

Centre for Global Higher Education working paper series

The public role of higher learning in Imperial China

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Working paper no. 28
October 2017

Published by the Centre for Global Higher Education,
UCL Institute of Education, London WC1H 0AL

www.researchcghe.org

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ISSN 2398-564X

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CGHE is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE), and is a partnership based at UCL Institute of Education with Lancaster University, the University of Sheffield and international universities Australian National University (Australia), Dublin Institute of Technology (Ireland), Hiroshima University (Japan), Leiden University (Netherlands), Lingnan University (Hong Kong), Shanghai Jiao Tong University (China), the University of Cape Town (South Africa) and the University of Michigan (US).

The support of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is gratefully acknowledged.

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The public role of higher learning in Imperial China¹

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Abstract

It is commonly accepted that higher education plays a public role and produces public goods. However, there is a lack of clarity about what this means. This paper examines higher learning's public contribution as well as the governmental and popular support it received in Imperial China in order to better understand higher education as a public good in this context. Closely combined with the Civil Service Examination (Keju), higher learning received generous financial and political support, and produced normative as well as descriptive public goods, with the ultimate goal of maintaining social order. By analysing these dynamics among three actors—society, the state and individuals (families)—this research explains the mechanism by which higher learning contributes to the public good. The findings shed light on higher education's role in Imperial China, and foreground perspectives from Chinese tradition in the wider debate around public goods.

Key words: Imperial China, public good, higher learning

¹ I would like to thank my supervisor Simon Marginson, who has always been supportive and carefully revised an earlier draft, and encouraged me to turn it to a CGHE working paper. I would like to thank Rui Yang and Vincent Carpentier for helpful comments. Last thanks are given to my friend Saul Wilson and Thomas Brotherhood, who not only kindly edited my English but also provided me useful suggestions on academic English writing. All errors and omissions are mine.

Introduction

Higher education in China has made huge progress in the last three decades, increasing both in the scale of enrolments (see figure 1) and research capacity (see Table 1). This rapid development is largely due to the Chinese government's massive financial input (see figure 2). The government's appropriation for higher education is larger than the total from other sources, and increased from about 40 billion RMB in 1999 to 400 billion RMB in 2011.

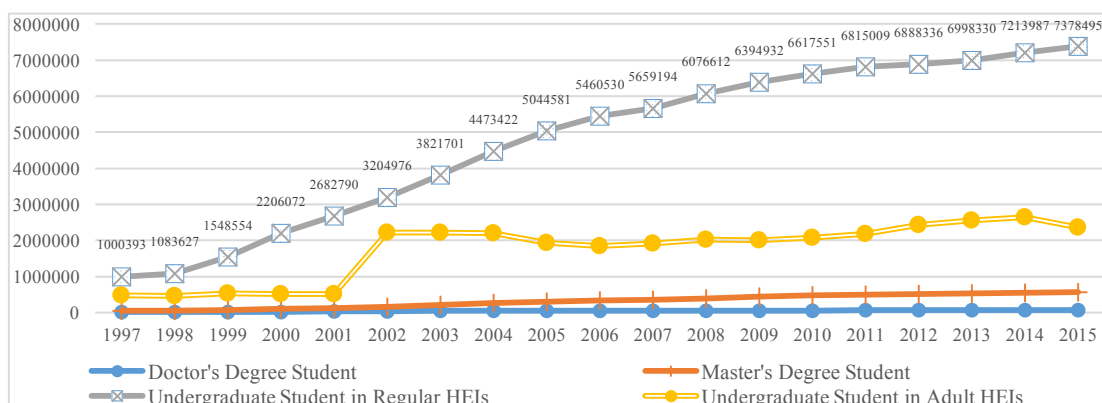


Figure 1. Entrants of students in HEIs (1997-2015)

Source: Ministry of Education, China

Table 1. ARWU Top 300 Universities in Mainland China

Year	Number of Mainland Chinese universities in top 300	Mainland Chinese universities in top 300
2003	2	THU(201-250), PKU(251-300)
2005	2	THU(153-202), PKU(203-300)
2007	6	THU(151-202), NJU(203-304), PKU, SJTU, USTC, ZJU
2009	6	NJU(201-302), PKU, SJTU, THU, USTC, ZJU
2011	7	THU(151-200), FDU(201-300), NJU, PKU, SJTU, USTC, ZJU
2013	8	FDU (151-200), PKU, SJTU, THU, ZJU, NJU(201-300), SYSU, USTC,
2015	13	PKU(101-150), SJTU, THU, ZJU, FDU(151-200), SYSU, USTC, HIT(201-300), HUST, JLU, NJU, XJTU,
2016	18	THU(58), PKU(71), FDU(101-150), SJTU, USTC, ZJU, HIT(151-200), SYSU, XJTU, BJNU(201-300), HUST, JLU, NJU, SCU, SCU, SCUT, SEU, XMU

