Wandering in the Shadow of Egalitarianism and Equity: A Social and Cultural Explanation to the Underdeveloped Gifted Education in China

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Abstract

Today it is accepted that the development of gifted and talented children is important to enable a nation to compete successfully. In China, though the estimated number of gifted children reaches 20 million (Chu, 2012), gifted education has seldom received sufficient support. The objections to gifted education always suppress suggestions that support programs for gifted students when educational policy is drafted. Starting with a historical review of the gifted education programs and policies in China since 1978, this paper discusses the main reasons for lack of support for gifted education in China from social and cultural perspectives. I conclude that the long-lasting ideology of egalitarianism, the overwhelming pursuit of educational equity and the dominant ideology of socialism have significantly hindered the development of gifted education. Driven by such beliefs and ideologies, the concept of giftedness and gifted education, the relationship between egalitarianism and elitism, and between equity and equality, are often severely misunderstood, which not only harms existing gifted education programs, but suppresses the potential for open discussion about the implementation of gifted education. Finally, I propose how gifted education should be framed in the future educational reform scheme in China and other countries with similar cultural and social environments.

Keywords

gifted education, gifted and talented students, China, egalitarianism, educational equity, socialism

Introduction

Today, it is widely acknowledged that gifted and talented children are valuable assets for a nation's development and excellence. An increasing number of nations have placed a strong emphasis on gifted education as they have recognized the importance of developing top students for global competition (Fischer & Müller, 2014; Sękowski & Łubianka, 2015; VanTassel-Baska, 2013), especially in such advanced fields as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). However, in China, the largest developing country in the world, gifted education has seldom gained sufficient policy attention and public support. The current gifted education programs are poorly framed with very limited range and influence. Public understanding of gifted

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education is mixed with bias and prejudice (Yang & Wang, 2009). The objections to gifted education stifle any supportive voice in drafting an educational policy agenda. An official report in 2010 estimated that there were 202 million school-aged students in China (Chu, 2012). Assuming that the percentage of gifted children is usually around 10 percent of the entire population, there should be 20 million gifted children in need of gifted education to develop their potential to the fullest.

Though the definitions of giftedness and gifted education vary (Harty, Adkins, & Sherwood, 1984; Renzulli, 2002; Steenbergen-Hu & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2016), researchers have reached some agreement on a number of typical qualities of giftedness. For example, Brodbelt (1979) suggested that six abilities and characteristics have been professionally identified to categorize gifted persons: intellectual ability, academic aptitude, creativity, leadership skills, psychomotor ability, and skill in the visual or performing arts. A widely used category of giftedness in China emphasized comprehensive knowledge base, long attention span and good memory, intellectual curiosity, rich imagination, and an ability to solve problems and the ability to think creatively (Zha, 1986). More recent studies provided more complicated frameworks to understand talent and giftedness, with an interplay with culture and values (Olszewski-Kubilius & Thomson, 2015; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). But overall, creative productivity has been recognized for its potential contribution to societal development in an era of globalization (Reis & Renzulli, 2010).

Starting with a historical review of the gifted education programs and policies in China since 1978, this paper discusses the main reasons why gifted education has not been well accepted in China from social and cultural perspectives. By illustrating the omnipresent impact of egalitarianism, educational equity and socialism, this paper can shed light on deepening the understanding of the function of external policy environment on gifted education, leading us to further consider how to design and implement efficient gifted education programs in a developing society with underlying cultural and ideological obstacles.

A Historical Review of Gifted Education Programs and Policies in Contemporary China

The Chinese government launched its first experiment of gifted education in 1978 (Li & Delisle, 1990; Phillipson et al., 2009), largely as a policy tool to eliminate the negative consequences of educational policies that existed during the Great Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. From then on, academic discussion and a few notable examples of gifted education emerged at both national and local levels. Based on an analysis of the relevant legislation, government regulations and policies of the past four decades, three major modes emerged as ways to implement gifted education programs and policies in China. Chronologically, they were: (1) "Key School" and "Key Class" at every school level; (2) "Opportunity Class" in a small number of top universities and high schools; and (3) a new national plan to train top-notch innovative talent called "Everest Plan," which only involved a few selected high schools and universities. The main characteristics and flaws of each mode are described below, with an emphasis on how such programs are funded and how gifted students are identified and educated respectively. The ideologies behind each mode are also briefly discussed.

