

Fairness Issues and Path Selections of College Entrance Examination Reform

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Abstract: In 2014, Zhejiang and Shanghai took the lead in raising the banner of comprehensive reform of the college entrance examination. By 2023, a total of 29 provinces and cities have joined this reform. In the batch-by-batch and step-by-step advancement process, all relevant stakeholders collaborate to uphold the principle of fairness, respond to fairness issues and lay the foundation for the smooth landing of this reform, which all aim to implement the fundamental task “to establish morality and cultivate talents”

Keywords: College entrance examination reform; Fairness

Fairness is the eternal theme of the development of human society. The allocation of social resources, the competition of workplace promotion and the acquisition of education opportunities all take fairness as the highest criterion.^[1] China is a big country of examination. From the establishment of “Jinshi Branch” in Sui Dynasty to the new college entrance examination reform in full swing today, China has formed a unique examination culture. The ancient imperial examination concept “absolute justice” still inspires Gaokao. In 2014, the State Council clearly required “the promotion of fairness as the basic value orientation of the reform in the examination and enrollment system, and effectively guarantee the fairness of examination opportunities, procedures and results.”^[2] It can be seen that this reform must take fairness as the value orientation.

1. Analysis of the fairness value orientation in the new collage entrance examination reform

Gaokao can't be defined simply as an examination, but involves various details of examination management and admission. It gradually develops into a kind of examination culture. The “new” of the comprehensive reform is to select the comprehensive development of high-quality talents. However, the specific content of the reform has always been centered around the three aspects of “what to test”, “how to test” and “how to admit”

1.1 What to test: promoting comprehensive and personalized development of students

Examination subject setting is a tool for evaluating students' various knowledge and intelligence. Now the College Entrance Examination subject schemes are mainly divided into three types: “3+3”, “3+1+2” and the liberal arts branch. Compared with the traditional subject scheme, the first two expand the number of the combinations of subjects. For example, Zhejiang province can reach 35 combinations of subjects.

The new subject schemes increase students' opportunities to choose the subjects based on their own personalities. In addition, They can promote the integration and transfer of students' knowledge. Currently more than half of the provinces adopt the “3+1+2” program, which gives full consideration to the overall development of the country and individuals. Taking physics and history as the required subjects is to follow their basic status. What's more, they lay the foundation for students' future major selection and employment direction.

1.2 How to test: demonstrating the concept of scientific talent selection

“How to test” refers to the examination technology, here “how” includes the question type and arrangement process and so on. With the implementation of the reform, China continues to explore scientific and effective test design, introduces modern measurement technology and examines students' various abilities with scientific measurements.

In the form of examination, the new College Entrance Examination break the traditional concept of “one test for life”. It also takes students’ leaning into consideration, which not only reduces the pressure of test but the learning pressure. In the design of question type, examiners explore “new questions” and avoid the tendency of students to “value knowledge, light ability”. For example, “Continuation Writing” in English test no longer simply examines language words memory, but pays more attention to reading comprehension and the meaning.

1.3 How to admit: highlighting the fundamental goal of multiple evaluations

“How to admit” mainly points to the examination admission policy. The “how” involves the presentation of the examination results and the proportion of the examination results in the admission, which directly affect the personal development future of students, the quality of college talent selection and the social fairness.^[3]

The biggest change in the reform is that the selected subjects are graded. Although different provinces adopt different grading methods, they all abandon the original simple sum of scores to compete with the relative positions of the respective groups. In terms of the voluntary mode, the “major plus school” mode is adopted to meet students’ needs for professional development. It also forces universities to optimize their majors. While on the admission mode, the introduction of “comprehensive quality evaluation” is not just based on the scores but gives full consideration to students’ non-intelligence factors.

2. Problems of fairness value orientation in the collage entrance examination reform

The new college entrance examination reform is a complex and burdensome systematic project. Although considerable progress has been made in promoting this reform, there are also some fairness problems that are worth pondering by all relevant stakeholders.

