General Education Reform and Its Implications for Student Learning: The Case of Yuanpei Program of Peking University in China

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＜Abstract＞

Although it is widely acknowledged that undergraduate students should receive general education, it is not clear how to implement the appropriate model designed for each particular group of students in different cultural, historical, economical and educational contexts. This article introduces one example of general education reform in China: the Yuanpei Program of Peking University. By providing general education courses to all undergraduates, and by setting up a Yuanpei College for a small-scale experiment, the Yuanpei Program has been implementing such reform strategies as free choices of specialty and courses, a flexible learning calendar with credit requirements, a tutor system, a mixed lodging arrangement, as well as placing the management of student study and life under the direct governance of the university. The outcomes of the reform are on the whole positive, although many problems remain due to lack of a consensus about general education as well as some structural constraints and physical confinements. In order to deal with these problems, some suggestions have been put forward not only for a consideration of logistics in universal terms but also with a view to tracing back to the Chinese historical heritage in search of more cultural resources in developing China's own model of general education for the current demands.

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1. Introduction

After the restructuring of higher learning institutions in 1952 based on the model of the former Soviet Union, undergraduate education in China was organized around narrowly defined specialties. Although this practice met the needs of economic development in the 50s, it has proven out of line with the open policy of economic reform, the rapid social development, the advancement of science and technology, and the needs of diverse student bodies. In recent years, a lot of reform in general education (GE) has been carried out in Chinese universities. This article will introduce the Yuanpei Program of Peking University (PKU) as a case to illustrate some of the reform strategies underway, their implications for student learning, the existent problems and concerns, and future prospects for further reform.

At the end of 1980s, PKU put forward its reform strategy for undergraduate education as "strengthening the knowledge foundation of students, weakening the rigid division of specialties, differentiating teaching and learning contents and methods according to student needs, and providing different kinds of education for different tracks of students with different objectives". At the beginning of 1999, the university further refined its reform strategy in more concrete terms as "implementing GE in the lower grades of student learning and widened specialized education in the higher grades".

By the end of 2000, PKU had run two experimental classes (one for humanities and the other for sciences) for 6-7 years respectively. Having harvested some experiences for reform, many problems remained. Firstly, the courses for these classes were put together by faculty members from different disciplines without internal coherence, and this resulted in disintegrated knowledge structure for the students. Secondly, since the students had to learn a large quantity of knowledge from different disciplines and the knowledge was not selected with great care, the workload for the students was too heavy. Thirdly, as the students were managed by different departments in turn, they felt a lack of affiliation to any institution as well as a weak continuity for the management of their study and daily life.

In the meantime, the majority of the students and faculty were not sa-

tisfied with the teaching and learning in PKU at that time. According to one survey conducted in 2000, out of the 404 teachers and 659 seniors, 82.2% of the faculty members thought that reform was needed for PKU's curriculum (Lin & Chen 2002). The majority of the students and faculty believed that the time to decide on the student specialty before they came to college was too early, and the existent specialties were too narrowly defined, thus unsuitable for student comprehensive capacity building. 40.1% of the seniors reported that they wanted to change their specialty without success. 65% of the students and 45.8% of the teachers believed that the proportion of the compulsory courses was too big, the division between different disciplines was too strict and rigid, and it was too difficult to choose courses in departments other than their own. 85% of the students and 77.4% of the teachers advocated a full credit system. While science students considered "the most lacking courses in the curriculum" as humanities and social sciences, those for the humanity students were sciences.

Due to these problems, among others, the university leadership, urged by a number of faculty members active for reform, came to recognize that PKU, as a top comprehensive research-oriented university in China, should be at the forefront of GE reform with more clearly-defined goals. Rather than running a few experimental classes within the model of specialty education, PKU should aim to produce "high quality talents with broad fundamental knowledge, basic human quality, high awareness for innovation, and capacity to play a leading role in the thriving of the nation and the country" (Wei & Chen 2000).