Key School and Key Class

The first experiment of formal gifted education in contemporary China was initiated in 1978, as one of the mechanisms to correct the educational policies driven by the extreme egalitarianism and anti-intellectualism of the Great Cultural Revolution (Phillipson et al., 2009; Zhao, 2014). In 1977, Xiaoping Deng, the most influential central leader of the era, suggested that developing education required

ability to "walk on both legs," a metaphor of promoting mass education and gifted education simultaneously. According to the strategic plan he proposed, it was necessary to build "key schools" in the nation in primary, secondary and post-secondary education respectively, using tests to screen and to recruit top students with the greatest potential at each school level. All funded by the government, those key schools were usually staffed with experienced leaders and teachers, and provided with sufficient educational resources, advanced teaching strategies and optimized learning environments. They were expected to cultivate elites and professionals in all fields, especially in subjects such as STEM, which was critical for national development at that time.

The basic logic behind the key school policy derived directly from China's economic development strategy, which was in effect since the late 1970s. With limited resources available, it was reasonable, and even inevitable, to devote some of the best resources to a few most talented people, cities and regions[1]. From 1978 to 1993, the Ministry of Education released a series of regulations that created key schools at different school levels nationwide, with a focus on primary and secondary schools (Chu, 2012). Driven by the same utilitarian logic, it soon became common in schools to build their own "key class" that gathered top students in each grade, as well as the best teachers and learning resources. No statistics are available to accurately estimate the exact number of key schools and key classes, but they have rapidly expanded to the entire country and become a very common phenomenon in the centralized educational system.

Seemingly, as the widest and most influential means of implementing gifted education in China, the practice of establishing key schools and key classes looks very similar to the modern mode of gifted education in other countries. Grouping gifted individuals together, permits them to study better with challenging peers at an appropriate pace. Some research has confirmed the long-term and short-term benefits of such grouping to the gifted students (Kulik & Kulik, 1991). In China, the key school and key class policy did achieve some success in selecting and cultivating top students. However, its policy effect was severely compromised for several reasons.

Echoing the common difficulties that other countries encountered, the first reason involves how to identify giftedness and gifted children. In reality, standardized test scores are normally used as the major, if not the only, criterion to evaluate eligibility for key schools and classes (Li & Delisle, 1990). The key elements of giftedness, such as critical thinking and creative productivity, are neglected in the screening system, which utterly undermines the actual effect of gifted education. We certainly cannot say there is no correlation between test scores and talents or giftedness, but there exist many so-called gifted underachievers who do not meet those stereotypical expectations (Roach & Bell, 1989), and therefore are ignored by the key school and key class policy.

Second, tailored curricula and teaching strategies for gifted students in key schools and classes is usually non-existent. The "acceleration" and "enrichment" modes are the usual practices employed for gifted students. While "acceleration" allows schools to accept students younger than the typical age limitation and "enrichment" usually provides students with more books, materials, lectures and academic competitions (Li & Delisle, 1990), the teaching methods and content for the gifted students are not notably different from methods and content provided to ordinary students.

Third, students in key schools and classes are assessed by the same periodic examinations as ordinary students, which explains why key schools and key classes have become standardized test-driven. Differing little from ordinary schools and classes, the teaching and learning processes in key schools and classes, including teaching strategies, class materials, learning modes and curricula, are focused on

preparing for the standardized tests. The quality of such schools and classes is also judged by the number of graduates accepted by leading universities and colleges. Though a small percentage of key schools actively implement advanced educational experiments, trying to enlighten students' creativities and innovations, the test-driven environment has already undermined the ultimate goal and essence of gifted education.

So in fact, the key school and key class policy is a superficial form of gifted education, since it gradually deviated from its original purpose, which resulted in unexpected detrimental outcomes. Numerous studies in China and other countries have documented that students' demographic information, especially familial socio-economic status (SES), is highly related to their school performance (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Hannum, 1999; Sirin, 2005; Whyte, 2010). The key school and key class policy has contributed to the enlargement of the educational gap and the social gap in China by filtering elite students by test scores. Upward social mobility through education for disadvantaged and impoverished students has become harder than usual. Meanwhile, as the best educational resources have been drastically accumulated in key schools, such policy has also increased the development gap among different schools and universities in the last two decades. Key schools have become much stronger and more competitive than other ordinary ones, which then severely harms educational equity, leading to widespread corruption when enrolling new students every year. Bribery is often used by parents in order to send their children to those schools and classes. Therefore, while the revised Compulsory Education Law in China of 2006 forbade the establishment of new key school and key class, the gap between existing key schools and ordinary schools will not naturally narrow down for a long time.

