

Future Development and Reform Strategies of Chinese Higher Education In a Fast Growing and Transitional Economy

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From 1980s up to the beginning of the 21st century, along with the economic transition from the centrally planned economy to a dynamic market economy, Chinese higher education has undergone a series of structural reforms, including the change of the overall higher education operation mechanism from a central planning approach to a market-oriented model, reorientation of the government/university relationship by granting autonomy to universities, restructuring the higher education system by merging and reorganizing over-specialized universities and colleges, updating curriculum and teaching and broadening the fields of studies, reforming higher education finance to diversifying resources for higher education, and enlarging provision by promotion of private institutions. Along with the economic transition and the fast growing economy, Chinese higher education has also expanded quickly. The total enrollment of higher education institutions in China rose from about 1 million in early 1980s to about 13 million in 2001. It is estimated that Chinese higher education system will continue to expand to 15 million students by 2005. To keep a healthy development, future reforms will be needed. Strategies include giving more decision-making power to universities and colleges to make them more initiative, creative and responsive to the needs of economic development and scientific and technological advancement. It is also needed to further multiply the sources for financing higher education including cost sharing and cost-recovery. The structure of the higher education system by levels and fields of learning has to be further adjusted to better match the social and economic needs. A more systematic approach needs to be formulated for more flexible faculty development and promotion including a more effective incentive mechanism. Further strategies also include the development of a comprehensive system for evaluation, accreditation and quality assurance in higher education. Finally, it is imperative to further establish and consummate a solid legal infrastructure to better protect and regulate universities and colleges with increasing institutional autonomy.