In order to reach this goal, PKU established Yuanpei Program in 2001, named after its late president Cai Yuanpei, who advocated general education in the early 20th century. Two specific approaches have been employed in the program since then. Firstly, GE courses are provided to all undergraduate students in the university. Out of the 140-160 total credits required by each department or school, students need to obtain 16 credits in 4 of the 5 following areas of study: 1) math and natural sciences; 2) social sciences; 3) philosophy and psychology; 4) history; 5) languages, literature and arts. Secondly, Yuanpei Class has been set up in order to trial a new

model of GE for its later scaling-up in the whole university. The Yuanpei Class was renamed in 2009 as Yuanpei College, with more financial support and personnel from the university to meet its needs for expansion.

2. Reform Concerning GE Courses

Since 2000, GE courses have been developed steadily from a few dozens to more than 330 now, with 150 courses or so for each semester. An approval committee composed of representatives from each of the 5 areas of study has been set up to screen the proposed courses from the departments and schools, before granting them permission to be taught.

2.1 Effectiveness of GE courses

According to the annual evaluation conducted by the Teaching Section of PKU since 2002, classroom observations of 37 courses by a research team, and frequent classroom visits of the Teaching Guidance Group composed of retired professors, students overall are satisfied with these courses (Teaching Section of Peking University 2002-2010; Teaching Evaluation Office in Teaching Section of Peking University, 2004; Xu 2003). The courses considered "good" by the students are those whose teachers have a deep understanding of their discipline, a wide range of knowledge, a rigorous attitude towards research and teaching, excellent teaching capacity and personal charismas. Those with a high student enrolment or whose lecturers can stir up laughter from the students with their humor are not necessarily regarded as "good" ones.

According to one survey (Wang 2005), 84.4% of the students from the Yuanpei Class believed that "the GE courses have expanded my scope of knowledge", and 74.5% agreed that "the GE courses have broadened my thinking". As for the usefulness of the GE courses to the students' choice of their specialty, however, 25.3% of the Yuanpei students considered them as "not helpful", 20.9% as "helpful but the help is not very big", and only 24.1% as "very helpful" and "rather helpful" (See Figure 1).

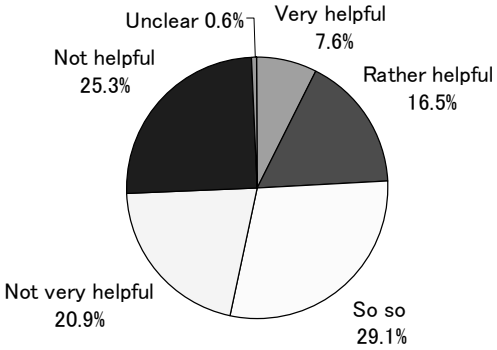

Figure 1　Helpfulness of GE courses to Yuanpei students in choosing specialty

The fact that GE courses are more effective in helping the students to learn about other knowledge areas than assisting them to choose their specialty may indicate that the introduction of disciplinary knowledge in many GE courses is rather superficial. They have failed to provide the students with a clear structure of the disciplines' knowledge and research methodology as a basis for their choice of a specialty.

Quite a few students think that, in comparison with the courses on their specialties, GE courses are usually rather easy, with shallower contents, a slower teaching speed, and a lighter workload for them (Chen et al. 2006; Wang 2005). As some teachers do not set high standards for the students, they believe that they can easily obtain credits from these courses. In the Spring Semester 2004, for example, of the 155 courses, the pass rate of the students from 106 courses was 100%. The percentage of the students who obtained an "excellence" score was 90% for 5 courses, 80% for 17 courses, and 50% for 85 courses (Teaching Evaluation Office in Teaching Section of Peking University 2004).

2.2　Factors Affecting the Quality of GE courses

Many factors have contributed to the above-mentioned relatively dissatisfactory outcomes of GE course. One is that, due to lack of enough publicity and open debate about GE, many administrators and teachers do not have an accurate understanding of GE courses. They harbor some misunderstandings of GE courses as: 1) "popular courses", which aim to

introduce interesting anecdotes and unscientific tales to students not specialized in this discipline; 2) "introductory courses", which superficially touch upon some general concepts and methods of the discipline as a foundation for the students to choose their specialty; 3) "technical courses", which inform students of the basic skills and especially operational methods concerning the discipline.

