

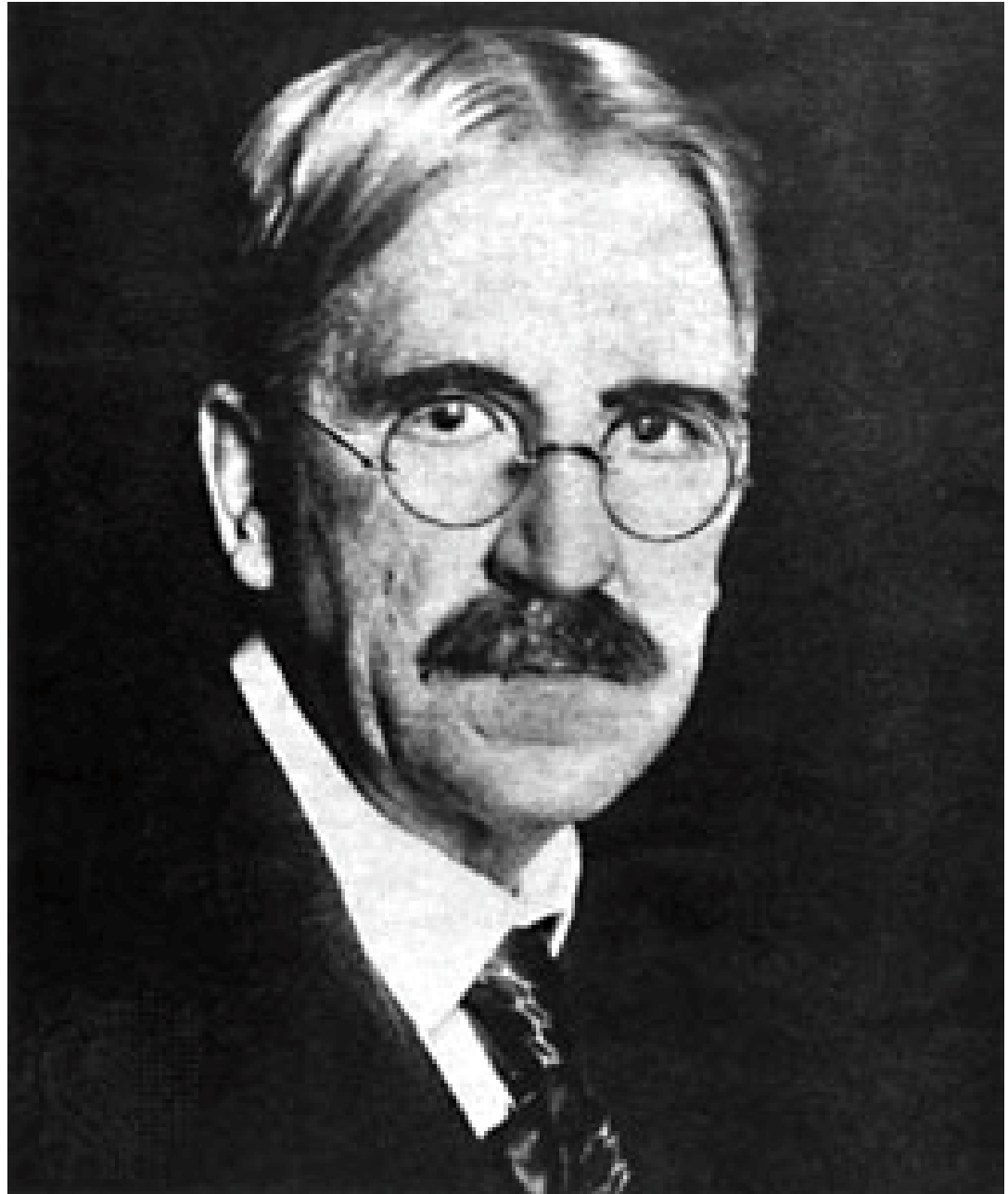
Peking University Graduate School of Education
Lecture 1 on 11 June 2019