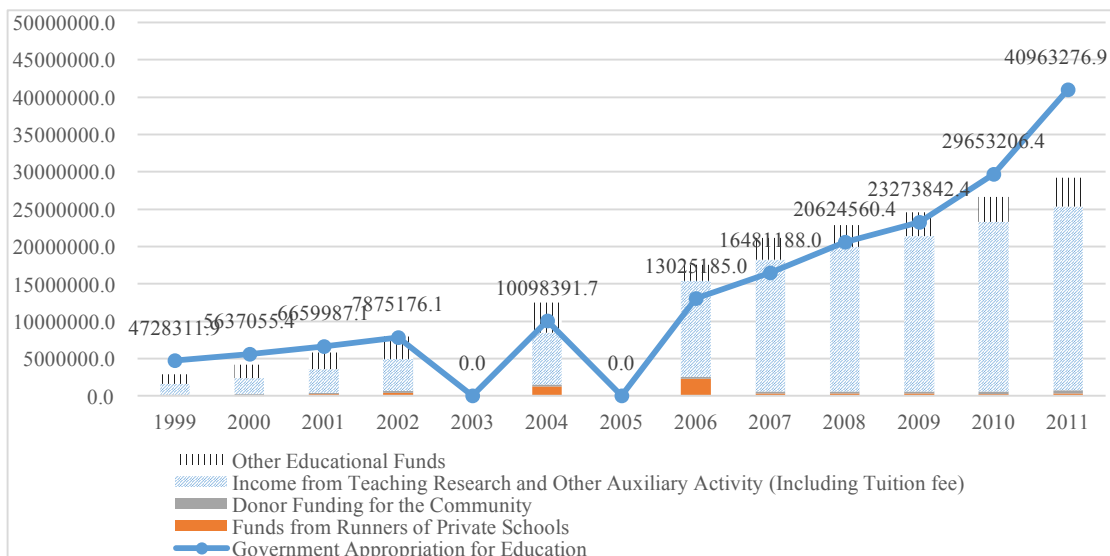


Figure 2. Sources of Educational Fund for HEIs (1999-2011, without 2003, 2005)
Unit: RMB10,000

Source: Ministry of Education, China

However, there is a lack of research into why China's government is willing to invest such large amounts of money in higher education. Is this a long-standing tradition or a contemporary phenomenon? What is higher education producing to reward the state? By reviewing the history of China, it is obvious that higher learning has always received full state support. Besides the state, Chinese society² and families have also been very supportive of higher learning. However, why were state, society and families unanimous in their support of higher learning? What were the presumed contributions of higher learning to each of these groups?

This paper examines traditional Chinese ideas about higher education and the higher education system in Imperial China, paying special attention to higher education's public contribution. The paper has three parts. First, it explores popular ideas about what constitutes 'public', 'higher learning', and Confucius's view of education and the public. It then explores the higher learning system in Imperial China, examining both higher learning institutions and the Imperial Civil Service Examination (*Keju*), and making particular note of state, social and family support for both forms of higher learning. Finally, I conclude with a discussion about the types and content of higher learning's public contribution as well as mechanisms for higher learning to make public contributions.

² In this article, the Chinese society refers what is commonly referred to as "under Heaven": that is, it reaches beyond the state and families to include the normative ideas shared by most families and individuals and larger communities that include more than one family.

Ideas about public and higher learning in Imperial China

1) Conceptions about public

Interpretations of 'public' and 'private' have changed in China since ancient times. In the early age (before the Warring States period³), public and private were used to describe physical objects, like farming tools and clothing. It was after the Warring States period that the two terms started to contain abstract and metaphysical meanings (Huang, 2005). Confucius (BC 551-479) and Mencius (BC 372-289) stressed to differentiate public and private. Public was the larger concept which contained private, and there was no conflict between them⁴. In the Northern *Song* dynasty, public referred to righteousness and private meant private good and personal desire. *Si Maguang* (1019-1086), claimed that people should prioritise public rather than private (近藤正則, 1984). During the Southern *Song* dynasty, public meant the heavenly principle and private represented people's wills. The famous Confucian scholar in the Southern *Song* dynasty, *Zhu Xi* (1130-1200) argued public to be legal while private was illegal⁵. The legacy of these ideas is still visible in modern China. Morality demands that one should always sacrifice one's private interests when there are conflicts between public and private good.

Xunzi, the famous literatus of the Warring States period, claimed that the public interests should take precedence over private interests, and people should 'use public norms to constrain private desire'. Anyone who was able to contribute to public good could become a decent gentleman (*Daru*⁶). Without doubt, there was tension between the public and private interests in Imperial China. The ideal was to find a balance to satisfy both, but if this was not possible, then the prevailing moral criterion was 'the Heavenly Principle,' which favoured the public. There could be dilemmas in making such choices. For example, if someone's father committed a crime, it could be hard to decide whether to report the crime (a public responsibility) or hide the fact (serving one's private interests)⁷. In Imperial China, many people would rather commit suicide than violate 'the Heavenly Principle' or report their father (Huang, 2005).

'Self' is a key term in seeking to understand public-private relations in Chinese tradition. The absolute 'self' in the Western sense never existed in the Sinic world (Hsu, 1985). Instead, there is co-existence of the 'smaller self' and 'larger self' (Cheng & Yang, 2015), and 'individual' is always a relative concept. Based on the interaction of the 'smaller self' and 'larger self', people's conceptions in terms of public and private change, especially when having family as an intermediary concern.

³ Refer to Appendix I. *Table for China's Dynasties*

⁴ See 黄俊杰. (1991). 孟学思想史论 (卷一). 东大图书公司 1991 年. 第 6 章. 第 106—107 页

⁵ See 朱熹, 吕祖谦, & 刘凤泉. (2001). 近思录: 山东友谊出版社. 第 276 页

⁶ *Daru* could refer to decent gentlemen, sages and literati.

⁷ See 韩婴. (1994). 韩诗外传, 卷六, 第 62 页

In Imperial China, the unit of political, social and economic life was the family rather than the individual. In general, Chinese ‘families’ do not refer to nuclear units, but to much broader groups of agnates that can number in the hundreds or even thousands (Fukuyama, 2011). In political and social affairs, individuals were tagged as members of the family, the success of an individual would lead to benefits of the whole family, and vice versa. The family that one belonged to had great influence on one’s career as well as smaller matters.

The ‘smaller’ and ‘larger’ selves are relative concepts that operate simultaneously at multiple scales (see Diagram 1 and Table 2). For example, the individual is easy to conceptualize as a version of the “smaller self”, and in this instance the family can be understood to be the “larger self” that operates around it. However, this type of relationship also exists at larger scales. The family unit may be understood as a “smaller self” in relation to the “larger self” that is the broader society or the state. Furthermore, the state represents the “smaller self” in relation to the “larger self” of the international society.

