

Selection for Admission to Graduate Level Education in China

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【 Abstract 】 The graduate school admission is an joint efforts of the national government, local governments and the universities. For applicants who apply for a master's degree, it is a two stage procedure: in the first stage, they take the tests administrated by the national government; in the second stage, they are selected by universities mainly through interviews. For those who apply for a doctoral degree, they will go through the similar two stages which are administrated by the universities.

Doctorial degree applicants are required to take the following tests: politics theory (It can be waived for those who have already have a master degree or those who will obtain a master degree before the enrollment), foreign language (including listening skills) and at least two subject tests. The tests are all developed by individual universities. Master degree applicants are required to take the following tests: politics theory, foreign language, 1-2 subject tests. The first two tests will be developed and administrated by NEEA. Part of the subject tests are developed by NEEA too. These tests include: Mathematics for programs in engineering, economics and management, Chinese and Western Medical Science Basics for Medical programs, Education Basics, Psychology Basics, History Basics.

The graduate school admission system is well developed. The system is efficient in China and it has been proved to be successful. Millions of qualified applicants are admitted into graduate school through this fair and secure procedure. In today's increasing internationalized, the graduate school admission system of China need to draw lessons from other countries and need to innovate and develop on the foundation of Chinese national conditions in order to meet Chinese modern needs.

I. The current managing system and basic model of the selection procedure for the

graduate school admission in China

In China the current graduate school admission is under a three-level managing system: the national government-the Ministry of Education, local governments-the provincial admission offices, the individual institutions having demand for new students. Among the three, the Ministry of Education is mainly in charge of the following duties: establishing the guidelines, policies, criteria and methods for graduate school admission, formulating and announcing the annual admission plan in association with other concerned national organizations, arranging, implementing and supervising the nation-wide admission work, stipulating the administrative criteria for the selection of recommended examination-free students, prescribing the test subjects for the national graduate entrance-examination, organizing the national uniform examination, drafting papers for the national test subjects and so on. As for the provincial admission offices, they are responsible for the following duties: the implementation of the graduate admission guidelines, policies, criteria and methods that are advocated by the Ministry of Education, the organization of the work concerning examination entrance, practice and marking, the printing of national test papers and the maintaining of their secrecy and security, and the coordination and supervision of the admission work by individual institutions. Compared to the above two levels, the individual institutions shoulder more concrete responsibilities that are closely relevant to their own admission needs. Their duties include outlining the admission scheme, selecting qualified candidates for sitting the examination, organizing the work concerning the writing of test papers for courses of specialties, administering the examination, marking the papers, and admitting students according to the nationally-stipulated principles, etc.

The current selection manner for graduates in China consists of two stages. For applicants who apply for a master's degree, it is a two stage procedure: in the first stage, they take the tests administrated by the national government; in the second stage, they are selected by universities mainly through interviews. For those who apply for a doctoral degree, they will go through the similar two stages which are administrated by the universities. The success in the first stage examination is an obligatory requirement for the entrance examination of the second stage. Besides, examinees' performance in the second stage examination accounts for 30%-50% of their total marks.

The forms of the first stage examination for applicants who apply for a master's degree are various, including the national uniform examination, the joint examination, the separate examination and the recommended examination-free project. In the national uniform examination, the developing of the papers for public courses and some basic courses of specialties is the duty of NEEA while universities take charge of examination concerning basic courses and others of specialties. The joint examination is applicable to certain subjects or specialties (e.g. MBA and master degree in law) that are sanctified by the Ministry of Education. Under this examination system, papers of some subjects are also written by NEEA. The separate examination is a testing manner in which the Ministry of Education empowers certain universities to organize separate examinations for qualified in-service candidates. The test subjects are determined by those universities themselves. The recommended examination-free project stands for the fourth form of the first stage examination. In this project, certain universities sanctified by the Ministry of Education recommend their excellent graduates of the year according to relevant principles and confirm those students' preliminary-examination-free status before they take the secondary examination administered by the universities that they apply for.

II. The current test subjects and contents of the preliminary examination for the graduate school admission in China

In the preliminary examination for the doctoral admission, the test subjects include: political theories (Masters and master candidates can apply for examination-free permission in this subject.), foreign languages (including the listening component), and at least two basic courses and others of specialties. The papers for all of the above test subjects are written by universities that have doctoral admission demand.

In the preliminary examination for applicants who apply for a master's degree, the test subjects include: political theories, foreign languages and one or two basic courses of specialties. The political theories and foreign languages are obligatory test subjects for participants in the national uniform examination. And the papers of these two subjects are written by the national authority-NEEA. The basic courses of specialty are test subjects established by the Ministry of Education or universities according to the specialties

examinees apply for. Papers for certain subjects of this kind are written uniformly by the Ministry of Education, for example, mathematics concerning specialties as engineering, economics and management, Chinese and Western Medical Science Basics concerning Chinese or Western medicinal specialty, the pedagogic and psychological basic comprehensive courses concerning education specialty, the basic course for history concerning history specialty and so on.

