

**CHINA'S PLAN FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
(2010-2020)**

ZHAO Litao

EAI Background Brief No. 617

Date of Publication: 15 April 2011

Executive Summary

1. China moved from elite to mass higher education in the first decade of the 21st century. For the next decade, the Outline for Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) takes quality as a priority issue.
2. Higher education has taken up an increasingly larger share of China's educational spending, from 17% in 1997 to about 30% in much of the 2000s, driven by rising tuition fees. Government budgetary spending declined in relative terms until 2006 when it began to increase thereafter.
3. The growing spending on higher education makes accountability a salient issue. Many students are complaining that they are paying higher tuition fees than before only to find less decent jobs or no jobs at all.
4. The public is also debating on why China cannot produce world-class universities and scholars, despite pouring a huge sum of money into the higher education sector.
5. The 2010 outline responds to varied and high demands on higher education by identifying three areas for reform: the examination and enrollment system; the creation of a modern university system, and the expansion of international exchanges and cooperation.
6. The outline recognizes the need for a more equitable examination and enrollment system without providing any guidelines on how to reform. In contrast, the outline endorses the idea of diversified examinations and diversified pathways to higher education.
7. To build a modern university system, the outline recognizes seven types of autonomy to be enjoyed by universities. Meanwhile sound assessment frameworks and incentive systems are to be established for quality control

purposes. There will be no breakthrough to the governance system that holds the president responsible under Party Committee Leadership.

8. In an effort to promote international exchanges and cooperation, China will attract more world-class scholars as well as more international students to the country. Meanwhile Chinese universities are encouraged to run branches overseas.
9. Looking to the next decade, China is in a good position to increase spending on higher education, which in turn can provide conditions for building an academic profession that attracts talent, rewards productivity and permits stability.
10. It is less clear, however, how institutional changes to be introduced in the next decade will improve the quality of higher education commensurate with the increased spending. Much has yet to happen as the outline is vague on the implementation of the plan.