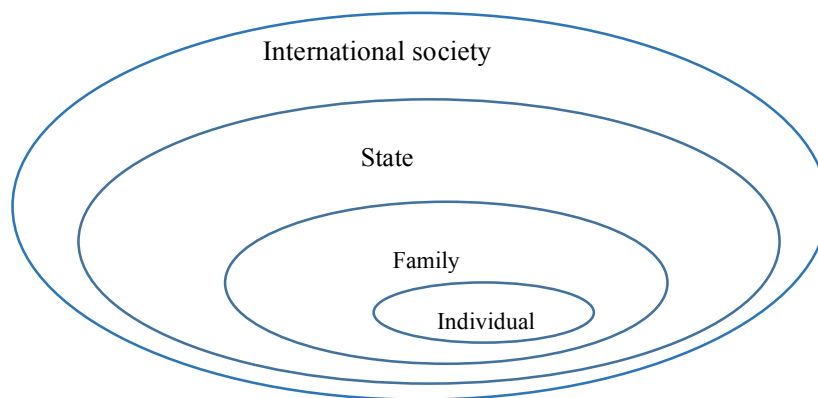


Diagram 1. Smaller self and Larger self in Chinese tradition

Table 2. Smaller self and Larger self in Chinese tradition (Huang, 2010)

Smaller self/ Private	Larger self/ Public
Individual in family	The family
The family	The society/ state
The society/ state	International society

2) Ideas about higher learning

Since “nothing is more honourable than learning” (*wan ban jie xia pin, wei you du shu gao*, 万般皆下品惟有读书高) and literati enjoyed the highest status in Imperial China⁸, education was a priority on which people should spend money. Legacies of this value are still tangible among contemporary Chinese people. For example, when Asia was facing economic crisis in the late 20th century, the Chinese government

⁸ See Wang, Z. (2010). 神童诗 [Poet of Genius Kid]: Retrieved April

made the decision to expand higher education rather than revert to traditional economic strategies to stimulate consumption, a strategy that has proved successful (T. LIU, 2009).

This emphasis on education lasted for thousands of years and was largely a result of Imperial China's residence system as well as its education system. Though mainland China is now criticised for its strict household registration system, there was a more detailed and stricter household registration system in Imperial China. In Imperial China, people were officially classified into four groups and mobility among these groups was not easy (Lu, 2007). The four groups were literati, peasants, artisans and merchants, in descending order⁹. Literati served as state officials and had the highest status, followed by peasants, and outstanding peasants could enter the literati group. It was after the *Ming* dynasty that people from artisan and merchant groups began to have opportunities to enter the literati group (Lu, 2007).

People's rights came according to their status. Becoming literati was extremely appealing as only they had the right to avoid corvée requirements, including tax, labour contributions, and military service. There was also the literati's high prestige, political power and salary. Furthermore, joining the literati could also grant family members the right to forgo their corvée requirements (Fan, 2004). As the prevailing Confucian ideology gradually built direct connections between Confucian scholars and the literati (Lu, 2007), receiving higher learning and passing the *Keju* became the only way of joining the literati. There are numerous examples in Chinese literature about how delighted a student was when he passed the *Keju* (e.g. *Fanjin zhongju*¹⁰). For peasants, artisans and merchants, receiving education was the only way of becoming literati. Accordingly, for the literati, ensuring their offspring received an education was the only way to maintain their social status (Lu, 2007).

Since education was regarded as almost the only way of realising social mobility in Imperial China (Cheng & Yang, 2015), families, especially relatively wealthy ones, gave family members financial and spiritual support in their education. For instance, they established family schools to educate younger members of the family, and gave material and spiritual awards for members who did well in the *Keju*. Correspondingly, family members who passed the *Keju* were expected to repay the family based on the family's standard criteria.

3) Confucian educational ideas

Confucius was himself an educator, founding the Confucian tradition which is still important in modern East Asian countries. He spent his whole life on three things—politics, teaching and making books, and his educational ideas are consistent with his political thinking (Xiao, 2016).

⁹ Besides the four divisions, people could also be divided into literati and non-literati (commoners).

¹⁰ See 吴敬梓. (1998). 儒林外史资料汇编·范进中举 (Vol. 6): 南开大学出版社.

Confucius's ideas of education's public role have two embodiments. Firstly, he advocated that education should be open to the public. He called for providing educational opportunities to all people regardless of their family backgrounds or social status, as long as one wanted to learn and had the ability to learn (back then, only males were allowed to receive an education).

Confucius accepted students regardless of their social background and insisted that one should 'make no social distinctions in teaching' (*you jiao wu lei*, 有教无类)¹¹, which then was a pioneering idea. He himself opened a private school and taught more than 3000 students in his life from different social classes, among whom 72 became famous and excelled in various areas. His practice changed the accepted wisdom of limiting education to only aristocratic youth (Ding, 2008).

Secondly, for Confucius education was a way of spreading state-supported values by teaching students to internalise them. This is good for people's well-being and ultimately for maintaining social order, especially the state's rule. Confucius regards providing for people (*yang min*, 养民), educating people (*jiao min*, 教民) and governing people (*zhi min*, 治民) as three ways of ruling (Xiao, 2016); he saw morality and ritual as key to providing for and educating people. Providing for people—equally providing all people enough of life's necessities—is the basis of educating people. The educator himself setting an example (*yi shen zuo ze*, 以身作则), as well as cultivating personalities (*yi dao hui ren*, 以道诲人), are central to his method of educational practice (Xiao, 2016). However, both raising and educating people are actually intended to help the state govern.