Opportunity Class

The second means of providing gifted education in China is called "opportunity class." Certain universities and colleges were authorized to set up special classes for under-age juveniles with superior intelligence and talents. The first opportunity class in the country was started in 1978 by the University of Science and Technology of China (Chen, Stevenson, & Lee, 1994). In 1985, new legislation by the Ministry of Education designated twelve leading universities, including Peking University and Tsinghua University, to open their own opportunity classes (Phillipson et al., 2009). The ages of the students enrolled in those classes normally ranged from 11 to 16. However, for various reasons, all the universities cancelled their opportunity classes so far, except for University of Science and Technology of China and Xi'an Jiaotong University.

Partly as supplement to the key school and key class policy, opportunity class is more like the authentic form of gifted education program since it is designed and implemented with clearer focus on giftedness and talents. Students are screened for admission and evaluated routinely by multiple scientific and comprehensive measurements, including academic and non-academic performance, intelligent and non-intelligent outcomes, psychological and physical status, and so on. Nevertheless, compared with enrollment in nationwide key schools and classes, the number of students enrolled in university-based opportunity classes is negligible. In Zhejiang University, one of the leading comprehensive universities in China, only around 150 students enter the opportunity class every year. Putting all the participating universities together, the number of freshmen every year is still under one thousand (Chu, 2012).

The opportunity class policy also inspired some primary and secondary schools to set up special classes for young students with extraordinary intelligence. In 1984, Tianjin Experimental Primary School started the first

opportunity class at primary school level in China. This was copied by dozens of other top primary and secondary schools. The typical model used in those opportunity classes was the popular "acceleration" model, pushing the students to complete six years' of curricula in four years. So far, some schools have reported experiencing gains in cultivating students' critical thinking, logical reasoning and creative innovating. However, just as with university-based opportunity classes, the very small number of participating schools has resulted in no significant impact on the national development of gifted education, especially considering that most of the schools are located in several modern big cities.

Everest Plan

The above two modes of gifted education have diminished in the first decade of 21st century. However, largely in response to increasing public doubt about the quality of mass higher education, gifted education has gained new attention of policymakers in the last ten years. In July 2010, the Ministry of Education released a landmark policy scheme, the National Medium- and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020), which called for cultivating each student's unique strengths and potential, and developing those accordingly. At both national and provincial levels, multiple strategies for gifted education have been quickly implemented. The most influential approach was introduced in 2009, when a new national project, Experimental Plan of Cultivating Outstanding Students in Basic Subjects, also known as the Everest Plan, was officially initiated. Starting with eleven top Chinese universities with strong specialties in science and engineering, the intent was to select top students in mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, and computer science from high schools every year. Special funds were allocated by the central government to pay for the best instructors with focus on international perspectives, learning environment, scholarship, research grants, and so on. The students in this program were expected to grow up to be future leaders in those subjects. Those universities were given full autonomy to choose their selection standards, training strategies and assessment methods. To date, the number of participating universities has increased to twenty.

Accordingly, many provinces have updated their educational development plans with a new focus on cultivating creative and talented youths. In several developed regions like Beijing and Shanghai, a few high schools have already made significant progress in enriching their curricula and teaching methods to meet the governmental requirements for gifted education. Comparatively, all the efforts under the Everest Plan look even closer to the ideal type of gifted education. Nevertheless, the major flaw still lies in its very small range of influence. Only top schools in big cities, most of which were previous key schools with abundant educational resources, played active roles in this new movement of gifted education. For the rest of the regions and schools in China, the plan has had little response and effect.

