

**Mette Kjær Petersen, Ph.D. Candidate,**  
**Department of Society and Globalisation, Roskilde University, Denmark**  
**Email address: mettekp@ruc.dk**

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**Educating innovative graduates for the Chinese economy - A case of higher education reform**

China's government aims to steer the economy away from 'Made in China' toward 'Designed in China' by developing its innovative capacity. As part of the aim to develop the innovative potential of the economy the government has initiated a comprehensive higher education reform, and the paper will discuss the government policy of how to educate graduates with 'innovative spirit' and show a case of how the policy is translated into education reform at a Chinese university. The research question to be dealt with is *How does the Chinese government propose to and legitimize education reform in the higher education sector to build an innovative workforce, and how is it translated into university reform strategy?*

China's significant but gradual change process from a catching-up strategy to a global-leader strategy was deepened in 1995 with the Decision by the National Science Conference to 'Revitalize China through science and education'. A principle that has been reiterated and strengthened in later government strategies. The higher education reform was launched in the 1980s, deepened in 1993, and intensified around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The reform is closely tied to the larger modernization strategy of the Chinese society and is legitimized by the need for 'qualified people' (*rencai*) to build a globally competitive economy and modern China.

The paper is placed within the literature on innovation competence development in Asia as well as higher education reform and development. Within the former, much is being written about the developments in research and university-industry partnerships but less about education reform of the workforce. Within the latter I believe that to understand the complex transformations taking place in Chinese higher education, the border between culturalist and institutionalist explanations of local adaptation and global convergence needs to be transcended. The policy is a 'bricolage' of what is considered needed and useful of global practice and of Chinese practice. On the one hand, lending legitimacy and inspiration in the global innovation and quality education discourses does not mean that the concepts have the same meaning in China. On the other hand, the localization of global practices cannot be ascribed to an all embracing 'Confucius legacy' as many scholars argue.

What I attempt to investigate is how the policy is shaped and the process of translation from national policy to university policy in order to explore the goal and means to foster innovative graduates. The paper is part of my PhD research, which also investigates the practical enactment of the reform, which alters the outcome of the policy. Changing institutional conditions for learning is a complex process because it is mediated by a number of physical and institutional conditions and has to balance new ideas with those perceived legitimate and appropriate by the constituents. However, the paper will not discuss the translation into teaching practice. It is just to say that studying the policy does not provide an accurate picture of China's future innovation workforce since the policy goals are amended down through the system. Still the objective of the paper is to investigate the Chinese strategy of and framework for educating qualified people with innovative spirits for the economy since strategies are important instigators of change.

The first part of the paper will study the Chinese government's reform rhetoric and policy to 'revitalize the education' to educate "specialized talents with innovative spirit and practical capability" (Higher Education Law, Article 5). The data are generated from policy documents and political statements. Secondly, I study how university leaders in a Finance and Economics University actively deconstruct the national requirement in their own strategy to change institutional conditions for learning and build 'quality education' that will foster the innovative spirit of their graduates. A case study method is applied of a fast developing non-key Finance and Economics University in Eastern China. The case university has reformed its teaching practice the last 10 years in line with the national reform. Its strategy is to make a fundamental transformation from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning as well as to introduce a number of new teaching methods to improve the quality of the education. Internationalization in the form of teacher and student mobility is considered an important strategy for this goal. The data is generated from interviews with university leaders, teachers and students, student documents, a student survey as well as observations.

Preliminary results show that a new path of teaching style is negotiated between foreign and Chinese ideas of innovative skills, 'qualified people', and quality education. The way to modernize the education system is through taking what is considered best practice from abroad without taking the values behind the practices and implementing them into the Chinese system. This is a general modernization principle. The result is an educational foundation with both global and Chinese characteristics where innovative spirit is only one of more concerns. This is also showing in the university. We will see that innovative and practical abilities are indeed key competences that leaders aim for their graduates to possess. The reform is legitimized by the employment needs for economic development but has also other elements. A deep and comprehensive teaching reform focusing on student-centered learning, inspired by the American participatory model, is proposed but modified to fit the special practical task of Finance and Economics Universities and to account for Chinese political and societal education requirements. The institutional conditions for fostering innovative talents can therefore be considered modernized rather than fundamentally changed, and the construction of 'innovative talents' seems closer to adaptable and problem-solving skills than critical and creative mind-sets.