Higher education as student self-formation

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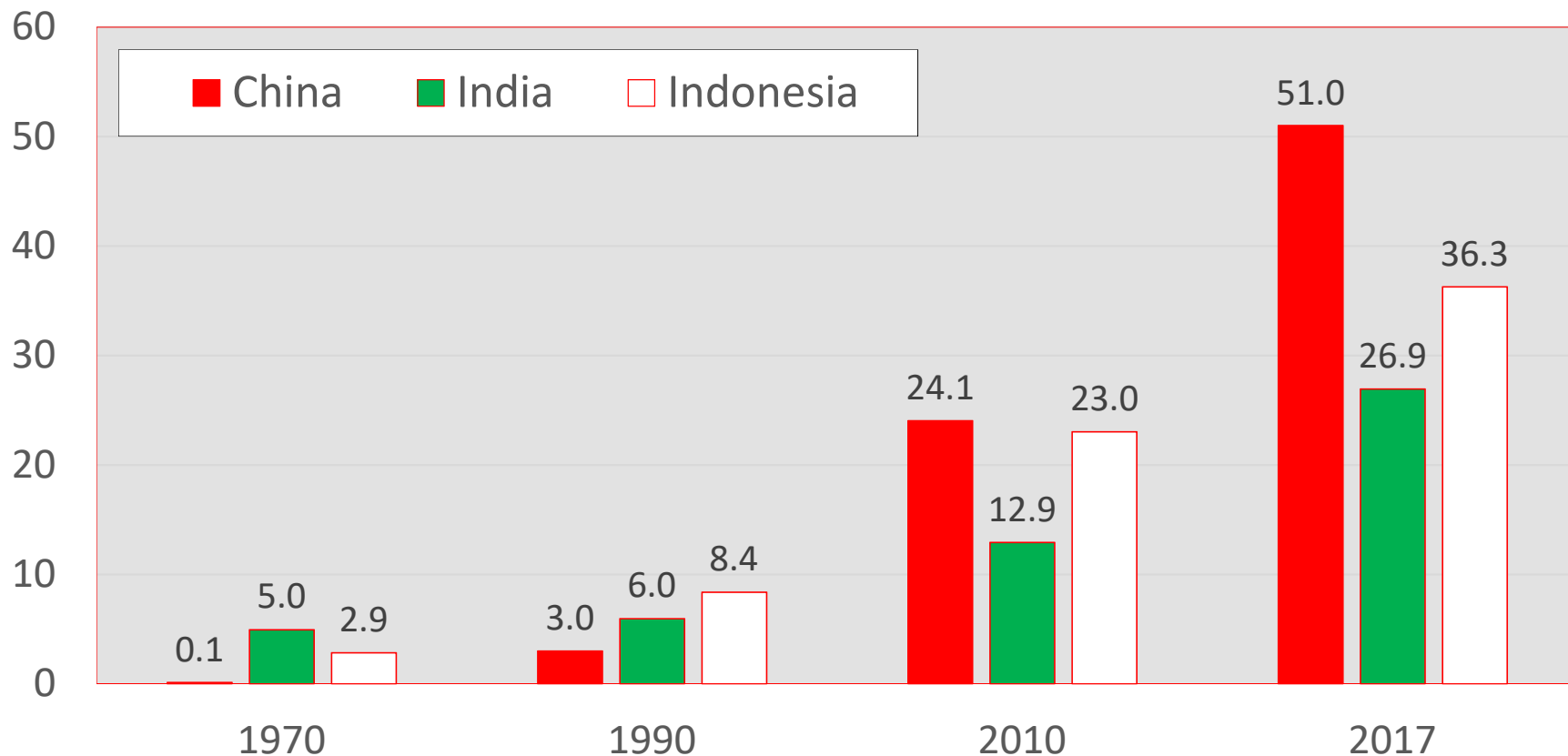
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John Dewey



Tertiary Enrolment Ratios in China, India and Indonesia: 1970, 1990, 2010, 2017 (%)

2017 populations, World Bank data: China 1386 million, India 1339 million, Indonesia 264 million



In India the UNESCO data are for 1971, 1990, 2010, 2016

Higher education as self-formation

- *Empirical*: 'Higher education as self-formation rests on the irreducible fact that while learning is conditioned by external factors, by the learner's background and resources, the institution, the curriculum, teaching and other circumstances, only the learner does the learning...
- *Normative*: Higher education can be understood as 'self-formation and the expansion of freedom', and valued for its contribution to the growth of self-determining persons in relational settings, via immersion in knowledge

Vygotsky on social learning and the individual self

- “ The true development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, it is from the social to the individual.”