In summing up, in China in the past 40 years, the three major modes of providing gifted education programs and policies that support them have several features in common. First, some fundamental questions about gifted education have neither been answered nor examined in practice. The definition of giftedness, or the criteria for identifying gifted children and assessing qualified gifted education are still under debate (Yang & Wang, 2009). Second, it is the government, not the public that advocates for gifted education. That suggests that the existing gifted education programs are framed mainly for the benefit of the country, instead of the gifted individuals. Third, the range and actual effects of gifted education policies are always restricted, especially when compared with the huge number of gifted students in the country. Such policies are usually labelled as educational experiments, despite the fact that

follow-up action has seldom been taken afterwards. Fourth, the implementation of gifted education in China has been heavily influenced by the traditional standardized testing movement, which shackles the creativity of every aspect of those programs, and especially contributes to the underrepresentation of the gifted population (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008).

The implementation of gifted education in China involves contradictions. Some politicians and researchers periodically address the strategic significance of gifted education at the national level, but the experiment of gifted education diminishes over time and is constantly lacking public support. Educators acknowledge the importance of gifted education for gifted students, but meanwhile feel apprehensive or even hostile to gifted education in practice. This paradox echoes the ceaseless debates on the advantages and disadvantages of gifted education globally (Heller, 2005; Phillipson et al., 2009; Wollam, 1992). Though the value of developing giftedness is accepted in an era of globalization, gifted education faces multiple philosophical and practical challenges, especially from the perspective of egalitarians (Mazie, 2009). To achieve an applicable trade-off, the causes of the paradox need to be fully revealed. In China, the reasons are not limited to the technical difficulties of identifying and caring for each student's special needs, interests and potentials under current test-driven educational system, but deeply rooted in the broader cultural and social environment.

Understanding the Gifted Education Paradox from Cultural and Social Perspectives

As in many other countries, gifted education has not received enough support in China for complicated reasons. But from the cultural and social perspectives, three contributing factors are especially noteworthy: advocacy of gifted education violates the long-lasting tradition of egalitarianism, harms the presumption of educational equity, and more politically, challenges the ideology of socialism by its implicit preference for individualism.

Egalitarianism Versus Elitism

From the cultural perspective, the ideology of gifted education is in conflict with the long-lasting tradition of egalitarianism in China. In his classic work *The Analects*, the most important Chinese philosopher and educator, Confucius, once commented, "people are concerned about the uneven distribution of wealth over poverty." The old saying illustrates the essence of egalitarianism deeply rooted in Chinese culture. In such an ancient society of centralized bureaucracy, equal distribution was strongly desired when public good or social wealth was allocated. The Great Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, in particular, pursued the ideology of egalitarianism in education to the extreme, with the utopian fantasy of eliminating all of the distinctions between education and other vocations and creating a type of new education that was politically, intellectually, and physically integrated with other social enterprises (Cheng & Manning, 2003). As one of the dominant civic ideologies, and a core demand of the impoverished social class, the influence of egalitarianism goes beyond the field of education and permeates most open discussions in the public sphere. It has even been used as the ultimate goal of most violent revolutions in Chinese history in the past twenty centuries.

As the major pathway for upward social mobility, access to education, especially superior-quality education, was subject to the principle of egalitarianism, which laid the solid foundation for Chinese Imperial Examination and the entire centralized educational system. Regardless of personal background, every student was guaranteed equal opportunity to study at will and take the exam. In this sense, egalitarianism was the key to maintaining social stability. As mass schooling developed into a

powerful social institution in the last century, it affected the ideology of egalitarianism and social justice, too. Education has functioned tacitly as a comprehensive mechanism to promote egalitarianism by enriching people's knowledge and attitudes about egalitarianism and equity, especially between races, ethnicities and genders (Shu, 2004). Correspondingly, educational resources are expected to be allocated equally among all eligible citizens.

Through the lens of egalitarianism, it is easy to look at gifted education as a specific form of elitism, since it asks for disproportional allocation of all types of educational resources and reserves much richer and better resources only for gifted students. That is why advocating for gifted education often evokes strong public opposition. Some scholars argued it is misleading to believe gifted education is equivalent to elitism (Olstad, 1978). Nonetheless, as long as criteria to identify students with real giftedness is absent, and the entry to gifted education is decided mainly by standardized test scores, it is hard to differentiate gifted education from elitism, especially in a society such as China where large social and economic disparities exist (Whyte, 2010). Students from elite families would have more chance to take advantage of those opportunities, reinforcing the common impression that gifted education is an excessive abuse of public resource for private needs.

