

PEKING UNIVERSITY LECTURE

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15 March 2013

TURBULENT TIMES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR QUALIFICATIONS

Introduction

It is a great pleasure to give this lecture at Peking University. Yours is one of the most prestigious universities in the world, ranking among the top four in China and in the top 200 on the Academic Ranking of World Universities. I am here today as part of the cooperation between the PKU and the DeTao Masters' Academy, where I am one of the Education Masters.

My name is Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić. I come from Yugoslavia, a country that no longer exists, I was born in Sarajevo, a beautiful city surrounded by hills which, sadly, is better known for wars that started or ended there. I have spent my life in international education, first through my own education in various parts of UNESCO where I was head of Higher Education until 2011. I still live in Paris.

My title today is "*Turbulent Times for Higher Education: Implications for Qualifications*". I shall reflect with you on the challenges facing higher education. Can universities survive as the traditional institutions that have existed for centuries?

Since this 21st century began, people have predicted that universities as you know them now will disappear. For example, a publication titled "*As the Walls of Academia are Tumbling Down*" asked how today's world will reposition universities. As new technologies spread, will the "click and mouse university" replace the "brick and mortar university"?

More recently another book, "*The Innovative University*", explores how universities can find new and less costly ways of performing their valuable functions so as to ensure their on-going economic vitality and save themselves from disruption and decline.

Although it is good that we examine the threats facing higher education institutions, it is difficult to imagine that universities will disappear. However, higher education is facing unprecedented changes in turbulent times. To survive, institutions will need to adapt to change.

I shall begin with a brief history of universities to show how they have preserved continuity for centuries. I will then look at the unprecedented changes facing higher education today, taking my inspiration from some of the new dynamics identified by UNESCO's 2009 World Conference on Higher Education: massification and the diversification of providers. Finally, I will explore the implications for qualifications and quality.

Brief history of universities – continuity and change

Institutions of higher learning have existed since the beginning of civilization.

In Ancient Greece, the “Platonic *Academy*” sometimes referred to as the University of Athens, was founded by the philosopher Plato in 387 BC and lasted nine centuries – with some interruptions.

Aristotle, another well-known Greek philosopher, founded the Peripatetic school in 335 BC whose pupils met at the *Lyceum*. These Greek institutions gave us modern names for institutions, like *the academy* and *the lyceum*.

In Western Europe universities have existed since the Middle Ages. The University of Paris was one of the first. It was founded in the mid-12th century and students were considered part of the Church, which ran the University. They came from many regions and spoke various languages but Latin was the language used in teaching. The university experienced many upheavals before it came to be called the Sorbonne. After one such upheaval, student riots in 1229, numbers of students left Paris and went to Oxford, thus expanding another famous medieval university. Paris is still one of the most prestigious universities in Europe and I was proud to study there.

But even further back in history we can find continuity in higher learning in Asia. Nalanda University was established in the 5th century in Bihar, India, and survived for eight centuries. It focused on Buddhist studies, but also trained students in fine arts, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, politics and the art of war. Nalanda University attracted pupils and scholars from Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Persia, Turkey and, particularly, China. Today, there is a campaign to revive Nalanda University on the same principles of internationalism as the ancient institution.

In China the ancient imperial academy known as Taixue was established during the Han Dynasty in 3 AD. It was supported intermittently by later dynasties until the Qing dynasty. I understand that Peking University, the Imperial University of Peking, which was established in 1898, is regarded as the successor of Taixue.

2009 WCHE: the New Dynamics of Higher Education

That is a snapshot of the past, but what about the present? In the last 15 years UNESCO has organized two World Conferences to examine the unprecedented changes occurring in higher education.

I was Executive Secretary for the second World Conference in 2009, which examined what it called the New Dynamics of Higher Education.

Rising demand and massification

Today, when knowledge is the driver of economic growth, higher education is of increasing concern for politicians. The overriding new dynamic is expansion, which is called massification because rising demand will add tens of millions of students in the coming decades. The global demand for higher education is predicted to expand from 97 million students in 2000 to 263 million students in 2025.

Here in China you now have the world’s largest higher education system. In 2008 there were 30 million students in Chinese higher education institutions, giving an age participation rate of 23.3%. Although growth is now slowing, a recent education reform strategy paper projects that enrolments will reach 35.5 million by 2020.

In most developing countries it will not be possible to satisfy this rising demand by relying only on traditional approaches based on public universities. We are seeing more and more

diversification and differentiation of providers and modes of delivery. Let me give you some examples.

World Class Universities

In recent years we have started to hear about ‘World-Class’ Universities. Your PKU is one of them. In some countries, like China, South Korea and Malaysia governments designate world-class universities, as in China’s 211 and 985 projects. World-class universities are part of what is called a global “race for excellence”.

To achieve world-class status a university needs three things: (a) highly talented people, (both faculty and students), (b) abundant resources to create a rich learning environment and facilitate advanced research, and (c) governance that encourages strategic vision, innovation and flexibility.

World-class universities feed on global and national university rankings. There are now ten international rankings, 50 country-based rankings and some regional ones. Governments and institutions try to do better in these rankings in order to be more competitive. The top places in the rankings include new and innovative institutions as well as famous traditional universities like PKU.