The test subject of political theories is a distinct Chinese feature that characterizes the graduate selection system. Its examination scope ranges from the Philosophical Principles of Marxism, the Political and Economic Principles of Marxism, the Synopsis of Mao Zedong's Thought, Deng Xiaoping's Theory, the essential elements of "Three Representatives", to domestic and global economic and political climate and policies. This test subject is aimed to examine examinees' grasp of the basic knowledge and theories, and their ability to apply basic Marxist standpoints and methods to the analysis and resolving of practical problems. The examination paper of this test subject is comprised of multiple choices with single- or multi-correct answers, and essay questions requiring examinees' independent analysis. The full mark of the paper is 100.

The test subject of foreign languages is branched into three areas, namely English, Japanese and Russian. This test subject is aimed to examine whether examinees are sufficiently competent to read relevant materials in foreign languages that are desired by the graduate study. The main focus of the examination is to check examinees' comprehensive ability to utilize foreign languages in the areas of reading, writing, translating and the like. The examination paper is composed of multiple choices, translation tasks and writing assignments. The full mark also amounts to 100.

In accordance with the different requirements of mathematical knowledge and competence imposed by subjects or specialties concerning engineering, economics and management, the test subject of mathematics is branched into four forms and aims to examine whether examinees understand basic mathematical concepts and theories, whether they have grasped the basic mathematical methods, and whether they can employ the abstract thinking ability, the logic inferential ability and the spacial imagination ability to analyze and solve problems. The examination paper is composed of multiple choices,

blank filling items and essay questions. The full mark is 150.

With the increasing number of population for graduate admission, the security and fairness of the examination become the focus of the public's attention. Before the establishment of an effective system of supervision and market-stimulating coordination, the Ministry of Education puts forward the reform focus during the period between 2006 and 2010 for the graduate selective examination system. The proposition of the reform focus is based on the summary of China's graduate admission practice during the years 2001 to 2005 and the learning of international experience. In order to enhance the quality of graduate selection and expand universities' admission autonomy, the current reform focus consists of three aspects, namely the reform of the secondary examination system, the preliminary examination system and the recommended examination-free system. Among the three aspects, the reform of the preliminary examination is of primary importance. The basic requirements of reform in this aspect are to further simplify and optimize the test subjects and revise the test contents, as well as strengthening the secondary examination's inspection of examinees' quality in specialties and their practice ability. With these potential changes, it is hoped that the preliminary examination can prioritize the testing of examinees' general qualities and abilities, and their general accomplishments in particular specialties.

According to the reform requirements, the Ministry of Education in 2007 initiated the adjustment of the test subjects and contents of graduate entrance examination which aims at specialties concerning education, history and medicine. In preliminary examination, the test subjects were reduced to 3 courses from 4. For specialties of education, psychology and history—the three first-class subjects, the examination papers for comprehensive basic knowledge concerning specialties are written uniformly by the national authority-NEEA. The selection and arrangement of the test contents takes into consideration not only the national requirements for the selection of academically advanced candidates, but also the current undergraduate teaching practice in universities. The reformed examination sticks to the principle of checking general, basic knowledge and core courses, and emphasizes on the checking of examinees' basic knowledge of specialty, grasp of basic theories and corresponding abilities that are obligatory for the graduate study. Under the influence of

reform initiated by the Ministry of Education, the number of test subjects designed for the examination of examinees' comprehensive, basic knowledge of specialty ranges from four to five.

In the field of education specialty, the test subjects of the comprehensive, basic knowledge of specialty include the Principles of Education, the Domestic and Overseas Education History, the Education Psychology, and the Education Research Methods. The examination paper is composed of multiple choices, statement judging and opinion expounding items, essay questions and items requiring analysis and exposition. The full mark amounts to 300, of which the objective items take up 30%.

In the field of psychology specialty, the test subjects of the same kind include the General Psychology, the Developmental and Educational Psychology, the Experimental Psychology, and Statistics and Measurement in Psychology. The examination paper is comprised of multiple choices with single- and multi- answers, essay questions and items involving relevant comprehensive knowledge of the special field. The full mark is 300, of which the objective items take up 53%.

For the study of history, the basic test subjects include Chinese Ancient History, Chinese Modern and Contemporary History, World Ancient History, and World Modern and Contemporary History. The examination paper consists of multiple choices, items for term explanation, essay questions and items for the analysis of historical materials. The full mark also amounts to 300, of which the objective items take up 13%.

For the study of herbalist therapy, the comprehensive test subjects include the Basic Theories of Herbalist Therapy, the Diagnostic Study of Herbalist Therapy, the Study of Herbalist Medicine, the Traditional Study of Herbalist Medicine, the Internal Study of Herbalist Therapy and the Study of Acupuncture. As for the study of Western therapy, the comprehensive test subjects include Physiology, Biochemistry, Pathology, Medicine and Surgery. The examination papers of the above two specialties consist only of multiple choices.

III. The characteristics of the graduate school admission in China

China's current selection system of graduate admission is determined by its national

system—the centralization of state power. It has been proven that this is a system that is currently the most effective and applicable, and in accordance with the national situation of China. Its biggest advantage is that it can maximize the security and fairness of the admission to the largest extent.