These misunderstandings may partly be caused by the vague relation between GE courses and other university-wide courses. Before the former was offered, a kind of general courses had been provided to students since 1986. There are two strands within this kind of general courses. One is compulsory for all students, with such courses as politics, foreign languages, computer skills, military training, and physical education, which takes about 40 credits. The other is elective for those students who have more capacity to learn, without credits. By 1990s, the number of this kind of courses ranged from 30 to 50. Their quality varied, with most of them involving a brief introduction to the field of study. Since there has never been a thorough discussion of the definition and functions of GE courses or this kind of general courses, many teachers tend to confuse the two.

Another cause for the confusion comes from the unclear relation between GE courses and the "platform courses". In order to increase the quantity and the quality of GE courses, the university has, in recent years, selected some high-quality discipline foundation courses from some departments and schools as "platform courses" for all freshers and sophomores. However, as these courses are originally offered to students of a certain discipline, the task of revising them for the purpose of GE becomes a big challenge for many teachers. While courses in sciences have more basis for knowledge integration as reflected in such foundation courses as math, physics and chemistry, those from humanities have less a basis in reaching consensus. Teachers of the latter fields have greater difficulty differentiating "foundation courses" for students in their own discipline from "platform courses" for students of other disciplines.

Another factor for the less satisfactory outcomes of the GE courses concerns the provision and the quality of the teachers. First of all, in such research-oriented universities as PKU, research is given more priority than

teaching, as reflected in the faculty evaluation and promotion criteria. Even within the same work of teaching, teachers find themselves benefitting more for their own research from teaching courses in their specialty than teaching GE courses. Thus, they lack enough incentives to teach the latter, understandably.

Secondly, the departments and schools do not usually send their best teachers for GE courses, due to their preoccupation with the development of their own discipline and teaching of their own students. Most of the teachers, in the meanwhile, consider themselves belonging to their discipline more than the university as a whole, thus more willing to teach students of their own departments and schools.

Thirdly, the teachers do not get enough support from the university as well as the departments and schools to offer GE courses. Although the university now provides 2,000 yuan and one teaching fellow position for courses which enroll more than 100 students, teachers still find the workload too big to handle. In addition, the financial management system in the university requires teachers to use their own money first before getting reimbursement, causing inconveniences for the teachers. In some departments and schools, the time spent on teaching GE courses is not counted as teachers' overall working hours, nor included as an indicator for teachers' performance evaluation and professional promotion.

Lack of inter-disciplinary collaboration is another factor for the relatively low quality of the GE courses. At the moment, the courses follow a distributed compulsory model. Teachers have to apply for offering the courses through their departments and schools, which do not have the capacity to build inter-disciplinary courses, let alone trans-disciplinary ones. Since there exist huge differences among different disciplines in terms of research paradigms, subjects, methods and ways of thinking, teachers must have a very clear understanding of their own discipline in order to embark on such a cooperation. However, due to lack of capacity in this area, as well as too clear an institutional divide, the overall design of GE courses for the whole university proves rather challenging. At the moment, Yuanpei Management Committee has been working very hard to establish some interdisciplinary courses, such as academic norms and thesis writing. The

quality of these courses, however, is still questionable.

The proportion of the credits for GE courses needs to be reconsidered, too. According to international experience, GE courses usually take about 1/4 of the total credits for undergraduate students. Take Harvard University, for example, the core curriculum takes about 1/4 of the total, and that of Chicago University is about one half of the total. In comparison, that of PKU occupies only 11%. This is partly due to the fact that students in Chinese universities are required by the Ministry of Education and the university to take some general courses, as mentioned above.

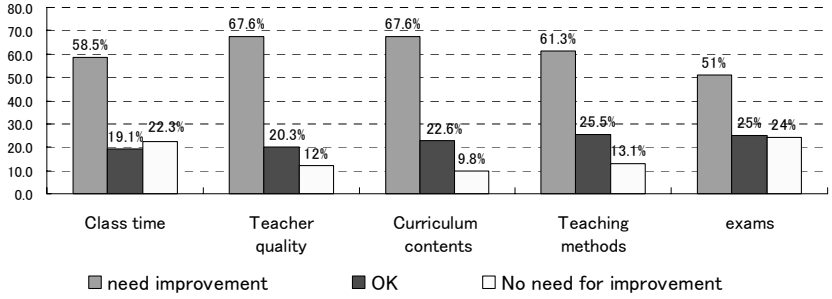

Figure 2 Suggestions for improvement of GE courses

In accordance with the problems discussed above, most of the students surveyed by one study (Chen etc. 2006) believed that the areas that needed most improvement for GE course were "teacher quality" and "the curriculum contents" (See Figure 2).

