

University Education Research Under the Game of “Speciality” and “Generalization”

HE Xie^{[a],*}

^[a]Ph.D., Faculty of Education, Southwest University, Chongqing, China.
*Corresponding author.

Received 25 July 2015; accepted 28 September 2015
Published online 26 November 2015

Abstract

University has always contained two big functions and two big ideas since its beginning, the first is the professional knowledge and exquisite skills under the function of “Skill training”, that is, the idea of “speciality”; the second is the wide knowledge and elegant personality under the function of “mental education”, that is, the idea of “generalization”. The two big functions exist side by side for a long time in the development process of the university and the confrontation and game of the two push the great progress of the university each time. By investigating how university education of representative countries in different periods balance the relationship between “speciality” and “generalization”, this article further puts forward the reference method for the Chinese modern university education in handling the relationship between the pair, that is, to strengthen the role of general education played in nurturing citizens’ “cultural beliefs, innovative spirit and ability” beside skills training function of university.

Key words: Speciality and generalization; University education; Knowledge

He, X. (2015). University Education Research Under the Game of “Speciality” and “Generalization”. *Canadian Social Science*, 11(11), 60-64. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/7756>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/7756>

INTRODUCTION

“Speciality and generalization” tend to express the depth and width of knowledge about its meaning. Knowledge is

the smallest unit as well as the core content of university. The preference of university for “specialized knowledge or general knowledge” is less a choice of education way and content than a choice of cultural belief. Since university came into being in the 11th century, the university education has been always built on the basis of solid faith—the belief of Christian church. Both the university and people in it are in the same spirit and material world of the same god, they discuss the common problems as well as common books by speaking the same language and all of them have to learn “Free Seven Arts” from College of arts. After the renaissance and the enlightenment, the university was growing in rational belief.

Since the middle of the 20th century, diversification has become the theme of the times with the reflexivity of knowledge more and more prominent, the utilitarian of academic more and more obvious, social culture more and more complex. How the university would guide social direction, and embody “representation of an era” decided the choice of thoughts and ways of the university education while behind this choice, the essence of which is on the choice of knowledge and its cultural beliefs—humanistic culture or scientific culture.

1. REFLECTION ON SPECIALITY AND GENERALIZATION IN CLASSICAL EDUCATION

University of Paris was the prototype of the modern university as well as the typical example of classical education. One must investigate the curriculum provision and training objective of University of Paris first to know about the state of knowledge in that period before researches the problems of choosing and coordinating the speciality and generalization in classical education.

1.1 The Curriculum Provision in University of Paris

The university of Paris has four colleges, the college of arts, theology college, law school and school of medicine, college of arts is the basic college of the university of Paris including basic knowledge in the lower position in the knowledge system. But all students who want to get advanced knowledge—theology, law, medicine education there have to be first graduated from college of arts. College of arts is the basis for University of Paris as well as the subject platform in charge of four associations of the whole university. In consideration of the huge group of students as well as the fundamentality of subjective nature of arts, students are both possible and necessary to assume a certain teaching task after completion of a bachelor's degree.

In 1215, Robert Couson, the Paris university president then, first made relatively complete degree plan for arts education—using the way of specifying the teaching book around the subjects, this also basically represents all curriculum of Paris university in the early stage. From this curriculum, people can see clearly the features of the two aspects. First, general humanities art courses eliminated the teaching content of Roman poet, historian, and speakers during this period and instead contained high attention to Latin grammar, logic and rhetoric. Second, students must “listening many times” to the lecture for each prescribed textbook. And students must attend more than once in general courses of all prescribed textbooks as well as attend at least one temporary lecture. This provision shows the systematic trend of the curriculum of college of arts of the University of Paris.

1.2 The Objective of Personnel Cultivation of College of Arts of University of Paris

The teaching of humanities art subjects of University of Paris aims at “mental training” which can let the mentality of students be prepared when entering those subjects college teaches. This preparation is somewhat a kind of the form of logical thinking as well as getting hold of inferential capability.

In the 19th century, the rise of realism theory of education forced people to focus on the specific things, science education became a new development direction of education. Grammar education in France was divided into “two parts”, one was inheriting the classical cultural education; the other was the education dominated by science with literature education not completely ruled out. This education was called “special secondary education” in 1865. In 1890, the new law framed secondary education in “classical education system” and makes it no longer professional and technical.

In conclusion it can be seen that humanities art subjects are the foundation of all advanced subjects in the classical education of university of Paris. Secondary education is the preparatory stage of higher education. People's firm faith for logical reason, mental training,

loyal to the reasoning are mainly decided by epistemology held by that nationality at that era and crying needs. Emile Durkheim said:

The transformation of education is always the results and the signs of the transformation of society, the transformation of education should be explained from the perspective of social transformation, to make a nation aware of education transformation, the new ideas and new demands should emerge first. (Durkheim, 2003)

In France in the 20th century, in the face of the tough development trend of science education, education must adapt to a variety of professions and volunteers, education itself should abandon its indivisibility in ancient times and go towards diversification. Those got by people needed by university of secondary education in France are not got only by single mechanical training but by mental training prepared well for specific duties, abilities—prepare well the right ideas and the ability of thinking, judgment, reasoning. Secondary education nurtures and stimulates people's logical reasoning, logical thinking ability by general ways, while the higher education develops ability and explores knowledge by specialized ways.