In a big nation like China, the scale of examinees reaches millions of persons each year, therefore the security of examination and the regularity of admission is a key issue that cannot be neglected. Under such conditions, how to realize and sustain the fairness and impartiality of the examination, admission and matriculation has special importance; for it does not only affect each examinee, but also influences the social steadiness.

Every coin has two sides, so does the current selection system for graduate admission. Under this system, the examinee has to reach the lowest matriculation mark before gaining admission to the secondary examination. This kind of test manner may deprive some students that have special talents of the opportunity to receive more advanced education.

Within the general framework of the graduate entrance examination system, the Ministry of Education in China is working on the stepwise exploration of a more scientific and sound examination system, for example, the current reform of secondary examination, preliminary examination and the recommended examination-free system. The strategic goal and task of building a nation rich in innovative spirit constitutes the current background of the reform. To achieve this goal, it is urgent to train a number of outstanding innovative candidates. Accordingly, the goal of undergraduate education should be gradually shifted from the training of advanced candidates who are expert in various specialties, have solid foundations in the basics and extensive knowledge coverage, and are highly competent and qualified to the establishment of a diversified and time-suited training model that emphasizes the quality-nurturing education and makes the knowledge transfer, the ability cultivation and the quality enhancement harmonize with each other.

In summary, the general guideline of the reform is adhering to the principle of facilitating the quality-nurturing education, enhancing the fairness, impartiality, security and efficiency, and expanding universities' autonomy in graduate admission.

The goal of the reform is to integrate, simplify, optimize and regulate the test subjects by following the rules of selecting advanced and outstanding candidates and by prioritizing

the checking of general quality and ability, and subject accomplishments in the preliminary examination; to make a substantial reduction of the test subjects in the preliminary examination within the next three to five years by establishing test subjects according to specialties, first-class subject groups or first-class subjects; to realize the uniform test development or joint test development among universities; to reform the test contents of the preliminary examination in order to enhance its quality, soundness, security, effectiveness and fairness.

- The further improvement desired by the selection system of graduate admission in China

With the developing history of the Republic of China, China's graduate school admission has also existed for more than fifty years. Especially after the enactment of the reform-and-opening policy and nearly thirty years of endeavor, the examination for graduate school admission has developed into a relatively perfect set of systems and methods and also made remarkable accomplishments in practice, which ensure the successful selection of excellent candidates. We have already had three millions: by far, the number of masters has already exceeded one million; the number of master candidates has amounted to one million; the number of the population applying for the graduate examination has also exceeded one million. While obtaining some achievements, we are also actively engaged in the exploration and experimenting of the reform, for example, empowering 34 universities to independently determine the lowest mark for admission to the secondary examination, reducing the test subjects in the preliminary examination from 4 to 3 on the experimental sites, reforming the recommended examination-free system and the secondary examination, etc.

Under the global trend nowadays, China's selection system for graduate school admission also needs to learn and import the relevant experience of other countries. Moreover, the imported experience needs ceaseless innovation and development, which should be based on the national situation of China, in order to be better adapted to the current demands of China's construction work of modernization. In this aspect, the author thinks that the further reform should adhere to the following principles:

1. Reform the management model of graduate school admission examination. The national educational administrative department should take the charge of macro-coordination and supervision. The educational examination organizations should offer services for examination. The individual institutions demanding new recruits should make independent decisions concerning the total number of new recruits, the number for different specialties, the form of examination, and the requirements of matriculation, etc.

2. Reform and improve the test contents under the condition of clarifying the functions of preliminary and secondary examinations. The basic functions of the preliminary examination should be situated at the checking of examinees' basic quality, general ability and their grasp of the basics in particular subjects. The delineation of examinees' understanding of the basics in particular subjects is dependent on the establishment of the examination of such knowledge. Besides, the design of this kind of examination should be based on the specialties that examinees apply for. Therefore the uniform examination of public courses should prioritize the checking of examinees' basic quality and general ability, which the design of the test contents should consistently embody, in order to change the current belief in checking a certain subject in the uniform examination of public courses.

3. Carry out multiple preliminary examinations annually and stipulate the period of mark validity.

4. Reform the format and contents of test-result sheets. As for an examination involving the checking of multiple subjects or abilities, it is necessary to provide examinees and individual institutions that seek potential candidates with marks for separate test items. Informed by this kind of marks, examinees can locate their shortcomings and consequently can carry out pertinent revision; in the meantime, individual institutions can recruit candidates according to different requirements for abilities by different subjects or specialties and this admission is thus beyond the limitation of the undifferentiated total marks.

5. For the establishment of evaluation system, the state should give universities sufficient autonomy. The specialties seeking new recruits should also be empowered by universities to independently determine the weighting of various indexes by taking into consideration the training requirements of their own graduates. In doing so, it is hoped that it can meet

the individualized demands of different subjects and specialties, and can realize a diversified evaluation and selection manner in a real sense.