3. Reform Concerning Yuanpei College

Yuanpei College is composed of two classes for each grade, one in humanities, and the other in sciences. In 2010, out of the 3,400 freshers enrolled by PKU (1,500 in sciences, 1,300 in humanities, and 600 in medicine), 200 have entered Yuanpei College (Teaching Affairs Office of Teaching Section in Peking University Website 2010).

3.1 Reform Strategies

Since 2001, five new reform strategies have been tried out for undergraduate students in Yuanpei Class/College in PKU in the new model for GE (Jin 2006).

1) Students are enrolled without a specialty, enter one of the two broad areas of study (humanities and sciences), and take mainly GE courses and "platform courses" for the first one and half years. (They should also take the general courses mentioned above like everybody in PKU.)
2) The students are given the opportunity to choose their courses and specialty according to their own needs and interest, after having familiarized themselves with the disciplinary arrangements and the educational objectives of the university, under the guidance of their tutor and the teaching plan of the university.
3) A flexible schooling calendar of 3-6 years is provided to the students, who can set up their own speed of study, and are regarded as qualified to graduate once they have acquired the required credits from their chosen specialty.
4) A tutor system is established with each student having his/her own tutor, who, considered experienced at teaching, is invited by the university to give individualized guidance to the students. The tutors help their tutees mainly by two means: 1) to deliver a lecture on his/her own discipline to the students every year; 2) to arrange for 2 hours a week office time to answer questions from the students. In the meantime, the students can send email to and make appointments with their tutor at any time.
5) A new management system of student life is set up, by putting students from different disciplines in the same dormitory, so that they can communicate with and learn from each other. In addition, after the students have entered the departments and schools for specialty education, their classes remain intact under the direct governance of Yuanpei Management Committee.

3.2 Outcome of the Reform

According to quite a few studies, internal self-evaluations and external assessments in the past 9 years, the outcomes of the reform strategies for Yuanpei Class/College are on the whole positive. However, many problems remain due to lack of consensus among various stakeholders, severe structural constraints, and physical confinements.

3.2.1 Free Choice of Specialty

One longitudinal study of all the students in the first two grades of the Yuanpei Class, in comparison with 600 non-Yuanpei students from 9 departments and schools of PKU, showed that 68.3% of the Yuanpei students benefited "a lot" and "fairly well" from the free choice of their specialty (Chen et al. 2006). Different from their non-Yuanpei counterparts, they exhibited more initiatives in collecting relevant information about the specialties in the university (See Table 1).

Table 1 Means of finding information when choosing specialty (%)

	Consult senior students	Consult tutors	Consult parents	Know about courses	Tutor lectures	Consult internet	Others
Non-Yuanpei	32.6	57.6	25.1	38.2	20.2	–	–
Yuanpei	45.3	61.0	28.3	62.3	12.6	15.7	6.3

While choosing their specialty, Yuanpei students were more influenced by their own personal interests (91.2%) and less by their parents' wishes (28.3%) than their non-Yuanpei counterparts (81.4% and 42.1% respectively). The influence of their learned courses was greater for Yuanpei students (65.4%) than for the non-Yuanpei students (39.7%).

The consistency between the non-Yuanpei students' final chosen specialties and their planned ones at the college entrance exams (48.8%) was higher than that of the Yuanpei students (34.3%). This means that Yuanpei students had more room for choosing their specialty. In addition, after 4 years of study, 71.3% of the Yuanpei students considered their specialty "meeting my wish and interest", much higher than that of the non-Yuanpei

students (54.9%) (See Figure 3).

