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The Importance of Anti-oppression Education in Chinese Higher Education

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The Importance of Anti-oppression Education in Chinese Higher Education

Abstract

This paper explores the existence and roots of oppressive education within the Chinese higher education system, focusing on Confucian traditional influence on educational practices. While Confucianism emphasizes social harmony and moral cultivation, its emphasis on social hierarchy and obedience to authority indirectly contributes to oppressive educational practices. This model prioritizes indoctrination and rote memorization, neglecting critical thinking and the development of student agency, potentially exacerbating educational inequality. This paper analyzes the current system's shortcomings regarding gender discrimination, regional disparities, and socioeconomic inequality. By comparing Chinese and Western educational models, it highlights the effectiveness of student development. Finally, the article suggests specific reforms, including curriculum reform, teaching training, diversified assessment, and institutional support to achieve equality and inclusion in higher education. The key to building an anti-oppressive system. The article concludes, lie in integrating critical thinking with Confucian principles of reflection, while respecting Chinese cultural traditions.

Key words: anti-oppression education; higher education; Confucian tradition; critical pedagogy

The Importance of Anti-oppression Education in Chinese Higher Education

Introduction and Background

Oppressive education refers to the unfair restrictions imposed on certain groups within the education system through institutions, policies, and cultural norms, etc., which disadvantage them in terms of access to education, development opportunities and social mobility. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, written by Freire (1970), who is a Brazilian educationalist, Freire (1970) states that the central feature of oppressive education is that students are passive recipients rather than subjects of education, and that the education system tends to perpetuate social inequality rather than promote equity. Can a country prosper if its education system inadvertently perpetuates the inequalities it claims to overcome? The answer, of course, is no, especially in modern China, where higher education practices and the implementation of anti-oppressive pedagogies need to be critically scrutinized. The global spread of neoliberalism, manifested in marketization, managerialism, and performance, has shaped public thinking about what educators should do and who they are (Ball, 2003). However, in China, the principle of over-surveillance is embedded in economic and social policies and in the institutional settings of educational organizations (Tan, 2015). China's remarkable economic rise and increasing global integration have profoundly reshaped its educational landscape (Naughton, 2022). This rapid modernization presents both opportunities and challenges. While increased access to higher education is a major achievement, persistent inequalities and the legacy of traditional teaching methods raise concerns about equity and inclusion (Marginson & Yang, 2021; Tsang, 2000). The enduring influence of Confucianism, with its emphasis on social hierarchy and conformity (Dallmayr, 1993; de Bary et al., 2007), has created a system that may inadvertently perpetuate

oppressive practices within universities. These factors include, but are not limited to, the lingering effects of Confucian social hierarchies embodied in classroom dynamics, implicit biases in the admissions process, and curricula that may not adequately address gender, class and regional differences. This underscores the urgent need to incorporate anti-oppression education into Chinese higher education.

From the perspective of a graduate student with a degree in adult and higher education in China, the main purpose of this capping exercise is to analyze the phenomenon of oppressive education on Chinese high education and propose anti-oppressive educational reforms to promote equity and inclusion. China's higher education system is deeply rooted in Confucianism, both as a methodology and ideology, which has profoundly shaped the country's cultural heritage for thousands of years. The Confucian tradition emphasizes social hierarchy and obedience to authority, resulting in an educational model based on indoctrination and rote memorization, which restricts students' critical thinking skills and sense of autonomy. Chinese education prioritizes collectivism and social harmony, favoring teacher authority and standardized testing over independent inquiry and discussion. While China should learn from successful anti-oppressive education models in the West, it must also integrate its own cultural traditions to strike a balance between traditional and modern educational concepts. The central aim of this paper is to promote educational equity and social justice, helping students gain broader opportunities and development through anti-oppressive education while maintaining a strong cultural identity. For graduates who have already received higher education, such reforms could lead to a future education system that places greater emphasis on personal development, critical thinking, and social responsibility. Additionally, this capping paper seeks to convey that

higher education should not merely serve as a means of transmitting knowledge or reinforcing oppressive structures but also should instead function as a powerful tool for social change.

