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Examining massification policies and their consequences for equality in Chinese higher education : a cultural perspective

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Abstract

This study extends the theoretical perspectives in policy studies on the issue of educational equality by analyzing the influence of cultural values on policies and policy processes. The present paper first teases out the key cultural values regarding education and equality, and then explores how these values shape the institution and policy making in the Chinese context. The policies of expansion, reform in governance and finance, differentiation of provision, and their consequences on equality in Chinese higher education are examined through the lens of culture. The context of close family bonds and strong commitment to education in the Chinese society has bolstered the policies of cost-sharing, privatization and concentrating resources in selected universities. Confucian bureaucracy and hierarchy shaped the strong state and top-down policy process; collectivism and elitism coupled with utilitarianism legitimized the paramount goal of development and strengthened the hierarchy of the higher education system; meritocratic tradition mediated the public demands and state's policies on provision, and buffered the debates about inequality. The idea of minben (people are essence of a

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nation) in Chinese tradition served as a counter force to balance the pursuit of development and equality. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Liu, Jian, E-Mail: jianliu1@sas.upenn.edu