2.1 The utilitarianism of subject selection

Although the new subject schemes expand the right of students to choose their own interesting subjects, there are still some issues. For example, whether the high school has the hardware and software facilities to cope with the diversification of subject selection.

In this reform, students’ partial subjects are more accurate. After choosing a subject they have zero investment in other subjects. For example, under the “3+1+2” scheme, there is a trend of abandoning chemistry, which is not only not conducive to the improvement of their comprehensive strength, but also will affect the social development.^[4] In addition, the traditional classroom instruction is unable to meet the needs of different student groups who choose different subjects. Because of lack of infrastructure and insufficient teachers, these schools lead to students back to the liberal arts branch, resulting in reforms that become a mere formality and less effective.

2.2 The aggravation of students’ burden

The reform has a strong impact on the concept of “one test for life”. Diversified evaluation methods are adopted to ensure that most students have the opportunity to enjoy higher education resources. However, due to the deep seeds of exam-oriented education, stakeholders focus on the scores. Besides, some students not only bear the academic pressure, but also consider non-intellectual factors, which will increase their burden.

Professor Liu Haifeng said: “The pressure of students’ college entrance examination is not a total pressure, but a variable that can be split.”^[5] What he means is that the test pressure is allocated to Grade One and Grade Two because the final results are linked with the academic proficiency test. Candidates need to grasp the basic knowledge of all subjects, which will increase the learning burden. What’ more, giving more test opportunities to get the best one result will also lead to students’ heavy schoolwork burden.

2.3 The alienation of comprehensive quality evaluation

Admission to collages with reference to the comprehensive quality evaluation of candidates is a practical step towards realizing “comprehensive development of talents”. However, we will inevitably encounter some problems in practice.

First, under the traditional examination concept, the comprehensive quality evaluation can not be recognized by parents and teachers. Second, the reliability of comprehensive quality evaluation needs to be improved like how to record and present the content of evaluation. Third, due to the economic gap between urban and rural areas, rural children are not sensitive to the comprehensive evaluation which will make the enrollment unfair.

3. Paths to solving fairness problems in the new collage entrance examination reform

The development of new things is bound to be a tortuous spiral form. The implementation of this reform is not the end point, but a new round of starting point and it eventually adjusts to a balance, which will play a positive role in high education allocation and social justice.

3.1 Adherence to top-level design and the principle of gradual progress

The so-called “top-level design” is to consider all levels and elements of the project in an integrated manner. Gaokao is the link between basic education and higher education, so it is not absolutely independent existence but an interlocking one. “What to test” is related to the basic education; “How to test” is the examination procedure and “How to admit” is the explicit result of “What to test”.^[6]All the three parts are indispensable based on the whole and interactive elements in this reform. Besides, it is necessary to implement the reform gradually to avoid becoming a formality or even the phenomenon of regression.

3.2 Adoption to the concept of “people-oriented” development

The core of the reform is to realize the comprehensive and free development of students and the fairness and rationality of social mobility by means of scientific measurements. First of all, It’s important to carry out career education and strengthen the guidance for the students. Teachers should guide students to select the subjects according to their interest, the university professional development and social development in harmony.^[7] Secondly, The government should strengthen the construction of accountability to ensure openness and transparency in the examination procedure. Lastly, It’s necessary to increase the application of network technology in the admissions so that students can track the admission status in real time.

3.3 Construction of a multiple evaluation and admission guarantee system

The focus of the reform is in the recruitment policy which is the standard reference for candidates to enter universities, so it is particularly important to ensure the fairness and scientific nature of the admission evaluation. First of all, the content of comprehensive quality evaluation should be scientifically determined, which means each part of the content can be transformed into the corresponding score. Secondly, using the Internet is a best way to make rural children complete the relevant content of comprehensive quality evaluation which will reduce the regional injustice. Finally, It’s important for stakeholders to consider whether to link the comprehensive quality with admission according to students’ professional development characteristics.

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