Thesis Statement

In Chinese higher education, oppressive education may manifest itself through issues such as gender discrimination, regional bias, and the homogenization of texts. These issues may lead teachers to believe that they have the right to view the minds of their students as a void to be filled. This is not only true in diverse and inclusive school environments, but it also has the potential to exacerbate inequality and injustice in the wider society. Therefore, the implementation of anti-oppression education in Chinese high school classrooms has become necessary to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to promote the holistic development of students. Zhao (2020) touches on this implicitly by discussing the challenges of cultivating critical thinking within a Confucian pedagogical context, highlighting the tension between traditional methods and the development of critical consciousness. Persistent inequalities and limited critical thinking in Chinese higher education require the integration of anti-oppression pedagogies.

This paper will compare traditional Chinese education methods with Western models that emphasize anti-oppressive education (McLaren, 2015; hooks, 1994), analyze the strengths and limitations of both approaches, and consider the implications of this comparative analysis for creating a more equitable system in China. It is particularly important to explore concepts such as critical consciousness and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billing, 1995) in this comparison. This requires a critical examination of how Confucian traditions shape educational practices, a comparative analysis with successful Western anti-oppression models, and the development of contextually relevant strategies for implementing transformational change in the

Chinese higher education system. Through anti-oppressive education, these historical legacies can be challenged and reshaped to enhance equity and inclusion in education. Drawing on the analyses of Dallmayr (1993), I argue that higher education can contribute to sustainable national development while creating an anti-oppressive educational iconography that enables students to grow as individuals and actively participate in social change.

Theoretical Framework

This paper argues that the adoption of anti-oppression pedagogy is crucial for creating a more just and equitable higher education system in China. By critically examining the interplay between Confucian tradition and contemporary educational practices, this study will demonstrate how the current system inadvertently marginalizes certain groups of students. The analysis will utilize Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; 1973) as a theoretical framework for understanding how education can liberate or oppress. Specifically, Freire's emphasis on critical consciousness and dialogue as tools for social change provides a valuable lens for analyzing the limitations of traditional Chinese educational methods and advocating for more inclusive and empowering practices. Drawing on the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy (Lanson-Billings, 1995), this paper will also explore how anti-oppression strategies can be effectively integrated into Chinese cultural and educational settings. Additionally, a comparative analysis with Western anti-oppression pedagogies (McLaren, 2015; hooks, 1994) will highlight successful models as well as potential challenges in applying them to the Chinese context. The paper will conclude with specific recommendations for policy and pedagogical reform.

To assert that Confucianism laid the theoretical foundations for oppressive education in China requires a nuanced understanding of its historical impact on pedagogical practices. Chen (2014) notes that the integration of different histories, living conditions, and sociocultural

discourses is the site of transformative in pedagogy. While Confucianism emphasizes education as an essential tool for the development of moral individuals (moral gentlemen) and the promotion of social harmony (de Bary et al., 2007), the methods employed tend to prioritize rote memorization and the transmission of traditional values. The emphasis on mastery of classical texts such as the Four Books and Five Classics, while contributing to the development of a common cultural understanding, also results in a rigid and inflexible education system (Dallmayr, 1993). As Dallmayr (1993) points out, this approach can be interpreted as neglecting the development of critical thinking and independent judgment—key aspects of anti-oppressive education. By focusing on memorization and adherence to established norms rather than fostering creativity and dissent, this system inadvertently lays the theoretical foundations for an educational structure that can become oppressive.

Tsang (2000) emphasizes that fluctuations in educational policy since 1949 reflect not only economic and political changes but also deeper social expectations rooted in tradition. This implies that the continuity of pedagogical practices influenced by Confucian values may contribute to the persistence of oppressive elements in the educational system. Thus, the literature presented strongly suggests a significant correlation between the enduring influence of Confucian values on educational practices and the emergence of potentially oppressive factors within the Chinese education system. Further research could analyze specific examples of how this connection manifests in practice.

The Influence of Confucianism on Chinese Education

The historical and cultural context of higher education in China has greatly shaped its current situation. Confucianism, the dominant philosophical and moral system for centuries, has profoundly influenced China's economic development, political, and educational landscape. In

Confucian culture, teachers are highly respected as role models and mentors who cultivate individuals with Confucian virtues (Tan, 2015). However, this influence has also contributed to oppressive educational practices. Understanding this complex interplay is crucial to advocating for anti-oppressive education in China.