To Confucius, the main aim of education is to socialise people to internalise moral principles, thereby supporting the legitimacy of the state. In his school, Confucius inherited many of the *Zhou* dynasty's traditions and taught the Six Skills (*liu yi*, 六艺)—rites (*li*, 礼), music (*yue*, 乐), archery (*she*, 射), charioteering (*yu*, 御), calligraphy (*shu*, 书), mathematics (*shu*, 数)¹². He stressed the importance of not only acquiring knowledge (*xue wen*, 学文) but also achieving personal excellence (*xue dao*, 学道). The latter is the key to "learning to be a sage" (*sheng ren ke xue*, 圣人可学)(Chen, 2005). Confucius's way of educating people not only prevailed among commoners, but also aristocrats – including emperors. Since emperors' personal behaviours and personalities determined the legitimacy of the state to a large extent, Confucianism focuses on emperors' education and regards them as the key to socialising the populace. The main Confucian way of educating emperors is arranging Confucian sages (*Daru*) to teach emperor candidates.

¹¹ See 孔丘. (1997). 论语·卫灵公. 论语直解, 3(1).

¹² See 郑玄. (1993). 周礼注·保氏. 卷第四地官.

Higher learning system in Imperial China

Chinese education has a long tradition dating back to the *Zhou* dynasty, and has experienced frequent change and reform since then.

The state began to establish public schools during and after *Zhou* dynasty, mainly for educating aristocratic youths (Wang, 2012). The Chinese public education system continued to develop and lasted alongside the *Keju* until the fall of *Qing* dynasty in 1905. In the private sector, Confucius's school was one of the earliest private schools in China, and private schools started to propagate after that. Gradually, private education institutions became an important part of the Chinese education system alongside their public counterparts.

However, the formation of a unified educational system took a long time after early educational ideas and trials. During the *Han* dynasty, especially after emperor *Wu* (BC. 156-87), a rudimentary education system was established, and the education system matured further after the *Song* dynasty (W. Liu, 2015). This paper will mainly focus on China's education system after the *Han* dynasty.

1) Higher learning institutions

Higher learning is usually seen in combination with the *Keju* in Imperial China. Most scholars tend to overlook the fact that higher learning started far earlier than the *Keju*, and experienced major reforms both before and after the establishment of the *Keju*.

The earliest record of higher learning in Imperial China dates back to the *Xia* dynasty when higher learning institutions were authorised and administrated by the central government (Wang, 2012). During the Spring and Autumn period, the dynastic system fell apart and private higher learning appeared. Accordingly, higher learning in Imperial China can be divided into two parts: public and private higher learning (*Guan xue*, 官学; *Si xue*, 私学)(Xu, 2000). Public higher learning had core status.

Public higher learning. During the *Zhou* dynasty, the emperor *Tianzi* (Son of the Heaven) set up five higher learning institutions for aristocratic young men in the capital, which were called *Piyong* (辟雍), *Dongxu* (东序), *Guzong* (瞽宗), *Chengjun* (成均) and *Shangxiang* (上庠), among them *Piyong* lasted until the *Qing* dynasty (the name was changed in late Imperial China). Every small kingdom subordinate to the central government could have one higher learning institution, called *Yanggong* (泮宫), respectively. Higher learning normally took nine years and was aimed at cultivating the next generation of monarchs and officials. The curriculum contained six parts, the same that comprised Confucius's teaching content, which centered around 'human relations' (*Ren lun*, 人伦). Teachers of higher learning were

governmental officials who had official titles corresponding to what they taught; they were officials but only needed to teach.

After hundreds of years' disorder during the Spring and Autumn periods and the Warring States period, Emperor *Wu* of the *Han* dynasty established a unified education system including *Taixue*, the public higher learning institute. *Taixue* not only continued the tradition of state supported higher learning combining education with moralisation, but also preserved *Jixia*'s tradition (more details about *Jixia* Academy will be discussed later) of academic autonomy from the state, academic debate among teachers and students, and respect for teachers (Fan, 2004). Teachers in *Taixue* were called *Boshi* (doctors), who belonged to a specific official group (*Taichang*), and had dedicated accommodation provided by the state. *Boshi* were recruited through recommendation and examination. Students at the *Taixue* were called *Boshidizi* (*Boshi*'s students), and they were recruited directly by *Boshi* or recommended by local officials. All *Boshidizi* must satisfy four criteria: 1) be above eighteen years old; 2) be dignified in appearance and physically healthy; 3) be interested in and good at literature; 4) maintain morality including loyalty and filial piety¹³. While at the *Taixue*, students were released from tax and corvée service (Zhang, 2006). Most students were able to receive material incentives from the emperor that covered some of their living expenses. In general, it took one year for students to graduate by passing an annually-held examination, and their future career paths were determined to a large extent by their examination results. Some of them would become officials, while others returned home to become local teachers.

The curricula and content of public higher learning institutions were closely related to the *Keju* after the *Sui* dynasty, and students were still restricted in terms of the institutions that they were able to attend and what content they could learn. Emperor *Wen* of the *Sui* dynasty established a special administrative agency to manage education, the *Guozijian* (国子监). This agency lasted until the *Qing* dynasty. *Guozijian* had six subordinate institutions collectively called the *Liuxue* (六学): *Guozixue* (国子学), which recruited children from upper third-level officials' families¹⁴ and taught them classic Confucian literature and history; *Taixue* (太学), which recruited children from upper fifth-level officials' families and taught the same content as the *Guozixue*; *Simenxue* (四门学), which recruited children from upper seventh-level officials' families and talented commoners and taught contemporary policies; *Shuxue* (书学), *Suanxue* (算学) and *Lvxue* (律学) that recruited children from lower eighth-level officials' families and commoners, and taught specific books, mathematics, and law (Xu, 2000).

¹³ See 班固. (1930). 汉书: 商务印书馆

¹⁴ In Imperial China, governmental officials had their corresponding levels, which represented their status, power, salary, etc. The first level was in the highest status.