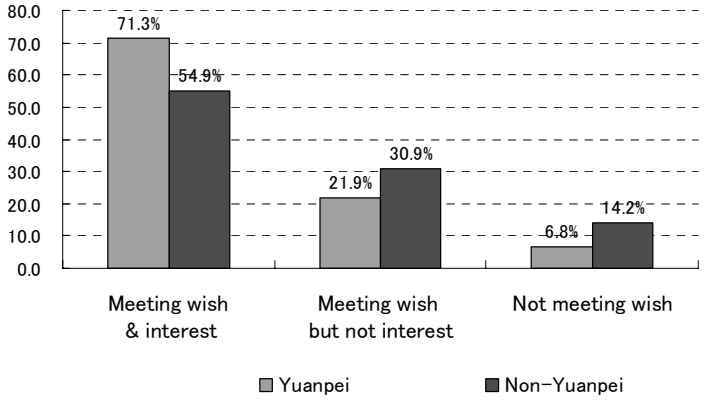

Figure 3 Comparison of satisfaction of specialties between Yuanpei and non-Yuanpei students

The initial concern that the chosen specialties of Yuanpei students may cluster around a few "hot" fields (business management, law, economics, math, computer science etc.) has proven unfounded. Of the 329 students in the first three grades, their chosen specialties evenly spread over 22 departments and schools in PKU. Eight students changed their specialties from humanities to sciences, and 26 from sciences to humanities. This means that Yuanpei students have taken into consideration more of their own interests and needs than job market attractions.

3.2.2 Free choice of courses

According to the same longitudinal study (Chen et al. 2006), 72.8% of the students believed that they benefited "a lot" and "fairly well" from the free choice of courses. 85.5% of the first group of graduates agreed that they were given "very big" and "fairly big" free space to choose their courses.

However, due to the "two-track system" with the majority of the students in the university still following the old way of course selection, Yuanpei students have encountered many difficulties, especially in the first

few years. As Yuanpei Class has no faculty of its own, all the courses have to be provided by the departments and schools. The latter arrange their timetable according to their own students' need, without consulting other institutions. As a result, there is a time conflict sometimes for Yuanpei students to choose courses and to take exams. As time goes by, especially after Yuanpei College was established, this difficulty has been gradually alleviated with the coordination of various parties involved.

Free choice of courses does give students more freedom, but too much freedom can bring them too much confusion and too strong a sense of uncertainty. Especially for those high school graduates who are not used to making decisions on their own, they may select inappropriate courses or too many courses at one time. This has resulted in their low GPA, which affects negatively their application for graduate study later on. Within such a free framework, some less diligent students tend to select "easier" courses in order to pass the requirements with high scores with fewer efforts.

3.2.3 Tutor system

The tutor system is not as satisfactory as it was expected, although 59.4% of the students thought that the tutors' introduction of their discipline was helpful, and 40.4% found the tutors' office hours conducive to their learning (Wang, 2005). 67.5% of the students graduated in 2005 and 80.9% of those who would graduate in 2006 considered the tutor system "not very helpful".

Many factors have led to this undesirable result: 1) there are too few tutors for the large number of students; 2) the tutors, as well-known scholars themselves, are too busy to give timely assistance to the students; 3) the tutors, not familiar with fields of study other than their own, have difficulties in giving relevant guidance to the students; 4) many students do not take initiatives in seeking help from their tutors for lack of awareness of their difficulties or for shyness; 5) many students have less contact with their tutor after they enter the department or school in their 4^{th} semester.

In order to provide more assistance to the students, Yuanpei Management Committee has, over the past few years, been appointing more pro-

fessors as tutors, who are younger, more energetic, less busy, but equally enthusiastic for reform. The number of the tutors increased from 28 in 2001 to 34 in 2005, and to 50 in 2010. In addition, two retired professors have been hired to provide full-time academic guidance to the students. Quite a few graduates from Yuanpei College have been employed as assistants to help with the management of the students' study, social activities and daily life.

3.2.4 Mixed lodging arrangement

The mixed lodging arrangement for the students is like a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it has provided opportunities to students from different disciplines to communicate with each other, and to accumulate some "social capital" as a byproduct. 82.3% of the students agreed that "living with classmates of other disciplines has helped me to learn about knowledge other than my own" (Chen et al. 2006).

On the other hand, 57.3% of the students agreed that "not living with classmates of the same discipline has prevented me from frequent discussion, which has brought about negative impact on my study". This is partly due to the fact that many administrators of the departments and schools, not considering Yuanpei students their own, do not provide necessary information to them. Many courses require group work, but Yuanpei students, not living with their classmates of the same discipline, often do not get the information on time, or do not have the convenience to work with them in the dorm.