Politics

Confucianism emphasizes cultivating one's moral character, aligning one's family, ruling the country, and bringing peace to the world," advocating governance through moral cultivating and ritual rather than solely through law and force. "Confucian influence was strengthened after the decision in 140 BCE by Emperor Wu (the sixth ruler of the Han dynasty) to turn Confucianism into a state ideology" (Hu, 2007, p. 136). This ideal has been the core governance concept for successive dynasties, influencing the development of the Chinese bureaucracy (Hu, 2007). In modern politics, the Confucian concept of selecting the virtuous and appointing the capable persists, exemplified by the civil service examination system, which continues the spirit of the imperial examination system in selecting state officials. Confucianism emphasizes that rulers should embody benevolent governance and moral governance, believing only highly moral rulers can achieve legitimate rule (Jiang, 2018). This has impacted the contemporary Chinese government's foundation on integrity building and moral cultivation among cadres. In recent years, the Chinese government's promotion of Confucius Institutes and emphasis on socialist core values reflect the continued influence of Confucian culture on shaping political legitimacy (Miller, 2010). While Confucianism emphasizes a people-centered rather than a "democratic" approach (Hu, 2007, p. 137), preferring elite governance to referendums, modern China, despite adjustments to its political system, retains traditions of governing by virtue and elite leadership. Confucianism has profoundly shaped the Chinese political system,

emphasizing moral governance, bureaucratic excellence, the building of state legitimacy, and social stability, laying the political foundation for a governmentalist approach to education.

Economics

Confucianism, with its emphasis on social hierarchy, obedience, and respect for authority, has historically underpinned the structure of Chinese society. While Ma and Ouyang (2020) found that Confucianism, despite emphasizing work ethic, contributes to market economy development, they also note its hierarchical nature may hinder economic innovation and entrepreneurship. Conversely, Yu (2008) suggests Confucianism's emphasis on hard work, discipline, and high value placed on education is a key reason for East Asia's economic takeoff. For example, economic policies in China, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore generally emphasize investment in education and talent development, reflecting the Confucian ideal of valuing education. Economically, this translated into an elite system, initially embodied by the imperial examination system. Although it offered upward mobility based on merit (demonstrated through rote memorization of Confucian classics), it also perpetuated a rigid social order and limited freedom of thought and expression. The focus on memorization and standardized testing, rather than critical thinking and personal expression, created a system susceptible to oppression.

Education

In education, the emphasis shifted from developing individual potential to cultivating moral qualities consistent with Confucian principles. The Four Books and Five Classics became the core texts, promoting rote memorization and traditional interpretations over critical engagement. Confucius was considered a model teacher for every age. His classroom featured strict discipline, imitation of the teacher's words and actions, and a knowledge-transfer-oriented teaching style. Confucius believed students should acquire knowledge and moral virtues by

observing and imitating the teacher's behavior (Matsunobo, 2011). This Confucian classroom model fostered a perception of teachers as authoritative figures solely responsible for knowledge dissemination, leaving little room for student questioning or dissent. The resulting lack of freedom of thought and critical analysis contributed to the prevalence of oppressive educational practices.

Influenced by Confucian tradition, Chinese higher education retains some teacher-centered teaching styles (Ho, 2018). Teachers maintain significant classroom authority, and students are expected to respect and follow instructions. This emphasis on obedience and conformity discourages dissent, questioning authority, and challenging the status quo. Many courses remain dominated by lecture-based learning (LBL) rather than the interactive approaches prevalent in Western education systems (Tan, 2015), and the focus on standardized tests and rote memorization often overlooks individual differences and learning styles. Teacher-student relationships in Chinese universities are still shaped by the Confucian principle of respecting teachers and emphasizing the way. This is due to “Confucian virtues and moral principles, the concept of benevolence or humanity is regarded as the highest level of self cultivation, leading one to become a superior person (junzi 君子), the ideal personality of Confucianism” (Wang, 2023, p. 326). As a result, students tend to follow instructors' directions more readily rather than challenge their views—a contrast to many Western educational systems (Matsunobu, 2011). Many colleges and universities prioritize the transmission of classical knowledge (philosophy, history, and traditional culture) over the development of creative and critical thinking (Tan, 2015). Furthermore, influenced by the imperial examination system, standardized exams remain the primary evaluation method, often neglecting more flexible assessments like essays and project-based work (Ho, 2018). While promoting social harmony, Confucian values have

