Chinese college entrance examination: Review of discussions and the value orientation of reforms

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1 Introduction

In the field of education in China today, what involves the whole society and causes concerns of various social classes is most likely to be college education...
entrance (CEE). Surveys showed that CEE has become a “nationwide primary examination”, therefore, special events such as traffic control, police vehicle escort, bus station change, and airline diversion, all could happen during CEE season (Fang, 2004). CEE is only a tool admitting students to higher education; nonetheless, it has become the focal point of the whole Chinese society. All reforms about it, major or minor, unexceptionally cause great concerns from relevant population such as students, parents and teachers. Among all these concerns, the most controversial and debated topic is whether or not CEE should be abolished. Why has CEE become a social issue that raises so many concerns and receives so much attention from the public? Where should the so-called nationwide primary examination go from here? Understanding the traditions and trends of the relevant arguments of it, analyzing the reasons why CEE has become a social concern, and exploring the value orientation of the reforms on CEE are inevitable theoretical questions faced by many researchers who are interested in the relationship between the examination and the society.

2 Review on arguments on pros and cons of CEE

Ever since 1952 when CEE was first established, there have been debates over whether the examination should be continued or abolished. Although each side of the argument presents its own viewpoints, the existence of CEE has remained unchallenged.

2.1 The 1950s of the 20th century

The early mission of CEE was twofold: selecting highly qualified candidates for the colleges and cultivating reserve cadres for the nation. The central government strictly enforced admission quotas and stipulated uniform regulations for each step of the admission procedure. Provincial governments were only the executive agencies, and the colleges and candidates had not the least right to decide the admission examination policy or method. In response to the problems resulting from the excessive centralization of power in the hands of the central government and the limited representation of the universities and students, there had been debates over whether the university admissions should be centralized or individualized almost every year prior to the examination from 1953 to 1957 (Yang, 1997).

In December 1956, pinpointing the shortcomings of the uniformed CEE, the Ministry of Higher Education commissioned local departments of education and bureaus of higher education of Shanghai, Jiangsu, Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong, Sichuan, Liaoning, and Shanxi to convene forums among universities to discuss