Private higher learning. Chinese people enjoyed the right to establish private higher learning institutions with autonomous curricula before the late *Ming* dynasty (B. Li, 2004). Private higher learning started in the Spring and Autumn period, and cultivated a large number of scholars during that time including Confucius, Mencius, *Mozi*, and *Xunzi*. During the *Han* dynasty, since the public *Taixue* only recruited a small number of students, many private higher learning institutions—*Jingshe* (精舍) or *Jinglu* (精廬)—prospered by addressing the remaining demand for education. Moreover, these private higher learning institutions were mainly established by famous sages who were unsatisfied with politics or frustrated despite their talent, and thus were of high quality. Hence these institutions attracted many students.

During the *Tang* dynasty, one of the most influential kind of institutions, *Shuyuan* (书院) appeared. These which were initially established for storing books, but gradually developed into institutions for higher learning. In the beginning, *Shuyuan* were mostly private. Later, the state came to invest in and support some *Shuyuan*, which became completely or partially public-funded (B. Li, 2004). Although *Shuyuan* was not against the *Keju*, training students for the *Keju* was not its main task. Different from public higher learning institutions, *Shuyuan* enjoyed a high-level of freedom and were places that integrated academic teaching and political criticism. Nevertheless, after the *Yuan* dynasty, the government controlled *Shuyuan* more tightly. The *Ming* government even abolished *Shuyuan*'s academic freedom in deciding curricula and demolished many of them. The *Ming* government stipulated that only students from public higher learning institutions could participate in the *Keju* (Lu, 2007), which discouraged students from choosing to study in private higher learning institutions. The number of *Shuyuan* decreased dramatically and most of the existing ones became similar to public higher learning institutions, aiming at training students for the *Keju*.

2) *Keju*

After the establishment of the *Keju* (科举) in AD. 606 (*Sui* dynasty), education, especially higher learning, became tightly intertwined with it until 1905. State schools were gradually absorbed into the *Keju* system. As a result, little actual teaching took place in them: higher learning institutions became places for students to study and prepare for the *Keju* by themselves (Elman, 1991; Lee, 1982; Miyazaki, 1976; Teng, 1967).

The *Keju* was crucial in Imperial China. It was a dominant force in determining Chinese culture before the onset of Western Imperialism (Elman, 1991). Scholars regard the *Keju* as almost the only means of social mobility (Cheng & Yang, 2015), an instrument for social control and political efficacy (Elman, 1991), and a way of reproducing the political legitimacy of both Confucianism and the Imperial state (Chaffee, 1995; Kahn, 1971; Miyazaki, 1976).

There was a long tradition of recruiting officials in China, even before the *Keju*. In the *Han* dynasty, officials were recommended by central and local government's officials based on six criteria such as filial behavior and honesty (*Xiao lian*, 孝廉). Some of them could become officials without passing any exams, but some needed to attend public schools and pass examinations before being awarded official positions. However, corruption gradually appeared in this selection system, which was used by influential families to further expand their influence, especially at the local level. So as to recruit talented people and counterbalance the power of aristocratic families, the central government established the *Keju* system, which was mainly based on people's political and administrative ability.

At first, during the *Sui* dynasty, the *Keju* only tested students' understanding of political affairs. In the *Tang* dynasty the state started to organise unified examinations which contained regularly-tested subjects (*chang ke*, 常科) and irregular ones (*zhi ke*, 制科). There was no strict regulation of test content. There were no special requirements for exam candidates' personal background, nor whether they had entered schools before. However, the state reformed the *Keju* after the *Song* dynasty to officially integrate it with officialdom and the education system (Honghui LI, 2003) and added the *Dianshi* (final Imperial examination, presided over by the emperor), which increased the emperor's authority over the *Keju* and the status of *Keju* winners. During the *Ming* dynasty, the *Keju* was completely institutionalised and standardized (B. Li, 2004), establishing four levels—*Tongshi* (the elementary examination), *Xiangshi* (provincial examination), *Huishi* (metropolitan examination) and *Dianshi*, with parallel schools for each examination. Students who passed these examinations were named *Xiucai* (equivalent to a Bachelor's degree), *Juren* (equivalent to a Master's degree), *Gongshi* and *Jinshi* (equivalent to a Doctor's degree) respectively (Ricci & Tregault, 1953).

In general, *Jinshi* could become relatively high-level officials in the central government and had a bright future. In Imperial China, most of the high officials including prime ministers (*Zai xiang*, 宰相) or ministers (*Shang shu*, 尚书) were *Jinshi*. Nevertheless, passing four levels of the *Keju* and becoming *Jinshi* was extremely difficult, requiring students spend at least two decades focused exclusively on studying a narrow curriculum: mainly the Four Books and Five Classics. After the *Ming* dynasty, the content was narrowed still further, with eight-leg essays (*Ba gu*, 八股) the sole form of writing included in the exam.

As an examination that existed for more than a thousand years, the *Keju* has had a significant impact on Chinese political and educational culture. On the one hand, the *Keju* recruited a large number of talented people into officialdom, directly integrating education with official recruitment and gradually making education the only way of realising social mobility (Cheng & Yang, 2015). Gradually, receiving education and becoming an official became the best choice for all in Imperial times, just as Confucius remarked much earlier in the *Analects*—"Officialdom is the natural outlet

for good students (*Xue er you ze shi*, 学而优则仕)". On the other hand, officials and those who wished to become officials served as bonds that linked common culture and Confucianism, the official ideology (Duara, 1991); in other words, the *Keju* combined traditional social motivation with political motivation, and effectively supported Confucianism's legitimacy in Imperial China (Rozman, 1982).