inadvertently fostered conditions that contribute to oppressive educational practices. This atmosphere suppresses critical and independent thinking, potentially perpetuating inequality and injustice. Students who deviate from prescribed learning methods may also face marginalization, further exacerbating the oppressive educational climate.

Comparative Analysis of Chinese and Western Higher Educational

Knowledge Acquisition Approaches

A core difference between Chinese and Western higher education lies in their approaches to knowledge acquisition. Western systems (particularly British and American) emphasize critical thinking and individual initiative, encouraging students to challenge authority and actively pursue knowledge. In contrast, Chinese higher education, influenced by Confucian traditions, prioritizes social harmony, collectivism, and receptive learning. As globalization advances, the Chinese system is incorporating more critical thinking while preserving cultural values to foster innovation and social change. Western education encourages questioning established theories and developing independent perspectives through critical analysis. For instance, British universities utilize Socratic questioning to facilitate student-professor interaction and challenge ideas (Qian, 2020). Conversely, Chinese education often views knowledge as authoritative, emphasizing rote and systematic learning, with many courses relying on standardized testing rather than open discussion.

Educational Goals

Western educational systems, especially in the United States and Europe, increasingly embrace anti-oppression pedagogy. This approach emphasizes critical thinking, inclusivity, and the development of individual student potential, aiming to create a learning environment where students can question oppressive structures, challenge inequalities, and become active agents of

social change. This contrasts with the more traditional collectivist focus of Chinese higher education. Western education prioritizes individual development, viewing the core goal as cultivating independent thinkers and agents of social change, encouraging students to explore their interests and develop creativity and critical awareness (Li et al., 2024). Chinese education emphasizes social harmony and collective responsibility, aiming to produce useful members of society rather than individuals who challenge structures. Historically, the imperial examination system prioritized knowledge accumulation and loyalty over challenging authority. The challenge lies in integrating these values to promote critical thinking and individual expression without compromising social cohesion and cultural values.

Individual Agency and Teacher Authority

Western classrooms tend to be more student-oriented, for example, in American colleges and universities, students are encouraged to ask questions and engage in interactive discussions with professors and peers. This instructional style grants students greater autonomy and emphasizes learner-centered learning approaches, such as project-based learning and open-ended assessment (Yang, 2022), promoting creative thinking (Pratt, 1991). However, Chinese classrooms remain largely didactic, with the teacher serving as the primary knowledge transmitter and students focused on absorption. Teachers maintain significant classroom authority, and students rely more on teacher guidance than independent learning. Furthermore, influenced by the Confucian emphasis on respecting teachers, students often hesitate to directly question the instructor's viewpoints. Consequently, many students are reluctant to participate actively in class, fearing that expressing their ideas might be perceived as disrespectful (Yang, 2022).

The Oppression of Chinese Higher Education

The pressures and constraints on higher education in China are sometimes described as *oppressive*, and this is largely influenced by social inequalities. While the term *oppressive*: requires careful consideration of individual experiences to avoid generalizations, the manifestations of oppressive education in China's higher education system include socio-economic inequalities, regional disparities, gender inequalities, limited academic freedom, and an unfair job market. Examining the impact of these factors can reveal the systemic challenges that lead to oppressive education in China.