2. REFLECTION ON THE SPECIALITY AND GENERALIZATION IN MODERN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION OF BRITAIN, GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES

2.1 The Speciality and Generalization in the Concept of University Education of the United States

The general-education of Harvard is the typical representative of universities in the United States in handling “speciality and generalization” as well as a good example for other universities in the United States on “handling speciality and generalization”. In 1945, under the publishing and guidance of *The Red Data Book of the General-Education in Harvard*, universities in the United States tried to avoid the disadvantage of single nurturing mode of emphasis only on professional knowledge and skills, and compulsorily reformed courses by introducing the “core curriculum” of general-education to nurture the humanities spirit and attainment of students so as to nurture “human of completeness”, nurture social responsibility of citizens in democratic society as well as elaborative faculty on social problems.

The system of “core curriculum” of the Harvard general-education formed relatively perfect curriculum implementation system, that is, the courses can be divided into 3 types including natural sciences, human science, social sciences. From the objective of its each kind of curriculum, it is by no means to make people become experts in each type of science: natural science cultivates

the ability to analyze and explain things; human science cultivates the ability of judging, measuring, criticizing things; social science cultivates the ability of analyze things by the methods of presentation and evaluation. The purpose of “core curriculum” clearly focused on the mind and the values it contains. And the essence of “core curriculum” is to seek a common faith, excavate and create a common culture for the citizens owns knowledge today. In the era of mass higher education, the “generalization” generated by general-education is faced with a wider range of people and the culture they contained. This “generalization” should be the extraction of all sorts of culture and subject professional knowledge rather than simply piled up by them. The essence of *The Red Data Book of the General-Education in Harvard* is to solve the problems of consistency and division of human knowledge and culture under free and democratic society and their influence on people.

2.2 The Speciality and Generalization in the Concept of German University Education

The mission of education put forward by Humboldt Universitat is: “First is to explore science, second is personality and moral cultivation. Science what Humboldt said is pure science, philosophy of science, different from these ‘empirical science’ like history and natural science, the science is ‘from science to moral cultivation’”. The views about university of research university in Germany represented by Humboldt shows that universities in Germany try to realize the improvement of personality and moral cultivation through the pursuit and exploration of academic and speciality pure without utility; achieve moral and intellectual cultivation through the critical thinking formed during the research in science.

Chen (2006) considers: “The classical university view of Germany is a kind of charisma concept”. That is to say, the classical university view of Germany gives science a kind of religious faith. Max Weber put forward Charisma Theory. It is a strength of reform built on faith, spirit, a “time-transcending, surpasses the worldly” ideal type leader or system of thought.

No matter from the idea of university, or from the university organizational structure and system, universities in Humboldt are infused with a faith for cultivation, besides, the universities emphasizes the valuable culture and spirit in daily life through free and pure scientific activities as well as mental activities. In 19th century, Berlin university set up the main value orientation of university education in Germany: For the purpose of nurturing the students’ cultivation, pursuing the integrated development of man in speciality, to acquire the integration of speciality and generalization by choosing a strength of faith from the inside out. This can make students own the ability of independent thinking, self coordination of body and mind and creative thinking during their career process of technical work after graduation.

2.3 The Speciality and Generalization in the View of British University Education

Universities in Britain have the longest history compared to Germany and the United States, there, the school-running mode and organization model of Oxford and Cambridge both originate from the University of Paris. Britain’s university is born with the character of the pursue of “liberal education (liberal-education)”. After the Second World War with the rise of scientific and technical revolution, the position of humanities in liberal education in British universities was shook by science and technology education. However, the persistence of “generalization” and “liberal education” by British university had never been interrupted. The liberal education of Britain is different from the general-education in the United States, although they all aim at shaping a good citizen, their concepts and ways are quite different. Britain’s liberal education represented by Newman is, to cultivate the reason, “gentlemen” with proper attitude through the command of “common knowledge” for all subjects, all truth. This is on the theory of knowledge and epistemology of Newman who proposes that only the systematic and integrated knowledge can make a mind to breed moral cultivation and university is “for the purpose of knowledge”. The concept of knowledge from Newman shows the contradiction between traditional specialized knowledge and integrated knowledge in university and makes the unification of university education based on the faith for truth. This concept established the tradition of British university education and gave the university in Britain the rule and direction when handling the problem of “speciality and generalization”.

