

Higher Education and Global Competition: China, Russia, and De-Sovietization Practices

In the age of global competition, higher education systems and their universities face increasing pressure to modernize their governance, research, curricula, and stakeholder outreach in order to be more responsive to the needs of rapidly changing markets and social expectations. The process of change is however painful for institutions and people alike despite the governments' efforts to control damage from job losses, inequality, and subsidy declines. The legacies of old political and economic mechanisms often linger for a long time and interfere with the process of unlearning and deconstruction in the modernizing society.. While countries with open systems and competitive innovation practices seem to handle organizational and cultural barriers more successfully, the process of 'creative destruction' appears to be more strenuous in the systems where the culture and practices of open and constructive criticism are weak.

The case of de-Sovietization of higher education in the countries that had to deconstruct the legacy of closed, hyper-centralized and regulatory system management presents an interesting perspective. Russia and China both went through the experiences of the Soviet model of higher education in their history, while suffering immensely from indoctrinated learning, excessive control and rigidity in social sciences, as well as confrontational relations with competitive systems elsewhere. Both made tremendous efforts in the 1990s to make change toward integration of their universities and academic professions into the globally-evaluated meritocratic systems of higher learning. Some argue that Chinese policy-makers succeeded more in integrating global standards of institutional governance, professionalization and evaluation than their Russian counterparts, while others point to a more politically-diverse governance and accountability systems in the Russian federal construct in comparison a more monolithic system of China. At the same time, while China was moving more wisely in the global architecture of competitive pressures, Russia rushed into numerous conflicts, while having strained relations with international political, economic, and academic actors. In the very difficult process of handling their legacies, China and Russia are often perceived as re-embracing their past, repeating the old mistakes, and losing their competitive ground in the architecture of soft powers.

A comparative examination of global competition and de-Sovietization practices at Chinese and Russian universities presents an excellent opportunity to explore the complexity of tensions between continuity and change in the international higher education. It allows to explore the dialectical dependencies between political swings of academic reformists and revisionist in both historical and modern perspectives. The modern bilateral interactions of the two countries often echo the political sways among their predecessors in the 1950-70s, ranging from ardent friendship to overt feud, with reformist and revisionist forces mixing together and often ending up with creation of bewildering hybrids in academic practice. The stakeholder analysis can be a useful part in such discussion. For example, some arguments have been emerging that Chinese

reformists have been stimulating innovative strategies among their counterpart-reformists in Russia (e.g., with regard to university rankings; research universities; world-class university movement), while Russian revisionists have been equally reinforcing the lingering legacies of the old Soviet patterns among their counterparts in China (e.g., centralized bureaucracy, self-censorship, ideological uniformity, authoritarian management). Less competitive universities in Russia, for example, have been largely broken down by inability to catch up and cope with the demands of the reformists urging performance evaluation schemes that promote globally competitive research. Some observers argue that the failure to assimilate the globally-competitive forms of inquiry and learning into Russian universities has generated massive frustration and cynicism among local professors and students, bred public resentment, and stimulated nostalgia for a factory model of academic management: top-down, normative, and predictable hierarchy of values and results.

This book intends to bring together researchers of higher education from across the world to look into the problems of continuity and change in Chinese and Russian academes. In unraveling the dilemmas, the proposed volume will engage critical examination of political, economic and social forces at the three levels of governance in higher education in the two countries: superstructure (e.g., influence of international agencies, ranking companies, meritocratic norms, and modernization policies of national governments); structure (e.g., institutional modifications in response to the superstructure stimuli); and under-structure (e.g., changing patterns of individual behaviors, beliefs, value systems and attitudes toward the norms of openness, meritocracy, critical thinking, freedom of expression and mobility). Examining interdependencies and asymmetries in expectations and real activities across these three levels of governance that drive change and continuity in higher education, this book will pursue an exploration of a new theoretical perspective on “creative destruction” in higher education and will contribute to the conceptualization of global competition and organizational change in higher education.

The book will seek to create value for comparative researchers, students of international higher education, policy makers, and institutional designers of academic transformations in China, Russia, and other systems affected by the Soviet legacies. The analytical work in this area is largely missing and is largely needed in the times of increasing turmoil and revisionist movement in the post World War II geopolitics, as well as in the global architecture of higher learning.

The book will be published by CERC-Springer and will build on earlier scholarly inquiries on continuity and change in transformative jurisdictions (please see publications of the HKU’s Comparative Education Research Centre at <http://cerc.edu.hku.hk/publications/cerc-studies-in-comparative-education/>)