According to one study (Chen 2006), over 40% of the students found themselves not getting along very well with their counterparts in the departments and schools, and 29.7% lacked a sense of belonging once they entered their specialty. As a result, 52.6% of the students considered the mixed lodging arrangement "not very beneficial to them". In the interviews of all 83 students in the first batch of Yuanpei graduates, many of them stated that as the pressure for study was higher than their needs for interpersonal and inter-disciplinary communication, they preferred to living with classmates of their own specialty (Chen et al. 2006).

This result has something to do with the traditional specialty education

model, where students are pulled out to form into homogenous groups of the same discipline. The main objective of this grouping is to train students' special skills more easily, while their interpersonal and inter-disciplinary communication becomes secondary. With the GE model, in contrast, students of the same discipline have to seek communication without an institutional infrastructure. Since most of the students are not used to this model, and their study in the specialty is considered more important than their inter-discipli- nary communication, they choose to give up the latter.

Besides, the student management of Yuanpei College now is still not up to the basic requirements of GE by international standards. Although students are put in the same dormitory, there is still not enough support of personnel, finance or facilities to organize inter-disciplinary activities in places, where students can get together for more frequent, convenient and in-depth communication.

3.2.5 Plans after graduation

In terms of plans about what to do after graduation, Yuanpei students have exhibited a stronger capacity for choices out of their own interest and ability, and their choices are more academic and research-oriented. The percentage of Yuanpei students who chose to work immediately after graduation (3.2%) is much lower than that of non-Yuanpei students (14.2%), with none in 2006 (Chen et al. 2006).

In addition, the percentage of Yuanpei students who planned for graduate study was much higher than their original plan when they first entered the university (See Figure 4). This illustrates the positive impact of GE they have received in their first 2 years. In the past 9 years, about 66.6% of Yuanpei graduates have chosen to go on with graduate study, with half going abroad and half studying inside China. Many go abroad for further study in world-renowned universities like Harvard, Yale, Stanford and Columbia.

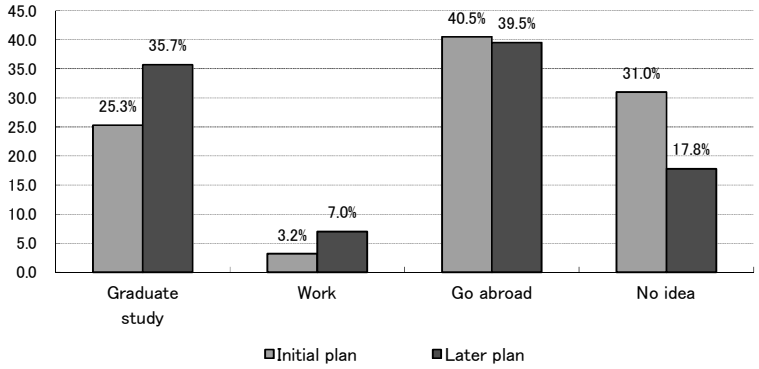

Figure 4 Yuanpei students' change of plans after graduation

In terms of their motivations for graduate study, 39.4% of Yuanpei students stated "carrying on academic research", much higher than that of non-Yuanpei students (24.6%). The motivations of "due to job market crisis" (0%) and "not wanting to work" (3%) for Yuanpei students were much lower than those for non-Yuanpei students (11.2% and 13.8% respectively) (Wang 2005).

4. Discussion

In general, the reform of GE in PKU in the past 9 years has accumulated a lot of experiences as well as positive results. As a "successful" model for undergraduate education reform in China, it has won quite a few awards from the Chinese Ministry of Education and the Beijing Municipality in recent years. However, due to constraints in many areas, there are still a lot of challenges for this kind of reform, not only in PKU in particular, but also in Chinese universities in general.

4.1 Reexamination of the concept of "General education"

According to the design of PKU, Yuanpei students' schooling arrangement consists of two stages. In the first stage, the students mainly take GE courses, and in the second stage they mainly study in their chosen

specialties in the departments and schools. The separation of GE (which means GE courses in the case of PKU) from specialty education has brought about some difficulties for Yuanpei students.

