such as providing regular training and learning opportunities, but also improving their working conditions and elevating their professional status, attracting more outstanding talents to engage in the education industry. Finally, strengthening the education supervision and guarantee mechanism is an important measure to ensure the quality and fairness of education. This requires the establishment and improvement of an education quality monitoring system, including regular education evaluations, school evaluations, and quality certifications. At the same time, the education department should strengthen supervision of unfair phenomena in the education process, such as curbing unfair behavior in enrollment and ensuring the rational allocation of educational resources. Through these supervision and protection measures, the transparency and credibility of the higher education system can be enhanced, and the trust and support of society for higher education can be enhanced.

In summary, the fundamental way to alleviate the phenomenon of alienation in higher education in China is to comprehensively improve the higher education system. This not only involves the internal structural adjustment and management mechanism optimization of the education system,

but also includes the adaptation and integration of the external environment, as well as close linkage with social and economic development.

### 3.3. Enhance society's correct understanding of higher education

One of the important ways to alleviate the phenomenon of alienation in higher education in China is to enhance society's correct understanding of higher education. In the current educational environment, many people view higher education as the only way to success and social status improvement. This biased view not only exacerbates the uneven distribution of educational resources, but also leads to the alienation of educational objectives and quality. Therefore, it is particularly urgent and important to establish a correct understanding of higher education in the whole society.

Firstly, it is necessary to fundamentally adjust and optimize society's values towards education. Education should not only be seen as a means of acquiring knowledge and skills, but more importantly, its role in promoting comprehensive personal development, cultivating innovative spirit, and social responsibility. All sectors of society should attach importance to and promote diverse learning paths and successful models, gradually changing society's one-sided understanding and excessive pursuit of higher education, so that higher education can cultivate composite talents with innovative abilities, critical thinking, and international perspectives. Secondly, reshaping educational goals is also an important way to enhance society's correct understanding of higher education. The goal of higher education should be to cultivate versatile talents with innovative abilities, critical thinking, and international perspectives, rather than just pursuing in-depth academic research or narrow training in vocational skills. By reforming the curriculum system, updating teaching methods, and adjusting evaluation standards, higher education institutions can better meet the needs of social development and promote the comprehensive growth of students. Finally, enhancing the correct understanding of higher education in society also requires extensive participation and support from all sectors of society. Enterprises and industry organizations can directly participate in teaching and research activities in higher education by establishing cooperative relationships, providing internship and training opportunities, and participating in course development.<sup>[5]</sup>In addition, the government and social organizations should increase investment in educational innovation and quality improvement, and provide more resources and support for the development of higher education through the establishment of education funds, implementation of public service projects, and other means.

By implementing the above measures, not only can society enhance its correct understanding of higher education, but it can also promote the optimization and development of the higher education system, making it better serve the progress of the social economy and the comprehensive development of individuals. In this process, higher education will no longer be a single academic pursuit or career preparation, but will become an important force in promoting social justice, innovative development, and cultural prosperity.

## 4. Conclusion

The phenomenon of alienation in higher education in our country mainly refers to the alienation of educational purposes, educational values, and educational processes. Its essence is the imbalance of educational development, rooted in the imbalance of economic development. At the same time, the alienation of education is also constrained and influenced by the education system and social awareness. So, we should vigorously develop the economy of underdeveloped areas, increase their education investment, ensure education equity, and change the wrong understanding of higher education in society in the past, ultimately returning China's higher education to the cultivation of

well-rounded talents

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