Lev Vygotsky (1986). *Thought and Language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, p. 36

- For Vygotsky self-formation and social-formation are simultaneous – the child’s early relational speech installs reflexivity, a double-coded self, socially separated *and* socially embedded

Amartya Sen



Amartya Sen's three aspects of freedom

Sen, A. (1985). Well-being, agency and freedom: The Dewey Lectures 1984. *The Journal of Philosophy* 82 (4), 169-221

Sen, A. (1992). *Inequality Re-examined*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

- *Control freedom* (negative freedom): freedom of the individual from external threat, coercion or constraint

Main understanding of freedom in liberal tradition – but if you are poor, you may be free in the sense of control freedom, but be unable to do much with it

- *Effective freedom* (positive freedom): freedom as the capacity of the individual to act

The exercise of effective freedom depends on the person's abilities or capacities, and resources, and on the social arrangements in which they live (individuals are nested in society)

- *Agency freedom* (will-power): freedom as the active human will, the capacity for self-directed conscious action

Arguably this is the key aspect of individual freedom, it is where self-will is centred. It is conditioned by the other aspects of freedom, and also shapes their potential. The three aspects are inter-dependent.

Invictus – William Hanley (1849-1903)

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.



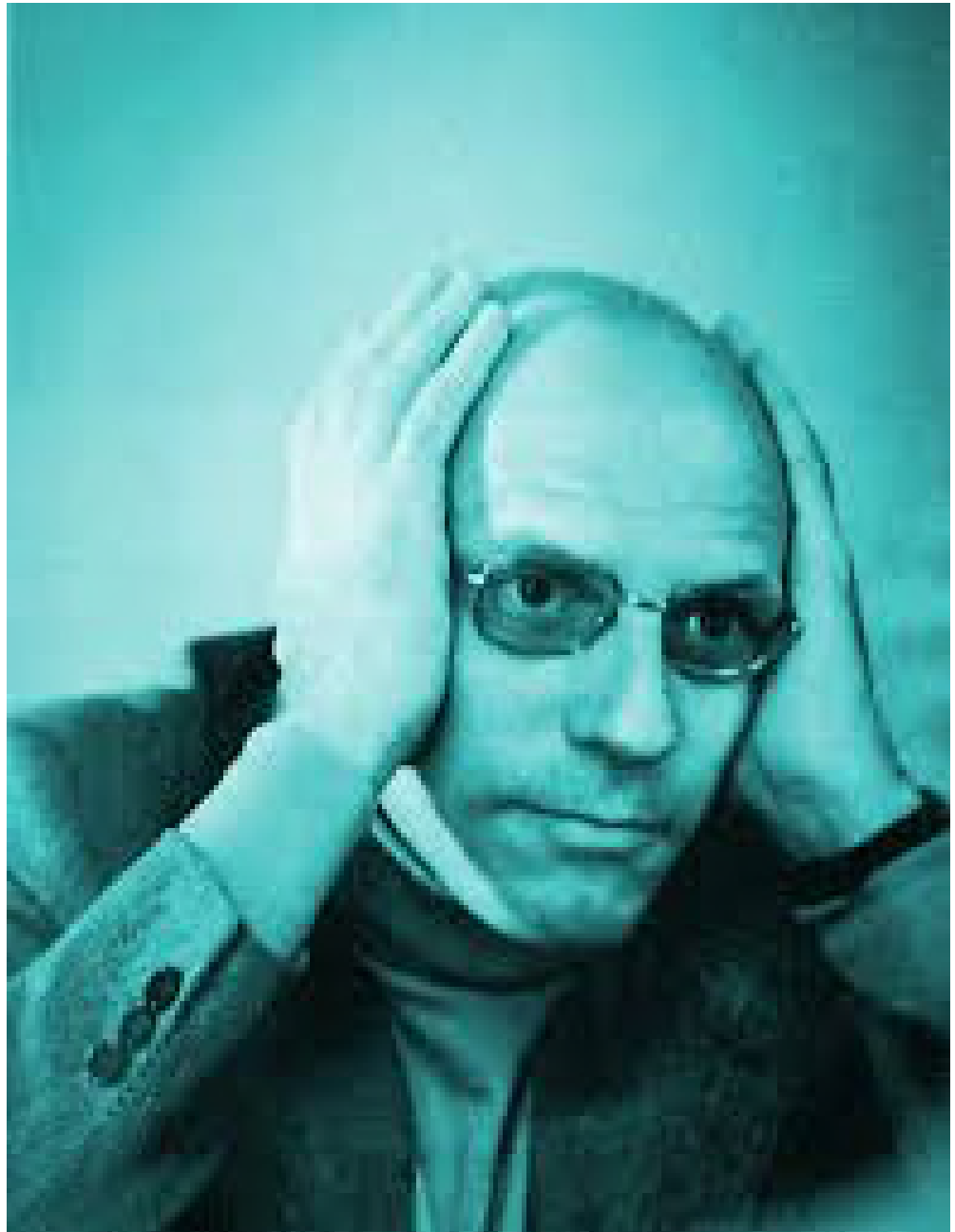
Agency freedom as both means and end; as medium and outcome of higher education