However, the *Keju* had several negative effects. Firstly, it constrained education to political purposes only, while neglecting education's use in promoting technological or economic development, undermining scientific education in Imperial China. Moreover, the only political purpose of education was to cultivate Confucian literati who actually lived and thought differently from commoners, and formed a world that was distant from broader society and its needs. Third, as education and the *Keju* took a long time and a huge amount of energy from students and their families, they expected substantial payoffs after becoming officials, leading to rent-seeking behavior and corruption (Wu, 2005).

3) State support and control—*Jixia* Academy as an example

The state was undoubtedly the main supporter of higher learning in Imperial China, not only financially but also politically and administratively. As all the Imperial governments valued and supported higher learning, public higher learning institutions were the first choice for talented students, and the idea of "learning inside the government" (*Xue zai guan xue*, 学在官学) became the mainstream in Imperial China.

The *Jixia* Academy was completely supported by the state (Hartnett, 2011) but for a relatively short time as it only existed for less than two hundred years. Later, during the *Han* dynasty, the government undertook to support all the living expense of students and teacher/administrative staff salaries in public higher learning institutions. What's more, all construction expenses, incidentals, and worship fees were paid by the government, and some dynasties granted educational institutions additional land rights for commercial use so they could cover some of their own expenses. During the *Ming* dynasty, students and teachers in public higher learning institutions were very well paid, while at the same time there was a direct bond between public higher learning and the *Keju*. Public institutions became the only choice for students who wanted to become officials. In addition to financial support, the Imperial government provided administrative support by establishing special educational agencies and appointing officials to administer higher learning. For example, in the *Song* dynasty, a local agency—*Tijvxueshisi* (提举学事司)—was established to administer higher learning in local areas (X. Li, 2006).

On the other hand, the state also supported private higher learning. For instance, the government's support was one of the three main financial sources of Confucius's school (Xiao, 2016), and the state was willing to support *Shuyuan* during the late Imperial period so as to control them.

Particularly because of its financial support for higher education, the state enjoyed control and regulatory power over higher education, leading to criticism concerning academic freedom and the autonomy of Chinese higher learning. However, unlike the tight control of higher learning exerted during late Imperial period, early higher learning institutions—e.g. *Jixia* Academy (稷下学宫) during the Warring States period—had a high-level freedom and autonomy while enjoying the full support of the state.

The example of the *Jixia* Academy shows that state support does not mean the definitive absence of autonomy. It can shed light on the Chinese tradition of academic autonomy.

As one of the most successful public education institutions in early China, the *Jixia* Academy was fully funded and supported by a powerful state—the Kingdom of *Qi* (齐国). As well as being an institute of higher learning, *Jixia* also exercised political influence in *Qi* state and promoted its ambitions to unite the other states (Hartnett, 2011).

King *Wei* (齐威王, BC. 356-321) first established *Jixia* Academy as a way and trigger of reforming *Qi* state's politics and administration: "King *Huan* (King *Wei*'s father, this is proven to have been mistakenly recorded) established *Jixia* Academy, set official positions, recruited and gave high positions to talented people (*Qi Huan Gong li Jixia zhi gong, she da fu zhi hao, zhao zhi xian ren er zun chong zhi*. 齐桓公立稷下之宫, 设大夫之号, 招致贤人而尊宠之)"¹⁵. The principal *Ji Jiu* (祭酒) was appointed by the King, who gave the *Ji Jiu* complete autonomy to run the Academy.

Jixia had a dual character, both an academic and a political function. It was a place for students to receive academic training as well as for academics to discuss political issues. During *Jixia*'s peak, literati from various schools gathered there, including Daoism, Confucianism, Legalism, *Ming*, and *Yin Yang*. Everyone, regardless of his nationality, age, experience and political orientation could express and debate freely. Moreover, some famous literati were given the title of "*Shang da fu* (上大夫)"—a senior officialdom—and received corresponding treatment without administrative obligations. Those "*Shang da fu*" were able to "discuss political issues freely without participating in governance (*bu zhi er yi lun*, 不治而议论)"¹⁶. Literati enjoyed a high degree of freedom in *Jixia* to wander without any barriers, share political ideas and

¹⁵ Cited from 徐干(AD. 171-217).中论·王公篇

¹⁶ Cited from 司马迁(BC. 145-90).史记·田敬仲完列传

make criticism freely, which were inspired by a popular idea, “innovation by opposition” (Hartnett, 2011).

Because of the *Jixia Academy*, literati from different states all came to *Qi* state, which not only promoted rapid intellectual development in Chinese history but also contributed to *Qi*'s prosperity and development. This provided evidence of how important it is to have free academic mobility. However, King *Min* (r. BC. 323-284, 齐闵王) ended the state's full support for *Jixia*, at which point most talented literati left *Qi* to become advisors for the “*Four Princes* (战国四公子)” and the *Qi* state entered a period of decline.

The history of *Jixia Academy* shows that it is possible to balance academic autonomy and state control. It demonstrates how much higher education can contribute to the state, how significant the state's support can be in giving free space to higher education. State control was realised through the appointment of the principal while autonomy was guaranteed by leaving all issues to the decision of the principal himself. Moreover, the literati's detachment from administrative work guaranteed their devotion to teaching and academic life, disconnecting their academic career from the limitations associated with administration, and left the Academy a sphere without state intervention.

4) Private support

Though public funding was the main financial source for higher learning in Imperial China, private contributions also provided important support. Private support not only included financial endowment, but also volunteer teaching by famous scholars.

There was a tendency in Imperial China for many famous sages (*Daru*) to go back to their hometowns and open private higher learning institutions after retirement. This led to many famous *Shuyuan*. These *Daru* all belonged to big families, which provided space and money to open the *Shuyuan*. Some even attracted many students from far away. As educational expenses were the priority of big families' support of local charity (Beattie, 1964), many families tended to donate money to these private institutions to help their functioning.

5) Families' support

The tradition of family investing in higher education has existed for thousands of years (Marginson, 2011). In Imperial China as well as modern China, family investment has been a primary source supporting students' education, including higher learning, whatever the financial status of the family. Family support included not only financial support, but also spiritual encouragement.