Socio-economic Inequalities

Oppressive aspects of Chinese higher education are largely characterized by the reproduction of socioeconomic inequality. Tsang (2000) points out that the role of education in promoting economic development is constrained by class barriers, and that the higher education system has, to some extent, instead become a tool for the reproduction of social class, consolidating the dominance of the affluent. Despite the massive expansion of higher education in China, socioeconomic disparities continue to restrict access (Jiang & Mok, 2018). Specifically, the urban-rural educational divide, the burden of tuition fees, barriers to entry at elite college and universities, and discriminatory treatment of graduates from different socioeconomic backgrounds in the job market families, even if admitted to university, often lack social capital, economic resources, and access to quality educational resources, resulting in a weaker educational foundation. Students from affluent families often benefit from superior pre-college education, private tutoring, and test preparation resources, giving them a significant advantage in highly competitive examinations like the Advanced Placement (Gaokao) exams. This creates a self-perpetuating cycle of inequality, limiting opportunities for students from

poorer families. The cost of higher education itself also acts as a significant barrier, exacerbating unequal access based on affordability.

The emphasis on standardized testing in higher education further impedes social mobility. While the system ostensibly performs well on these examinations, thus perpetuating existing social stratification. China's top universities, such as Tsinghua and Peking University, predominantly admit students from economically developed regions and high-performing high schools; students from poorer families are significantly underrepresented at these prestigious institutions. Poor students are burdened by substantial tuition fees and living expenses, making it difficult to overcome their financial disadvantages despite government student loan programs (Mok & Jiang, 2018). Students from disadvantaged backgrounds may lack the resources to overcome this systemic bias, hindering upward mobility.

Economic constraints, along with a lack of information and support, may limit university choices for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, restricting access to prestigious institutions and potentially impacting career prospects. While higher education expansion has increased access, market-based reforms have linked the value of a college degree closely to a family's economic background. Poor students are less likely to secure high-quality internships and employment opportunities, even after college enrollment (Mok et al., 2016).

Regional Disparities

Educational quality varies significantly across regions. Students in urban areas, particularly large cities, generally have access to better facilities, qualified teachers, and more advanced learning resources than their counterparts in rural areas or less-developed areas. Universities in China's economically developed regions possess greater resources, while students

in central and western regions face more significant challenges in enrolling in top universities due to policy limitations, funding constraints, and other factors (Jacob, 2007).

The concentration of prestigious universities in major urban centers creates geographical barriers for rural students. Limited access to these universities restricts opportunities for higher education and career advancement for students from less-developed areas. Rural students experience systemic disadvantages upon entering higher education, including fewer internship opportunities, limited social networks, and hindered career progression. Furthermore, school cultures often favor urban students, making adaptation challenging for rural students (Wang, 2023). Variations in teaching standards and curriculum implementation across regions also contribute to educational disparities. Local colleges and universities struggle to provide the same quality of resources as their urban counterparts due to budgetary and policy constraints. While policies such as the National Special Program (Lu, 2024) aim to improve rural students' access, they remain significantly disadvantaged in college entrance examinations due to inadequate secondary school resources. Urban students typically benefit from better teachers, training programs, and extracurricular activities, enhancing their competitiveness in college entrance exams and university admissions. This results in local college graduates being less competitive in the job market, thus perpetuating regional inequalities (Lu, 2024).

Gender Inequality

Despite remarkable progress in Chinese higher education over the past few decades, with female enrollment rates surpassing those of males, structural gender inequality persists. But I believe that this phenomenon does not only exist in China, there is no still no real equality in gender throughout the world, especially in the educational field. This inequality manifests not only in access, major selection, and academic development, but also pervades employment, pay

equity , and campus culture, creating a systemic form of educational disadvantage. Although the proportion of female college students has increased, men remain overrepresented in top universities and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields (Ji et al., 2017). Some institutions utilize different gender-based admission scores, particularly in fields like military science, policing, and aerospace, where women often require higher scores for admission. Women are frequently steered toward traditionally feminine majors (e.g., education, literature, nursing, social sciences), while men are encouraged into higher-paying professions in science, technology, business, etc. Even when admitted, female students may encounter implicit biases, such as instructor bias and unequal access to resources. These disparities may stem from societal expectations, gender stereotypes, and ingrained biases within the enrollment and academic environments.

Gender inequality extends beyond college, affecting career choices and opportunities. Women may face barriers to entry in high-paying careers and experience gender-based pay gaps. Female graduates encounter employment discrimination, with some companies exhibiting a preference for male applicants, particularly unmarried women (Ji et al., 2017). While subtle, biases within the academic environment affect women's access to opportunities, mentorship, and advancement. These interwoven forms of inequality create a system that many students find restrictive. While not uniformly oppressive, the cumulative effect of these systemic barriers significantly impacts access to quality education and shapes life trajectories in ways that reinforce existing social inequalities. Further research is needed to fully understand the scope and impact of these issues and to develop strategies for mitigating inequalities and fostering a more equitable higher education system in China.