Research shows that graduates -

- Have a larger range of employment options
- Are more likely to be in good health, as are their families
- Have more advanced skill in the use of information and communications technology (electronic agency)
- Are more geographically mobile, independent of income level (personal confidence and agency freedom)
- Report higher levels of inter-personal trust (also = greater personal agency)
- Are more likely to state that they have a say in government (also = greater personal agency)
- Are more positive about migration and cultural diversity

Walter McMahon, *Higher Learning, Greater Good* (2009); OECD, *Education at a Glance* (various years); OECD, *Perspectives on Global Development 2017: International migration in a shifting world* (2016) etc

Michel Foucault



Michel Foucault: The work of the self on the self

“Freedom is the capacity and the opportunity to participate in one’s own self-formation.”

- Stephen Ball, *Foucault as Educator*, 2017. Cham: Springer, p. 69

The self is the only object that one can freely will “without having to take into consideration external determinations.”

- Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France 1981-82*, 2005. Transl. Graham Burchell. Houndmills: Palgrave, p. 133

Tu Weiming



Confucian self-cultivation

“ The great strength of modern East Asia is its self-definition as a learning civilization.” This may be “the most precious legacy of Confucian humanism.”

Weiming Tu (2013). Confucian humanism in perspective. *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China*, 7 (3), pp. 333-338

“ The Confucian emphasis on sympathy and empathy suggests ... Self-interest, no matter how enlightened, is never adequate as a basic principle for personal growth, let alone a cornerstone of national policy”

Weiming Tu (1996). Beyond the Enlightenment mentality: A Confucian perspective on ethics, migration and global stewardship. *The International Migration Review*, 30 (1), p. 68

Immanuel Kant



Bildung

- Self-formation in Kant's definition of the Enlightenment meant the release of humans from their "self-incurred tutelage" through the exercise of their "own understanding". Here the role of education is to cultivate the inner self in both intellectual and ethical terms, to form citizens in public rationality who will constitute emerging civil society. Kant emphasised that Bildung would not occur by itself, it required education.
- The aim of education is "the active autonomous person within the framework of social life", a rational subject who uses reason in a public way and "lives in the public sphere among other individual beings."

Kivela, A. (2012). From Immanuel Kant to Johann Gottlieb Fichte – Concept of education and German idealism. In Siljander, P., Kivela, A. and Sutinen, A. (eds.) (2012). *Theories of Bildung and Growth: Connections and controversies between Continental educational thinking and American pragmatism*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, p. 59

Theories related to the self-formation idea

- As a philosophy and practice of education, self-formation has its first and most important antecedent in Confucian learning as self-cultivation
- The Kantian/Humboldtian idea of Bildung
- Dewey, CP Mead and the American pragmatists, who worked with a variation of Bildung
- The psychology of individual self-determination
- Human capital theory in economics, status theory in sociology, etc

What then distinguishes higher education in student self-formation?