However, rankings are controversial because most of them focus mainly on research output. They give the impression that there is only one model for a university, whereas what we need today is a diversity of different institutions.

Competency-based education

For example, many governments are encouraging the development of Community Colleges, which focus on preparing students for jobs. They focus on the learning outcomes for students, which they define in terms of the competencies that graduates can demonstrate.

Indeed, in some competency-based education models, there are no courses, but simply well defined “competencies” for the student to acquire. I shall return later to the new phenomenon of ‘open badges’, which are a way of capturing these competencies as qualifications.

An example of a competency-based programme here in China, which operates at a high level of specialisation, is the De Tao Masters Academy that I am proud to represent today. Its aim is to enhance China’s cultural, economic and social development by increasing its capacity for high-level innovation in business, industry and education.

De Tao brings eminent experts to China, where they share the tacit knowledge that brought them to world leadership in their fields with high-level Chinese colleagues. Sustained partnerships with elite universities such as PKU and with important business enterprises are a core feature of the DeTao approach.

George Lee was inspired to establish the DeTao Masters Academy by the creative excitement of the 2010 Shanghai Expo. Given these origins, many of the first group of 100 Masters are major international figures in architecture, design and the creative industries. This span of professional expertise will broaden rapidly as the number of Masters grows to over 1,000. Several of the Masters have given lectures here at PKU as I am doing today.

The De Tao Masters Academy is still a very new project, but it could become a unique approach to fostering innovation and creativity at the highest level of industry. However, one of the challenges it

faces is that none of the existing qualifications frameworks is really suitable for this type of advanced learning and tacit knowledge. I shall return to this when I come to talk about Open Badges.

Private provision

The corporate structures of higher education institutions are also changing. Private higher education is now the fastest growing sub-sector. Globally some 30% of students are enrolled in private higher education institutions, some of them operating for profit. For example, Japan and South Korea have had 80% of their students in private higher education institutions for some time.

Today, the fastest increase in private higher education is in developing countries and countries in transition. It is a strong trend in East Asia with a majority of students in Indonesia (72%), Philippines (65%) and Malaysia (51%) enrolled in the private sector. The growth of private institutions is encouraged by international organisations such as the International Labour Organisation, the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank and the OECD because they are thought to provide a better link to the job market. However, many countries still worry about the quality of for-profit higher education in particular.

Cross-border Higher Education

Another trend is a steady increase in cross-border higher education, which designates higher education that occurs when ‘the teacher, student, programme, institution/provider or course materials cross national jurisdictional borders’.

Cross-border higher education (CBHE) can take different forms, ranging from branch campuses and franchises of universities offering courses abroad to eLearning across borders.

International branch campuses (IBCs) make the news, but they are actually a small part of CBHE provision, although they continue to multiply. By 2011 there were 200 degree-awarding IBCs in operation, with more due to open. East Asia is becoming the world’s leading destination for new international campuses. In the last two years the number of IBCs in Singapore increased by 50% to 18 campuses, while here in China a 70% increase brought the total to 17 schools.

For example the UK’s University of Nottingham has created viable IBCs in both China and Malaysia. Conceived as a ‘global university’ by its visionary Vice-Chancellor Sir Colin Campbell, over a decade ago, it was the first foreign university to receive a licence to operate a campus here in China in the city of Ningbo in Zhejiang Province.

Turning to the US, New York University has branches in Abu Dhabi and Albania, and another opened last year in Shanghai in partnership with East China Normal University.

Why do universities create these branch campuses when the investment required is considerable? One of their motivations is pooling international talent, another to have a global outreach.

Distance education

Cross-border education also takes the form of e-learning or online learning. Among its new dynamics the WCHE stressed the opportunities offered to universities by modern technology.

Open Universities that teach at a distance have multiplied around the world. Here in China the Open University of China, formerly China’s Radio and TV University system, has an aggressive strategy to become China’s leading institution for lifelong learning.

Moreover, I see that PKU is posting lectures by prestigious professors online. Your President Zhou Qifeng said "We've produced dozens of episodes and will work hard to increase quality and share it with the public". He added "I have a dream that everyone who wants to go to Peking University can see their wishes come true".

A very new example of distance education making the news is MOOCs – Massive Open Online Courses. MOOCs target students worldwide in another attempt to create global universities.

MIT launched its first MOOC in the spring of 2012. Since then many other elite US universities have launched similar ventures. Within the MOOC movement, however, there are differences in purpose and approach.

MIT's is using them as part of a long-term strategy to use online learning to improve its teaching on campus, while for other universities it is still a marginal activity.

The appeal of MOOCs is that they are free and open to the whole world, offering courses from prestigious universities, mostly in the US – although very soon some MOOCs will be available in Chinese, French, Italian and Spanish. The greatest weakness of MOOCs is that students do not get credit for their work that they can count towards a degree.

However, as well as MOOCs there are initiatives to expand online programmes that do lead to credit and degrees. For example, thirty US state universities have teamed up successfully with a company called Academic Partnerships. Academic Partnerships is now seeking alliances in countries worldwide, including China.