When the students enter their specialties in their 4rd semester, many departments and schools have already provided some foundational courses to their own students. Yuanpei students have to make up for those courses on their own. However, as many departments and schools only consider the timetable of their own students and put the same kinds of courses and exams in the same time period, many Yuanpei students are unable to choose some compulsory courses or take the required exams, due to time conflict. The curriculum structure of some departments and schools is rather strict with its sequence of course learning (especially in sciences). Yuanpei students, due to time conflict again, often have to take courses in the wrong order, causing a low GPA and learning difficulties. Because of poor adjustment to the requirements of some departments and schools, a few students end up unable to choose the specialty they like.

In addition, after the students enter their specialty, they return to the traditional model of specialty education, not taking GE courses any more. They are unable to learn about other fields of knowledge than their own, let alone inter-disciplinary research. As a result, the students, in the first one and half years, know very little about the specialties in PKU and, in the latter two and half years, have very little access to other fields of study.

The difficulties that have mainly resulted from the two-stage schooling arrangement call for a reconsideration of the concept of "GE". It is clear that "GE" should not be reduced to "GE courses" alone. As a comprehensive model for educating college students, GE should include not only learning about the knowledge and skills outside their specialty, but also upgrading the over-narrowly defined specialty education, and, above all, reforming all aspects of undergraduate education, including education objectives, student enrollment, specialty selection, teacher training, curriculum set-up, choice of courses, learning and teaching methods, extra-curriculum activities, and student daily life.

Besides, GE should not be in opposition to specialty education, and the latter should be included in the former. Students who are educated with

the GE model should also have strong capacity in solving specialized problems, apart from having a broad foundation of knowledge. "General" in the term "GE" does not mean that students know about everything in a "general" superficial way, but being able to make connections with knowledge of different disciplines, and to view things from a broader, interdisciplinary perspective[1]. To separate GE and specialty education, as manifested in the two-stage arrangement of student learning in PKU, may make the former subordinate to the latter and reduce the status of the former[2].

4.2 Prospects for further reform

Based on the above description and analysis, some suggestions can be made for further reform in the case of Yuanpei Program of PKU. These suggestions can also be used as referent for other higher learning institutions with similar education goals and objectives in China.

Addressing the "headache" of the "two-tracked system", one suggestion is to change the connotation of "specialty" and the way it is administered in China (Lu 2003). If "specialty" becomes a group of required courses, rather than an entity (department or school) with a fixed number of faculty members, students, equipment and finance, students would be liberated from the confinements of their department or school. They could choose courses of other specialties if their interest changes later on, or they can design independent study programs on their own. The university can also set up new specialties rather flexibly by combining different courses from different disciplines, in response to the developments of academia, student needs and job market demands. Faculty members would be more willing to teach GE courses, which can help publicize their specialty so as to attract more students to choose it. With more senior and well-known professors joining the teaching force of GE courses, the status of this kind of courses would be upgraded as well (Huang 2001: 255). Although this strategy may stir up a lot of conflicts in power and interests, and lead to rearrangement of institutions, redistribution of resources, and readjustment of emotions and behavior, it is worthwhile trying.

Another suggestion is to improve the management and the quality of GE

courses. More specific measures include: 1) to set up an academic committee for each discipline to screen courses more rigorously; 2) to give more credits to GE courses; 3) to encourage teachers to teach GE courses by dividing their salary into two parts: one from the university based on their teaching for undergraduates, and other from the department or school based on their work with graduate students; 4) to provide teachers with more assistants so that more interactive methods such as group discussion, case analysis and role play can be utilized in large classes; 5) to require students to read more classics of certain foundation disciplines (Gan 2006); 6) to introduce formative evaluation as well as student and teacher self-evaluation, besides external evaluation of the courses.

Concerning the two-stage schooling arrangement, one suggestion is to give more differentiated freedom to students in choosing their courses and specialty. Students could be allowed to take GE courses in all four years, with its number gradually reduced as they enter higher grades. Those students, who have a clearer idea about choosing their specialty, should be permitted to enter their specialty earlier. In this way, they would have more time to explore their interest, and change their specialty if they find it unsuitable for them later on.

The last, but not the least important, suggestion concerns the overall design of the learning environment for the students under the GE model. The goal of GE obviously goes beyond mere transmission of knowledge and skills. Successful implementation of GE needs a university culture, which fosters active, inquiry-based learning with as much freedom as possible. The creation of such a culture requires more radical steps than the provision of GE courses and experimental classes or colleges. It may involve resource reallocation, new arrangement of architecture and physical space, as well as reconstruction of power relations. No reform can be devoiced from its historical and social contexts and conditions. PKU, even if as one of the first-class universities in China, also needs more social, cultural, economical and psychological support from society, the government and the academia in order to implement GE more systematically and thoroughly.

