

TWO UNIVERSITIES, ONE POLICY

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Chinese universities were not very important in the beginning of the economic reform, because they were undersized with very few students and a lot of the university professors were underpaid.

In 1977, China was just emerging from the Cultural Revolution. All the university facilities at this time were downsized, damaged, and so on. During this period, Deng Xiaoping, who was the leader of the reform movement, started a new initiative. Since then, China's universities have expanded their importance and their influence. University professors are getting paid much better than before and we now have a much larger body of graduate and undergraduate students.

If you look at Chinese history in the past thirty years, you would say that the 1980s were different from the 1990s, which in turn were different from the 21st century. In the 1980s, universities were essentially formed to furnish political debates about the definition of modernization and its priorities. **In China, there were four areas of modernization. They were modernization of agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology.** So there was a debate over which of these areas should modernize first. Do we take defense as the first priority, or industrial modernization, or science and technology?

There was never a clear cut difference between universities in promoting one line of reform over another. In general, you can say that some individual scholars have tendencies for particular views, but you can find many of these different views within a single university. For instance, in the Beijing University there were probably voices in favor of reform, but there were also scholars talking about a slowdown of the pace of the reform as well.

In terms of the defense versus other priorities, I think the military universities, for instance the National Defense University, of course argued for the priority to be placed on defense. They argued that if you have a more advanced military, then you have a more advanced technology, which can be transferred back to civilian use. But apparently Deng Xiaoping did not take that view. He decided that economic modernization should take precedence and did not give a lot of money to the military. So here we have an example where **academic debate became a kind of political debate.**

I would not say that there is a sharp dichotomy between scholars and the population in general. To say so would be too simplistic. There is a diversity of views among scholars. You have people with very leftist views and you also have people with very liberal views.

There is one occasion I can think of when the academic community had a

different view from the general public. It was during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. The people in general seemed to oppose that war and did not think it was justified. However, some scholars and academicians were pretty much in favor of the war. That's the rare incident, where we can see a clear division between the academic community and the population at large. In general, you see a wide spectrum of views among scholars. Overall, it's very hard to generalize whether they are a progressive force or not.

In a purely academic sphere, scholars cannot advance very far in terms of a political career. Among the Central Committee members, pure academics rarely get any further than becoming alternate members. And even then only a few of them, maybe seven or eight people. You cannot go far in politics if you have a purely academic background. However, a lot of scholars have been converted into politicians. That's a completely different story. These types usually come from two universities, one is Qinghua University, and the other is Beijing University. These are both very prominent universities, and sometimes **people talk about the Quingua clique, and the Beida (Beijing University) clique,** because these two universities are a lot like Oxford and Cambridge in the UK.

I would not say there is necessarily a contradiction between these two universities and their graduates. Quinghua graduates basically went to the university during the 1950s–1960s, and Beijing University graduates went there in the 1970s and 1980s. So they just belong to different generations. One prime example of a **Quinghua graduate is President Hu Jintao** himself. And the other example of a **Beijing University graduate is Vice Premier Li Keqiang.** They belong to two different generations. But actually, these two men are closer than you would think because they have common work experience in the Youth League. ■

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