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Peking University – Icon of Cultural Leadership

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It is fitting that Peking University (affectionately known as Beida for short) should be first of the portraits of China's universities in the move to mass higher education because of its unique role in modern Chinese history. In our talks with its leaders, faculty and students, we caught the sense of an institution that is constantly under observation as a kind of cultural icon. From the national leadership down to the families of ordinary people in all parts of China, Beida is always being watched for its response to opportunities, challenges, problems and crises. One of its influential educators, Professor Wang Yongquan, described it as "the conscience of the nation."¹

While Beida has had many illustrious leaders, two have been most widely recognized as defining its spirit, Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培) and Ma Yinchu (馬寅初). The brief historical overview that starts this chapter will therefore reflect on their legacy. We also wish to acknowledge that this book owes a great deal to Beida's contemporary Party Secretary, Professor Min Weifang. A well recognized scholar in comparative higher education, with a PhD from Stanford in the economics of education, Professor Min has served as Director of its Institute for Higher Education Research from 1992, Executive Vice-President from 1993, and Party Secretary and Chairman of Council since 2002. Other aspects of Min's background include five years working in a coalmine during the Cultural Revolution, and his decision to enter Beijing Normal University in 1977. This reflected a strong commitment to education, after the devastating losses of the Cultural Revolution decade, that has shaped his career up to now.

Min was first interviewed for our study of the policy process in the move to mass higher education, which appears in Chapter One of this volume. At that time he agreed that Beida should be included as one of the twelve case universities and signed our ethical protocol. His support

¹ Ruth Hayhoe, *Portraits of Influential Chinese Educators* (Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong and Springer, 2006), p.260.

for the project was important to us, and may well have given confidence to the leaders of some of our other case universities, as they considered our request to include them in this book. Thus we too experienced the sense of Beida as an institution that others look to, when they may hesitate over stepping into unknown territory.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of Beida's history and context, then considers the changes in student numbers, finance and curriculum that constitute the empirical face of the move to mass higher education. From there we reflect on the university's new vision and mission, its governance structure and strategic decision-making processes. Finally views from faculty and students on various dimensions of the move to mass higher education are presented.

History and Context

The Imperial University and the early Republic

Founded in 1898, as part of an important but largely unsuccessful reform movement, the Imperial University (京師大學堂) is often considered China's first public university, although two major engineering universities had preceded it: Tianjin University in 1896 and Shanghai Jiaotong University in 1897. Under Japanese influence, the Imperial University was originally intended to head up an entire modern education system, as specified in legislation of 1902.² After a ministry of education was established in 1904, it continued to serve as the pre-eminent national university, educating the majority of those destined for leadership. With the Revolution of 1911, the Imperial University was renamed Peking University, and was led by a series of prominent scholars, including Yan Fu (嚴復), Ma Xiangbo (馬相伯), He Yushi (何燠時) and Hu Renyuan (胡仁源). Nevertheless, it struggled with inadequate funding and the vagaries of an uncertain political context. Only with the appointment of Cai Yuanpei towards the end of 1916, did Peking University become an intellectual force that was to shape the destiny of modern China.

Cai Yuanpei and the Spirit of Peking University

Cai Yuanpei had served briefly as Minister of Education for the new republic in 1911-12, but returned Europe, when it became clear that President Yuan Shikai (袁世凱) was seeking to restore facets of the old

² Douglas Reynolds, *China 1898-1912: The Xinzheng Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1993).

imperial system. Born in 1868, Cai had gained a thorough grounding in classical Chinese scholarship through studies in a traditional *shuyuan* (書院), then had taken the civil service examinations and passed with the highest honor, becoming a Hanlin (翰林) Academician in 1892. His first mentor in the Western academic tradition was Ma Xiangbo, with whom he studied Latin and philosophy. Subsequently he studied in France and Germany, from 1906 to 1911, then returned in 1911 to serve briefly as minister of education and establish a Sino-French University. He also was occupied with translating into Chinese the work of such leading German scholars as Wilhelm Wundt and Friederich Paulsen at this time.

While Cai attempted to introduce the principle of university autonomy in legislation he drafted for the new republic in 1912, it was only when he returned again from Europe in 1916 to become Chancellor of Peking University that he was able to institute forms of university governance that ensured some distance between the university and the national government. On the principle that “professors should rule the school” (教授治校) he strengthened the academic senate, which was composed of all deans and representatives of the professorial faculty. He also instituted a rule that faculty members could not hold concurrent positions in government. His extraordinary efforts to attract leading scholars of diverse academic and political persuasions in all major fields created conditions for lively debate and discussion.