5. Conclusion

China, as one of the oldest ancient civilizations in the world, has its cultural roots of GE in its longstanding history. It could be seen in Confucian goal of educating "the humane person" with broad and thorough mastery of scholarship overarching the old and the new, as well as integrating doing things and being in the world. It was also reflected in Liang Qichao's advocate of educating talents who could connect the Western and the Chinese, as well as the wisdom, the humane and the courageous, at the end of 19th century. Cai Yuanpei's ideal of "free thinking, and inclusive of all" for PKU at the beginning of the 20th century was an even stronger and clearer manifestation of GE in Chinese history. Although this tradition was interrupted in the period between 1949 and 1976, it has been reviving since 1980s (Pang, 2006).

However, as current GE is developed with regard to the drawbacks of planned economy, and it has mainly been introduced from the Western modern universities, it has been focused too narrowly on knowledge transmission and "skills" (shu) mastery, rather than personhood development and enlightenment of "the Way" (dao)[3]. The Western culture, due to its massive knowledge development and predominant utilitarianism in social life, understands GE mainly from the perspectives of ontology and epistemology, attempting to integrate knowledge of various fields and to solve social problems with education. The Chinese culture, in comparison, pays more attention to the life view, the value system, as well as the historical and aesthetic aspects of GE, in order to pursue never-ending perfection in scholarly life, human wisdom, and moral development in doing things and being a person.

It is in this regard, Chinese universities have rich cultural and historical resources to draw upon in developing their own model of GE. The Chinese GE should not only guide students in obtaining universal basic moral values, scientific inquiry attitude and behavior norms, but also the Chinese virtues, ideal personality and practical wisdom, especially its holistic world view of seeing the human and nonhuman as parts of a whole. In this sense, Chinese universities have chances of contributing to the development of GE in

the world arena.

Another important issue to keep in mind is that China is a huge country with more than 3,000 universities varying in levels and kinds, and the case of Yuanpei Program in PKU is only one example. How to design and trial out different models of GE for different students, different educational goals, different higher learning institutions, different disciplines and fields of study, and different market demands is also a big challenge for China. Although China's gross university entrance rate has increased to 21% by 2010, whether China needs the kind of GE that other countries like U. S. and Japan are implementing, still needs exploring. It is obvious that, due to historical reasons, all universities in China need to expand their scope of education, but to what extend and how remain to be examined in the future.

Notes

1) In the Chinese language, "GE" is translated as "通識识教育", and the word "通" literally means "connected" and "going thorough".
2) In the last few years, this problem has been alleviated with more students start to learn about their specialty before their 4th semester and some students take GE courses in their later grades. However, public understanding of GE, especially its difference from GE courses, is still divided.
3) "Shu" (skill, 術) and "Dao" (the Way, 道) in the Chinese language are two important concepts, which differentiate the practice that focuses only on skill mastery from that attaching great importance to the personal enlightenment of the essence of that practice.

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北京大学における元培プログラムの意義

－大学生の学習を促進するための一般教育改革－

陳　向　明

＜要　旨＞

学士課程における一般教育の重要性は広く知られているが、どのような学生を対象として、どのような教育モデルを適用すればよいのだろうか。本セミナーでは、中国の大学における一般教育改革の事例として、北京大学の「元培プログラム」を紹介する。

北京大学ではすべての学士課程学生が一般教育を受ける仕組みになっており、さらに大学本部の直轄による実験ベースの「元培学院」を小規模ながら設立している。名称は北京大学の元学長で著名な教育者である蔡元培（1868-1940)にちなんでいる。この学院が提供する元培プログラムの学生は、専門分野や履修する授業を入学後に自由に決めることができる。北京大学でどのような一般教育を実施するべきかという全学的な合意はまだできていないが、同プログラムはおしなべて良好な成果を出している。同時に、構造的な制約や運営上の課題も存在する。中国高等教育独自の一般教育モデルをどう開発するかという観点から、これらの課題を克服する方法を検討したい。

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