Theoretically, egalitarianism and gifted education are not mutually exclusive. In affluent societies egalitarianism is even associated with higher average educational achievements (Condron, 2011). But in reality the concerns about gifted education often oscillate between the two poles of equality and excellence (Heller, 2005; Wollam, 1992). In developing countries like China, the pursuit of excellence has to defer to egalitarianism, with equal educational rights of the majority taking priority.

Educational Equity Versus Educational Equality

From the social perspective, gifted education has rarely won much support from the public because it results in spoiling educational equity. In a society where social and educational inequalities have become the major threat to the stability of the nation in the last two decades (Kanbur & Zhang, 2005), any policy agenda that may further aggravate the socio-economic gap will not receive support. Unfortunately, the emergence of gifted educational programs has raised many direct challenges to educational equity.

Chinese researchers usually define educational equity by a classical approach, taking school as a given entity and focusing on the question of who gets into school (Mingat & Tan, 1985). Such definition manifests an essential call for equal educational opportunity. Baker and Friedman-Nimz (2004) categorized equal educational opportunity into three ways: horizontal equity, fiscal neutrality and vertical equity. What programs like gifted education attempt to achieve is vertical equity, implying unequal treatment of unequals. However, constrained by the trend of egalitarianism, educational equity in China is usually equated as horizontal equity, which requires equal treatment of unequals.

Many critics in China are concerned that those gifted education programs may serve as a haven for upper-middle-class students (Chu, 2012; Yang & Wang, 2009), as much empirical evidence has shown (Gallagher, 1995). As mentioned above, the widespread key schools and key classes did result in systematically ruling out the underrepresented groups and enlarging the social and educational gap existing in the population. Students in key schools and key classes were treated highly preferentially compared with their ordinary peers. Furthermore, in line with previous research literature from other countries that shows that minority groups are constantly underrepresented when identifying gifted

children (Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005; Winsler, Karkhanis, Kim, & Levitt, 2013), in China, the limited opportunities to high-quality education are unfairly distributed, particularly based on students' individual and family background. Under these circumstances, gifted education programs inevitably exacerbate social conflict by putting disadvantaged groups in even worse positions, resulting in embedded and lasting discrimination against disadvantaged students and minorities.

Actually, no matter what form of gifted education programs is applied, in China the selection process always lacks sufficient representation because of the small range and strong preference for advanced schools and regions. Gifted students from rural areas or from the underdeveloped central and west area of China are provided little access to qualified schools and classes. The opportunity class policy and the Everest Plan mainly benefit advanced cities. The qualities of key schools are not even comparable between cities and countryside, or between the east and west. Therefore, without national criteria to identify gifted children, and to provide equal access of all eligible students to those programs, gifted education programs will mainly benefit a few elite gifted students, formulating a straight violation of education equity in the population of gifted children.

Advocates of gifted education may argue that gifted education agrees with the principle of educational equality, instead of equity. But the difference between those two concepts is often misunderstood in China. In contrast with educational equity, educational equality is usually used in a more comprehensive sense in China. It requires differential treatment on a reasonable basis, implying the infusion of diversity issues (Chu & Yang, 2008). Educational opportunities and resources should then be allocated to individuals based on their special needs. Gifted education programs then could be viewed as an ideal way to respect and cultivate students' special needs and benefit them substantially (Ford, Moore, & Harmon, 2005). But from this perspective, it is even harder to justify gifted education in China. It is understandable that some people's special talents and potentials deserve better exploitation and maximum usage. But as some researchers remark, all students at all ages have relative talent strengths, and it is the schools' responsibility to identify and nurture them (Feldhusen, 1998). Every child deserves some type of education tailored for his uniqueness, otherwise the principle of educational equality would be violated. However, it is apparently an unfeasible task in Chinese society at this time.

Egalitarianism and educational equity do not necessarily prevent individual difference. Some researchers even argue that schools cannot be truly egalitarian unless they acknowledge students' differences (Winner & Karolyi, 1998). But the differential treatment should be concentrated on assisting and compensating the disadvantaged students, for example emotionally and physically handicapped and bilingual students, not only cultivating the gifted ones. As another old Chinese proverb says, "It is the right thing to offer others fuel in snowy weather, but not to add brilliance to one's present splendor."