Besides providing educational expenses and living expenses for family members undertaking higher learning, some families even owned and funded family schools. Among all private educational institutions, there existed a special kind that were established and supported by wealthy families called *Zongzuxuexiao* (family schools, 宗族学校), including both basic educational schools (e.g. *Sishu*) and higher learning institutions (e.g., *Shuyuan*). In these family higher learning institutions, students from the family were gathered together to prepare for the *Keju* under the guidance of teachers hired by the family. Many family-owned *Shuyuan* proved to be very successful. For example, the “*Lvyin Shuwu*” held by *Guo* family in the *Ming* dynasty cultivated two famous brothers *Nanxuan Guo* and *Lvyin Guo*, who both earned doctorates at the *Guozijian* and became vice ministers.

On the other hand, various mechanisms were designed to supervise and encourage family members pursuing higher learning in big families. As receiving higher learning was directly related to passing the *Keju* and becoming officials which was crucial for families to remain and expand their wealth, power and prestige, families created material and spiritual incentive systems in terms of family members’ educational achievement (Ouyang, 1992). Material incentives included cash and land, while spiritual incentives were connected with family worship or important ceremonies. There was punishment too. Family members who did poorly at studying could face fines (Ouyang, 1992).

Less wealthy families, even low-income families, were also willing to support family members’ education. There are many examples in Chinese history of families using all of their property, including savings and land, to support the education of a family member who was good at studying and performed well in school or on tests. Some families would even borrow money to guarantee educational expenses.

Higher learning’s public contribution

The ultimate public contribution of higher learning in Imperial China was to social order. This required two types of public goods—normative public goods and descriptive public goods. For those holding power in Imperial China, the main use of education was to cultivate persons with the ability to consolidate imperial power and propagate the official culture and values (X. Li, 2006). Education’s purpose was to cultivate and recruit state officials, improve bureaucratic efficacy and disseminate values.

1) Normative public goods

The normative public goods that higher learning produces are the values and principles underpinning society that guide and restrict people’s behaviors. Higher education’s task is to propose, update and disseminate this value-set.

In Imperial China, through higher learning and the *Keju*, Confucian values predominated, and these kept evolving. Confucianism became not only an ethical code guiding individuals but the governing principle of states. Seemingly paradoxically, Confucian values were used by the state to govern the people, while in turn these values constrained the state. In both respects Confucian values sustained the legitimacy of the state.

As Confucianism highlights both virtues and the assurance of people's living conditions, the broadly agreed priority was to maintain social stability and guarantee that people could live and work in peace and contentment (安居乐业). The basic Confucian virtues included benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom and trust, loyalty to the emperor and filial loyalty to parents (*ren, yi, li, zhi, xin, zhong, xiao*, 仁义礼智信忠孝). Beginning with this foundation, the literati added some of their personal principles, such as "building up the manifestations of Heaven and Earth's spirit, to build a good life for the populace, to develop past sages' endangered scholarship, and to open up eternal peace (为天地立心, 为生民立道, 为往圣继绝学, 为万世开太平)"; and the four ontological goals for intellectuals or the rungs on a ladder in Great Learning "cultivating the self, organising the family, governing the kingdom, harmonising the world (修身, 齐家, 治国, 平天下)".

It is obvious that Confucian values are intended to keep society in order by establishing a particular hierarchy of social obedience (let the king be a king, the minister a minister, the father a father and the son a son). The highest virtue is to maintain the social order.

2) Descriptive public goods

Different from normative public goods, descriptive public goods materially influence the operation of society and people's lives. As was discussed with regard to the relation of public and private, to Chinese individuals, there are no absolute public goods or private goods. The exploration of descriptive public goods requires distinguishing the 'smaller self' and 'larger self'.

In Imperial China higher learning was almost the only channel for social mobility, which further largely influenced social stratification. People managed to pass upwards by receiving higher learning and passing the *Keju*, while high-status families might lose their status if none of their offspring was able to pass the *Keju*. In this process, talented people appeared and became state officials who contributed to bureaucratic efficacy and helped emperors to govern more effectively. This provision of social mobility and generation of skilled bureaucrats constituted a society-wide public good.

In the sense of the 'smaller self', family benefits were the 'smaller' descriptive public goods commonly shared by all family members. Since any individual's wealth, privilege and reputation were intertwined with family status, an individual's upward mobility as a consequence of higher learning benefitted the family as a whole. Though gathering individuals' private goods could result in a family's 'smaller' descriptive public goods, the accumulation of 'smaller' descriptive public goods did not always lead to the broader sense of descriptive public good because such family 'smaller' public goods were private goods instead. The public good did not equal to the accumulation of private goods. Tensions between 'smaller' and 'larger' public goods were not uncommon.

On the other hand, in Imperial China higher learning did not emphasize means to produce prosperity, itself an essential element of the social order. That is, higher education paid little attention to science, technology and the economy relative to maintaining social stability. Conversely, in modern China, higher education is considered a tool for triggering economic and scientific prosperity, and people tend to ignore its moral-building function. Though the state emphasizes education's role in maintaining stability, this is regarded by many as a negative effect of Chinese state's control.

Seemingly, educational ideas in Imperial China were antithetic to modern university operations and opposed to scientific education. But it is not that simple. In Chinese history, disorder did not involve much external influence. Moreover, prior to the 19th century, though there were external invaders, no invasions were from people more advanced than China. There was no inspiration for economic or scientific development because China lacked external competitors.

Nevertheless, the 19th century invasions by technologically advanced Western countries were different. The premise of re-establishing social stability was to develop China and become 'strong' in the face of external threats. So a combination was sought: using western technology to develop and use Chinese traditional ideas to restore stability and order¹⁷. The *Keju* was abandoned and new modern universities were established, where both technology and traditional thought were taught¹⁸. Then education became seen as a mechanism to trigger the country's development and re-build Chinese social stability, which in the end would lead to a new social order.