Discussion

Chinese higher education remains heavily influenced by Confucian culture in its modernization process, particularly in its emphasis on social hierarchy, teacher authority, and the spirit of obedience (Dallmayr, 1993; de Bary et al., 2007). However, this authority structure manifests in the classrooms as a teacher-dominated style, where students passively receive knowledge (Ho, 2018). This approach may contribute to educational oppression, inhibit critical thinking, and reinforce social inequalities (Tsang, 2000). Matsunobu (2011) argues that the Confucian teaching model stands in stark contrast to the Western education system's interactive, inquiry-based learning models. This model conditions students to be more inclined to accept authority rather than think independently (Zhao, 2020). As a result, Confucian traditions continue to shape modern Chinese higher education, making it a tool for social control rather than a means of liberating individuals' minds (Freire, 1970).

Higher education plays a crucial role in social mobility, yet regional disparities in access (Jacob, 2007), gender inequality within the education system (Ji et al., 2017), and broader social stratification persist (Mok & Jiang, 2018). To break this cycle, anti-oppression education must be introduced into the higher education system to enhance equitable opportunities for social disadvantaged groups. Freire's (1970, 1973) theory of critical education asserts that education should not serve as a tool for indoctrination but rather cultivate a critical consciousness in students, enabling them to challenge unjust social structures. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (1995) proposes the theory of culturally relevant education, emphasizing that critical education should be integrated into the Chinese curriculum within its local context to foster socially responsible and critical aware citizens.

McLaren (2015) and hooks (1994) highlight that the Western model of anti-oppression education primarily focuses on individual freedom and social justice. However, in China, education reform must consider cultural factors and avoid directly replicating the Western model. Chen (2014) argues that meaningful educational change lies in integrating local Chinese culture to create an approach that aligns with societal needs rather than simply dismantling traditions. Lu (2024) examines the impact of foreign language education policies on urban and rural students, revealing that rural students are at a disadvantage in English language learning due to the unequal distribution of teaching resources, which further affects their competitiveness in higher education.

As China's higher education system becomes increasingly marketized, affordability has become a crucial factor affecting educational equity. Mok et al. (2016) point out that the commercialization of higher educational opportunities through additional resources such as private tutoring and overseas study, while children from low-income families are often excluded from quality education resources. This trend has exacerbated social stratification within the education system. A critical analysis of modern Chinese higher education reveals that oppressive factors such as rigid teacher authority, rote learning methods, and urban-rural educational disparities can be addressed through anti-oppressive education. By drawing on Western theories of critical education (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 2015) and adapting them to the local cultural context (Chen, 2014), a more equitable and inclusive learning environment can be established in Chinese higher education.

Reform Suggestions

Curriculum Reform

First, universities and institutions should provide clear guidelines on integrating critical thinking skills across all disciplines. Courses should systematically teach skills such as analyzing

information, evaluating arguments, and identifying biases to foster independent thinking (Hope, 2023), thereby addressing the limitations of rote learning. Courses should go beyond official narratives to cover the history, culture, and perspectives of different social groups to promote a more comprehensive understanding. Institutions should also incorporate issues of social inequality, discrimination, and oppression, encouraging student engagement through case studies, class discussions, and community projects (Muller, 2016). Developing curricula that incorporate diverse perspectives can challenge dominant narratives and foster a more inclusive understanding of history, society, and culture. Actively promoting social justice as a core educational goal can help mitigate potential biases in traditional courses.