3. THE CHOICE OF CHINESE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION UNDER THE GAME OF “SPECIALITY AND GENERALIZATION”

The game of “speciality and generalization” in university education specially performs in the game between professional education and free education (or called as general education) of university, is a choice of culture relief formed by knowledge hierarchy for various subjects from various perspectives or culture relief formed by single knowledge system. Undoubtedly, the world is entering into the digital age of high and new science, universities in China and even in every country in the world pays too much attention to the specialized teaching and research on the specific things, specific technologies and single subject, that is, the attention on single professional, specialized education is more obvious, universities tend to be attached more to in business, marketing and professional technology with neglect of the cultivation of the quality of the true, the

good and the beautiful of a man. China's universities has a lot of problems on handling the "speciality and generalization": The professional education training mode of "speciality" prevails over the general education training mode of "generalization", single common subjects, ideologicalization of the content, big limitations of quality checking. Although there are much research results of general education for "generalization" from academic world and education world, the results are not good just as the China general education curriculum said by Professor Jin (2001): "No one is willing to go to take care of; No professor to teach; No students take the spirit to listen." (Chen, 2006).

The education of Tsinghua University is walking in the forefront of the development of China's university. The university issues *The Several Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening Education and Teaching Reform* published by Tsinghua University in October 2014 and put forward:

To establish an undergraduate education system combined with general education and specialized education based on general education...plan general education and specialized education as a whole, enhance top-level design of general education and comprehensively improve the quality of the course; carry forward the characteristics of specialized education, optimize the professional core courses. Increase elasticity, flexibility of training programme as well as independence and selectivity of students' learning, practically promote students values shape and sublimation, enhance their consensus of outstanding traditional culture and understanding of human civilization, and make them form complete noble and independent personality, nurture their critical spirit and innovative spirit of science, strengthen the cultivation of practice ability and creative entrepreneurial ability.

for the problem of implementation of general education in both Tsinghua University and in our country. Opinions on the reform of practice of general education of Tsinghua university are timely and targeted, while before the carry out of top-level design, two problems must be solved: Problem one, the status of general education and general courses. Only when managers of university internal and external advocate the status of general education and general courses on aspects of teaching, scientific research and management, can the functions of general education be embodied. There are three reasons why the subjects of low-level—"Free seven arts" be in a position of supremacy, first, in the educational administration, the college of art implementing "Free seven arts" is taking control of the Senior management power of the whole university, it gives the teachers there highest academic prestige and social status; second, on the scale of teaching, the "Free seven arts" is with the most students; third, on the human knowledge structure, it is in the leading position irreplaceable. Therefore, even if in the knowledge level and education level the status of "Free seven arts" is low, its existence is unchallenged. Problem two, the

problem of the implementation of China's general education lies not at curriculum provision but teachers—the gap and contradictions between teachers' knowledge system and teachers' teaching ability and the training objective of general education. Gan Yang considers that, "to push the development of general education of our country, formalism and outward imitation should be strictly avoided, and instead, it is necessary to pay attention to the accumulation of substantiality and take a path with more actual effect" (Gan, 2006). "System of teaching assistant" is one of the two core links he put forward. Since 1898 the establishment of universities in China, there were no general subjects. There are no educational objectives and patterns of generalization in Chinese teacher-training education. Most of teachers set the general education curriculum are young teachers with their knowledge reserve not enough to meet the requirement of generalization. The understanding of the curriculum objectives of young teachers is not enough to meet the requirement of curriculum. Up to today, general education still has strong vitality, it is from humanism. It can avoid the utilitarian of a single orientation and the professional technical education idea and education mode, abidingly play an irreplaceable function on various aspects including promoting individual freedom, communicating and building national culture, social morality as well as breeding civilization. University education in the 21st century in China must trace back to every transformation of Chinese society and Chinese university, under the premise of the university guided by science research, the talent cultivation for the purpose of professional education, besides, it is necessary to vertically compare curriculum, training objective, knowledge source, distribution and its system during the development process of university of our country; to make generalizations of ideological characteristics, moral image, life style, social culture, etc. of Chinese nation during the development process of our country's society. Therefore, the key method of coordination is cultivating the "complete personality, innovative spirit and ability" of citizen so as to reach the balance of human knowledge between speciality and generalization as well as the harmony and unity of professional skills and moral culture of social man besides playing the function of general education in university professional training.

SUMMARY

Therefore, the key method of "speciality" and "generalization" is cultivating the "complete personality, innovative spirit and ability" of citizen so as to reach the balance of human knowledge between speciality and generalization as well as the harmony and unity of professional skills and moral culture of social man besides

playing the function of general education in university
professional training.

REFERENCES

Chen, H. J. (2006). *German classic university concept and its
impact on China* (revised edition p.29, 88). Beijing: Peking
University Press.

Durkheim, E. (2003). *The evolution of the education thought*
(p.231). In K. Li (Trans.). Shanghai: Shanghai People’s
Publishing House.

Jin, Y. J. (2001). *The concept of the university* (p.150). Beijing:
Sanlian Bookstore. Quoted: Shen Jun Shan. The expectation
of general education of National Tsinghua University.
Collected Works of the Theory and Actual Conference of
University General Education.