¹⁷ See 张之洞. (1991). *劝学篇*: 文海出版社

¹⁸ The first modern university established in China is 京师大学堂, the predecessor of Peking University

Discussion: mechanisms for higher learning to make public contribution

In China, higher learning made its public contribution to social order through its impact on individuals and families that played an intermediary role between the society and state. On some occasions, the state and society could be in contestation that lead to social disorder.

As was discussed, the ultimate aim of the society was to realise people's well-being: living and working in peace and contentment, while the state only entails the state's legitimacy as the ruler, and people's compliance. Moreover, the state's objectives required the realisation of society's objectives, while the achievement of society's objectives requires the stability resulting from the state's rule. Also, if society's objectives were not achieved, there would be a revolt against the rule of the state—while if the state's rule was too strong it would harm society.

Families (individuals) were component units of the society, and supported the state through obedience and by producing future officials. In this system the prevailing ideas in families (individuals) are those of the consensus of the society, including morality, while families' (individuals') identification with the state supports the legitimacy of the state.

The maintenance of social order requires harmonious relation between the society and the state, especially a balance between the realisation of their objectives. Higher learning's public contribution is embodied in keeping the society in harmony with the state, which contributed to social order. (The fundamental difference between Sinic and Anglo-American traditions may lie in the different definitions of the state, society and families, and the different dynamics among them.)

Specifically, there are two ways higher learning could make a public contribution to the legitimacy of the state and keeping the society and state in harmony.

1) By guaranteeing people's living conditions by producing *descriptive public goods*. Specifically, there are three approaches: Firstly, cultivating political and administrative officials to realise political efficacy and to provide better rule. Secondly, providing the prospect of social mobility. Thirdly, promoting economic and scientific development by creating knowledge. (This was not urgent in Imperial China as social order did not ask for this, but it has become crucial in contemporary China.)

2) By enhancing people's identification with the state by producing *normative public goods*. Again, there are three components. Firstly, creating virtues and moralities. Higher learning's knowledge creation can not only lead to economic prosperity, but also cultivate literati who could create core values of the society. Though in Imperial China, knowledge creation, especially scientific knowledge, was not a main concern in higher learning, creating new knowledge about morality and values that suited the

political/social requirements of the day was extremely significant. If we examine the classical descriptions and interpretations of Chinese virtues and moral principles, most of them were put forward by literati who performed well in higher learning, and many were created during their studying; for example, the many contributions by literati to the formulation and development of Confucianism.

Secondly, the dissemination of state-approved moralities and values and the encouragement of their internalisation by people. Higher learning combined with the *Keju* let state-approved values and moralities be the content of learning and tests, which gradually ensured that these virtues and moralities would prevail. By including these values in *Keju*, they became compulsory content in basic education and higher learning. With all students learning these throughout their education, plus with families' emphasis on them, they became internalised. Hence, all educated people would not only practice these values and principles themselves, but set examples to the whole society. Anecdotes, songs, and literary works focused on praising those who met the desired qualities.

Thirdly, educating the emperor. People's approval of the emperor largely determined their approval of the state. Confucianism supports the idea of educating the emperor so that he will be a good example and better rule the country.

Higher learning in Imperial China contributed to the public good by producing both normative and descriptive public goods, both of which supported the maintenance of social order. The fact that the social order was regarded by the state as the highest priority in Imperial China led to both pros and cons—the prosperity of higher learning supported by the state, and the gradual narrowing of its functions as a consequence of tightening control by the state. Irrespective, the legacies of higher learning in Imperial China are still evident in contemporary China.

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Appendix I. Table of China's Dynasties and Key Events in Higher Learning

Time Period	Dynasty	Key events in higher learning
BC. 2070-1600	<i>Xia</i> Dynasty 夏朝	The earliest record of higher learning in China.
BC. 1600-1046	<i>Shang</i> Dynasty 商朝	/
BC. 1046-771	West Zhou Dynasty 西周	The establishment of <i>Piyong</i> , <i>Dongxu</i> , <i>Guzong</i> , <i>Chengjun</i> and <i>Shangxiang</i> .
BC. 770-476	the Spring and Autumn period (East Zhou) 春秋 (东周)	Private higher learning appeared; <i>Jixia</i> Academy.
BC. 475- 221	the Warring States period (East Zhou) 战国 (东周)	/
BC. 221-207	<i>Qin</i> Dynasty 秦朝	/
BC. 206-AD. 220	Han Dynasty 汉朝	The establishment of a rudimentary education system, including <i>Taixue</i> .
220-581	the Three Kingdoms period 三国时期 (魏、蜀、吴); <i>Jin</i> Dynasty 晋 (东晋、西晋); the Southern and Northern Dynasties 南北朝	/
581-618	Sui Dynasty 隋朝 (<i>Keju</i> was established)	The establishment of <i>Keju</i> and <i>Guozijian</i> .
618-907	<i>Tang</i> Dynasty 唐朝	<i>Shuyuan</i> appeared.
907-979	Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms 五代十国	/
960-1279	<i>Song</i> Dynasty 宋朝	Add <i>Dianshi</i> to <i>Keju</i> .
1206-1368	<i>Yuan</i> Dynasty 元朝	/
1368-1644	Ming Dynasty 明朝	The end of freedom of establishing private higher learning institutions with autonomous curricular in the late <i>Ming</i> Dynasty. <i>Keju</i> became completely institutionalised and standardised. (eg. only students in public institutions could attend <i>Keju</i> ; eight-leg essays.)

1616-1911	<i>Qing</i> Dynasty 清朝	The end of higher learning in Imperial China (1905); The establishment of modern universities in China.
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