Students gain credit and degrees and there is a sustainable business model for both the universities and the company. Some of these university partners will now make the first course in these online programmes a free and credit bearing MOOC, thus blending both approaches.

Qualifications: from harmonization to diversification

Harmonization of degrees systems

We have shown examples of the differentiation of higher education institutions, and talked about the diversification of modes of delivery, but we should also note a trend towards regional harmonization. This harmonization focuses on degree systems, quality assurance and the recognition of qualifications.

The best-known example is the Bologna Process in Europe. This started when four Ministers of Higher Education – France, Germany, UK and Italy – signed a declaration to create a common higher education area in Europe at the Sorbonne University in 1998. It was an expression of European integration but also aimed to increase the competitiveness of European universities.

The aim of the Bologna Process was to create a “European Higher Education Area”, EHEA, by the year 2010.

This achievement was celebrated by an Anniversary Conference that took place symbolically in two once divided cities – Budapest and Vienna in 2010– and some 50 European Ministers took a train from one city to another. I was proud to be part of this historic Conference.

The harmonisation of degree systems to three cycles (Bachelor/Master/Doctorate) had been achieved and their recognition is largely based on quality assurance.

How do we define quality?

We all study with a purpose, to gain knowledge but also to obtain qualifications and then to move on and get jobs. With degrees from a prestigious university like PKU you should not find it difficult to get good employment. However, in the world generally, graduate employability is a big challenge, especially as today many richer countries have weak economies. It is no longer sufficient to have a degree or diploma, because some employers consider that graduates often do not know how to communicate effectively, have poor work habits and are not competent at problem-solving and decision-making.

This challenge is changing the way that higher education defines and measures quality, one element of which is its relevance for employment.

In any educational enterprise you can identify inputs, processes and outputs – what are sometimes called learning outcomes.

The traditional way to judge the quality of universities was by their inputs: such as the school examination results of new students, the quality of the library, the qualifications of the academic staff, and so on. This approach was criticised by people who said that what counted was not the inputs but what the university did with them for the benefit of students.

That led the focus of quality judgements to switch to processes. How good is the teaching? Are counselling services useful? Are the administrative procedures effective and incorrupt? This new approach gave some indication of institutional efficiency but raised the next and obvious question.

What is the impact of all this on the graduates? What are the learning outcomes?

That is what quality assurance bodies are trying to focus on today. It is a difficult challenge because we do not want all universities to offer the same curricula and teach the same skills. This means that each university must clarify the content of its programmes in terms of student competencies, which has led to a need for new types of qualifications.

What about qualifications?

Turning to qualifications, we are now witnessing both harmonisation at regional level and diversification at global level.

To address this dichotomy, UNESCO is taking steps to develop a global convention on the mutual recognition of qualifications. The underlying challenge is to address the diversity of higher education systems on the one hand and the diversity of qualifications issued by a wide range of new providers, on the other.

For example, a programme from Peking University will be different from a programme from the University of Loja in Ecuador, but we need tools to compare the two qualifications.

The main question here is what does a qualification represent? All universities issue glossy diplomas but it is difficult to judge, especially in an international context, what stands behind them, what did the student learn and what competencies were acquired? There are also fake diplomas, issued by degree mills that sell them for money. Providing transparent and accessible information about qualifications and the learning outcomes will be key to their portability and interpretation.

Open Badges: a new type of qualification

In terms of access to information, I shall give the example of a new type of qualification: Open Badges. These are an indication of accomplishment, backed by special software, that provide a more complete picture of learners' skills and competencies than conventional certificates and diplomas. The badge ecosystem allows individual learners to express their learning, skills and achievements through personal badge collections.

The value of the badge comes from the information or *metadata* that is attached to it in the badge software. This indicates:

- who issued the badge and on what date
- how the badge was earned
- hyperlinks to artefacts, documents or testimonials demonstrating the work that led to earning the badge, and
- authentication back to the issuer.

The metadata will vary according to the skill, the assessment and the body issuing the badge, but it does build an implicit validation system to prevent the illegal copying of badges.

Badges are a very new concept. The DeTao Masters Academy intends to introduce them to China, starting with courses in Industrial Design and Animation at the Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts. We also intend to design badges for PKU students who come to lectures like this one and can demonstrate mastery of the content. This is an exciting and important way of creating very specific qualifications in a wide variety of fields.

Final remarks

I end by saying what a great pleasure it has been to address you. During my 20 years at UNESCO I have been closely involved in the development of policies and frameworks for higher education and I am still actively engaged in issues related to quality as Advisor to the CHEA International Quality Group, based in Washington.

Let me end by asking you seven questions:

- What will PKU look like in ten years' time or fifty years' time?
- To survive, how will PKU need to adapt to change?
- Would PKU students take a MOOCs course if it were offered to them?
- What makes the PKU an institution of quality?
- Do DTMA lectures add value to the studies at PKU?
- Does the qualification issued reflect adequately the knowledge and competencies acquired?
- Would a system of Open Badges be helpful?

Thank you.