Teacher Training

Teachers should receive training in culturally relevant pedagogy, focusing on understanding the dynamics of power and oppression and eliminating unconscious gender, racial, and socioeconomic biases in the classrooms (Kumashiro et al., 2004). This training should ensure teaching methods are responsive and respectful of students' diverse backgrounds. Teachers should also receive training on facilitating discussions of sensitive topics, enabling students to critically examine social issues without creating antagonism or silencing minority voices. This training should raise teachers' awareness of their own biases and provide them with strategies for creating inclusive and equitable classrooms. This is crucial for transforming classroom practices and empowering teachers to use culturally relevant pedagogy to create more inclusive learning environments. Furthermore, teachers should encourage students to engage in critical discussion of social issues and challenge traditional norms, directly addressing the need to foster critical thinking within a culturally sensitive context.

Assessment Methods

Schools should reduce their reliance on standardized tests and incorporate project-based assessments, presentations, essays, and case studies to more comprehensively measure students' critical thinking skills (Fewer, 2019). This can mitigate potential biases inherent in standardized testing. Institutions should also develop holistic assessment methods that consider not only academic performance but also students' critical thinking, creativity, and engagement in social justice initiatives.

Institutional Support

Colleges and universities should foster inclusive campus environments that value diversity and support all students. This includes establishing comprehensive support services, cultivating an inclusive campus culture, and promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives. Institutions should establish multicultural centers and student support services to assist students from diverse backgrounds in acclimating to the college environment and provide psychological support and career guidance (Garza, 2017). Governments need to develop and implement policies to achieve anti-oppressive and equitable practices throughout higher education. Equitable enrollment policies should ensure fair access for students from low-income backgrounds, rural areas, and underrepresented minority groups (Struve, 2019), encompassing admissions, financial aid, and academic programs. Governments must also invest in research and evaluation to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement. This continuous improvement process is vital for effecting meaningful change.

Connecting Tradition and Progress

A key challenge is integrating these changes without compromising valuable aspects of Chinese culture. This might involve integrating Confucian values, combining critical thinking

with Confucian self-reflection, encouraging students to refine themselves through ongoing questioning (Chang & McLaren, 2018). Contextualized pedagogies, adapting anti-oppressive pedagogies to the specific Chinese cultural context rather than directly copying Western models, can increase acceptance among teachers and students (Stein et al., 2016). It is crucial to ensure that reforms are relevant and meaningful to both students and teachers.

These recommendations are not exhaustive but offer a starting point for building a more just, equitable, and empowering higher education system in China. This process requires sustained commitment, collaboration, and careful consideration of cultural and historical contexts from educators, policymakers, and community members.

Conclusion

Despite significant progress on expanding access to certain education in China (Naughton, 2022), structural inequalities persist, particularly under the influence of Confucian traditions. Tertiary teaching styles often prioritize obedience, rote memorization, and collectivism over critical thinking and individual agency (Dallmayr, 1993; de Bary et al., 2007). While culturally and historically significant, these traditional approaches may inadvertently reinforce oppressive structures, limiting social mobility and exacerbating educational inequalities. Examination of Western anti-oppressive education models (Hooks, 1994; McLaren, 2015) suggests that centering social justice and equity in teaching and learning offers transformative potential. However, directly adopting Western models is not feasible; the challenge lies in integrating critical education methods with Chinese culture to create a path to change relevant to Chinese society.

Despite government efforts toward educational equity, higher education continues to grapple with oppressive challenges, including structural inequality, unequal distribution of

resources based on regional or economic factors, and gender inequality. These issues affect not only individual student development but also broader educational equity and social justice.

While the influence of Confucianism and wider social inequalities is acknowledged (Marginson & Yang, 2021; Tsang, 2000), further research is needed to document specific instances of discrimination, biased policies, or exclusionary practices.

Achieving truly anti-oppressive education requires a multi-pronged reform strategy encompassing curriculum reform, teacher training, assessment adjustments, and institutional support. Curriculum reform should prioritize critical thinking, incorporate diverse perspectives, and explicitly address social justice issues. Teacher training must focus on anti-oppressive and culturally relevant pedagogies to enable educators to create inclusive classrooms and promote critical dialogue. Assessment methods should diversify beyond standardized tests, incorporating holistic assessments that value diverse learning styles and achievements. Finally, crucial institutional support includes creating inclusive campus environments, implementing equitable policies, and conducting ongoing research and evaluation to monitor progress and inform future reforms. By thoughtfully considering the unique sociocultural context and integrating traditional values can thrive and become agents of social change.

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