Socialism Versus Individualism

The implementation of gifted education programs has an underlying assumption of individualism (MacCurdy, 1960). Gifted education programs are not just needed to help children with special talents to learn and to excel; they are entitled to appropriate education designed for their special needs. Cultivating the talents of these children is an exhibition of respecting individuals' human rights. However, this assumption is hard to defend under the Chinese mainstream ideology of socialism that favors public interests over individual rights. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, education has been strictly required to serve the majority of the mass population, and the modernization of China (Wang, 2009). Gifted education usually gains its

support when it is believed to be associated with national competition and long-term development. Meanwhile, when a society has an overwhelming faith in collective efforts over individual talents, appeals for the legitimacy of specialized gifted education will be undoubtedly suppressed. That explains why the major modes of gifted education policies and programs in China are always proposed and encouraged by the government, not the public.

Post-Mao China has adopted many new strategies such as privatization and market based reforms to cope with the challenge of globalization, which also brings significant reforms to education governance and policies (Mok, 2005; Zhao, 2014). But the ideology of socialism still permeates every aspect of education along with the centralized curriculum structure, teaching materials, instructional strategies and examination systems. The essence of socialism is taught systematically through moral education, integrated curriculum and various school activities. Schools are deprived of autonomy to develop their local and school-based gifted education programs. A school environment of individualism can hardly be established, which hinders the public awareness of the value of gifted education.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Fifty years ago, Adler (1967) noted some correlation between economic cycles and public interest in gifted education in the United States. He argued that during the period of depression, special education for the gifted students was equated with special attention for the privileged, which is undemocratic to some degree. What this paper adds to the literature is the understanding that not only the status of economic development, but also the socio-economic disparities and mainstream ideology within a society lead to serious public doubts and obstacles to the development of gifted education. At the center of such doubts in China lies the pursuit of egalitarianism, educational equity, and a widespread faith in socialism over individualism. In such a policy environment, any proposal for gifted education suffers from strict scrutiny of the public.

In fact, people are worried for good and solid reasons. In a developing and highly uneven society, gifted education will easily become another institutional tool for segregation, systematically blocking underrepresented groups from enrolling. The expansion of gifted education may enlarge, instead of bridging, the educational disparities within the society. As the largest developing country, with a sharply increasing social and economic gap, China provides an example illustrating the importance of cultural and social environment to the fostering of efficient gifted education programs. The long-lasting ideology of egalitarianism, the overwhelming pursuit of educational equity, and the dominant ideology of socialism have jointly forged strong barriers for the development of gifted education.

While addressing the importance of external environment, this paper does not suggest that it is unnecessary or impossible to promote gifted education in a contemporary developing society like China. But it does suggest that certain strategies have to be carefully adopted first to reduce the tension between gifted education advocates and the discontented public. Theoretically, a legitimate gifted education program should be based on two minimum standards: the students must be really "gifted," and the education must be able to satisfy their needs and capacities. Otherwise the eventual outcome of gifted education would be equivalent to elite education. So first, the problem of how to identify giftedness and gifted children directly determines the social acceptance of gifted education. For China and other similar developing countries, it is important to establish comprehensive and scientific standards for such programs in order to select students with real gifts and talents (Johnsen, 2012). As traditional measures such as standardized test scores and IQ test are rarely

practical in evaluating gifted students (Gallagher, 1998), more accurate instrumentation, and assessment skills that can fully take every talent into account, have to be developed.

Second, the curricula and instructional modes for gifted students need to be better structured at each school level, with specific emphasis on different types of talent. Third, accelerating the process of legislation can help secure equal access to gifted students from all over the country in response to the pursuit of educational equity.

Finally, maintaining a delicate balance between developing mass education and gifted education is a difficult but vital policy goal for China and other developing countries which also are in need of sufficient educational resources. Without an expansion of high-quality mass education for the public, gifted education can hardly overcome the ideological barrier of egalitarianism and win its firm standpoint in the future educational policy scheme.

Notes

1. The economic plan at that time required development of the eastern part of China first, because it was more urbanized and had much more advantages (such as transportation). The middle and western parts were sacrificed, since resources nationwide were mainly given to the east for decades. To a large degree, this contributed to a huge economic and educational gap between east and west China.

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