1. This is self-formation in formal institutions
2. Higher education is nested in *knowledge sets*, disciplines, enabling students to self-form in chosen different ways
3. The role of *teaching* (NB. Vygotsky's ZPD, Zone of Proximal Development, in which learners require mentoring)
4. The multiple ways that students form themselves, the multiple selves they want to become
5. Sudden changes such as geographical or social mobility that trigger reflexivity and accelerated self-formation

Students form themselves in many ways in higher education. They—

- invest in the self to gain economic benefits such as rates of return, employability (economic capital / human capital)
- enter professions and occupations and make a career
- secure a broader set of opportunities and possibilities
- achieve social status/ prestige/ social respect

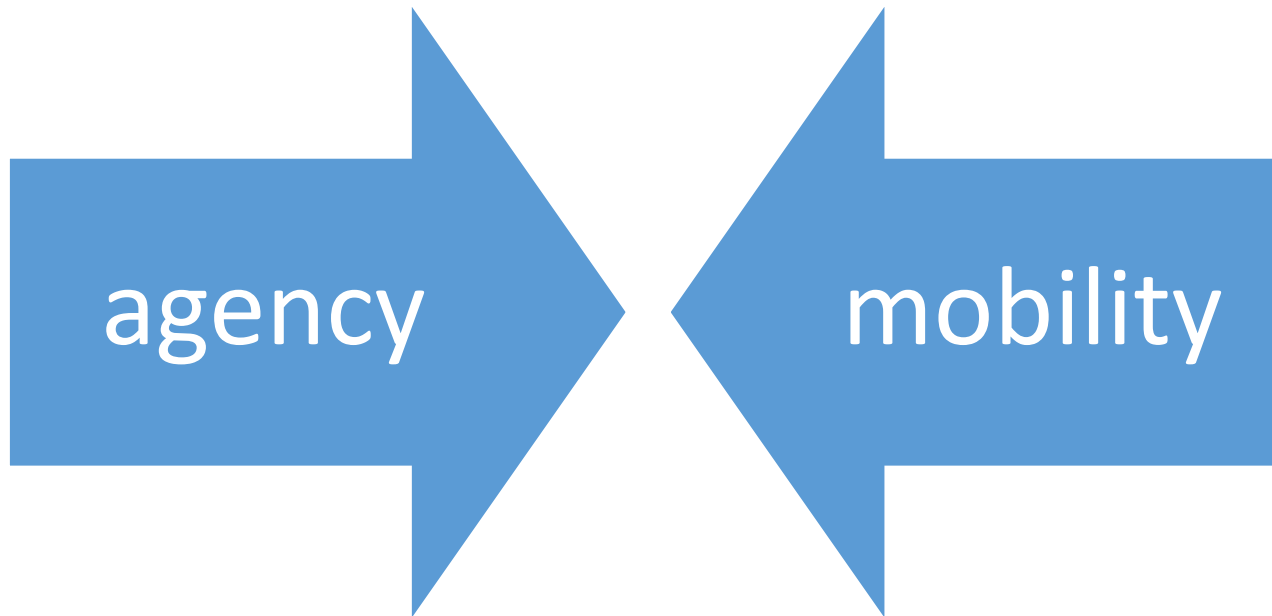
- learn via knowledge in specific disciplines. Varying fields of knowledge and professional training shape different kinds of people—compare engineering students and music students
- achieve continuing self-cultivation through learning

and

..... also

- build in themselves skills and personal attributes (cultural capital)
- make useful contacts and networks (social capital)
- make friends, negotiate marriage partners
- express themselves artistically in beautiful, truthful, useful things
- express themselves politically, work with others to achieve social change and transformation, and work for the global good
- develop themselves through educational mobility
- ‘find themselves’, grow up, shape their futures, take charge of their own lives
- become new persons

Accelerated self-formation



Marginson, S. (2014). Student self-formation in international education. *J. Studies in International Education*, 18 (1), pp. 6-22

Concluding thoughts

- We mostly emphasise structure, and structural constraints. It is important to focus also on **agency** and agency freedom which is the way through the structural constraints
- Higher education can be understood as a process of student self-formation
 - ... by socially-nested persons
 - ... under conditions that they do not individually control
- Higher education as student self-formation encompasses other theories of higher education, and explains higher education more completely than other theories