Cai’s personal statement on academic freedom has become one of the classics of modern Chinese higher education, because of the way in which it integrates values of scholarship from Europe and China: “I am open to all schools of thought; according to the general standards of the universities of all nations and the principle of freedom of thought, I believe we should be inclusive of diverse viewpoints. Regardless of which school of thought, if their words are logical, those who maintain them have reason, and they have not yet met the fate of being eliminated by natural selection, indeed even if they are mutually contradictory, I will allow them to develop freely.”³

The notion of tolerating mutually contradictory ideas is probably rooted in Chinese thought, yet Cai’s view on academic freedom was otherwise rather European, with a focus on basic theoretical knowledge. He made sure that the curriculum of Peking University was composed of

³ Xiao Chaoran et al. *Beijing daxue xiaoshi 1898-1949* [The History of Peking University 1898-1949] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1988), p.65. (Author’s translation)

basic sciences and humanities, with applied fields such as engineering moved elsewhere. When the May 4th Movement broke out in 1919, there was little question that it had been nurtured by the atmosphere of free debate that Cai had introduced, yet he himself was concerned that faculty and students should not get directly involved in anti-government activism, following the German principles of *Lehr* and *Lernfreiheit*. He resigned his presidency in protest against the government's crackdown on students and faculty, while at the same time making the following plea to students: "You have the opportunity of receiving education and the chance to take part in pure scientific research, so that you can lay the foundation for a new national culture for China and participate in world scholarly activities."⁴ It was striking to find the ideas expressed here continuing to reverberate in the interviews we held with students and faculty members nearly 90 years later.

Peking University in war-time circumstances

Once China's national capital moved to Nanjing in 1927, Peking University had a less prominent role on the national scene, though it remained a leading centre of scholarship throughout the Nationalist period.⁵ In 1937, after the Japanese invasion, it moved to Kunming to share a campus with Tsinghua and Nankai universities. The geographical remoteness of this location made possible considerable autonomy from the beleaguered Nationalist government, and John Israel's well researched history of the Southwest Associated University, known as Lianda, describes its spirit in the following way: "In sharing poverty for the sake of education, faculty members and students felt drawn to each other and a sense of community emerged. It was more akin to that of the traditional *shuyuan* than to that of the status-conscious universities of pre-war days. The existence of a 'vital, upbeat, creative spiritual life' was a matter of pride and satis-

⁴ Cai Yuanpei, *Cai Yuanpei xuanji* [Selections from Cai Yuanpei] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), p.98. (Author's translation). In the end Cai was persuaded to stay on as president until around 1927.

⁵ Two excellent histories of Beida's early years have been published recently: Timothy Weston, *The Power of Position: Beijing University, Intellectuals and Chinese Political Culture 1898-1929* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); and Xiaoqing Diana Lin, *Peking University: Chinese scholarship and Intellectuals 1898-1937* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005). For an essay review on these two volumes, see Ruth Hayhoe, "Peking University and the Spirit of Chinese Scholarship," in *Comparative Education Review*, Vol.49, No.4, 2005, pp.575-583.

faction”⁶ There were effective protests, yet there was also remarkable scholarship and excellent teaching in the harshest of conditions, with two later Nobel Prize winners, C.T. Lee (李政道) and C.N. Yang (楊振寧), among the students.

Beida moved back to Beijing in 1945 and its curriculum was broadened under the presidency of the American-educated philosopher Hu Shi (胡適). Faculties of engineering, medicine and agriculture were added to its three original faculties of humanities, sciences and law. With the success of the Communist Revolution of 1949, however, it reverted to the curricular patterns that had been advocated by Cai Yuanpei. Soviet higher education had been strongly influenced by 19th century Germany and France, and under Soviet influence Beida was defined as a new-style comprehensive university, having programs in basic sciences and humanities only. The medical, engineering and agriculture faculties moved out to become specialist universities in the reorganized system. However this was a small loss, compared to the gains brought by leading scholars and whole departments in the humanities and basic sciences that came to Beida from Tsinghua, Catholic Furen and Protestant Yenching universities. Beida also was given Yenching’s beautiful campus, which had originally been a royal garden of the Qing emperors.

Ma Yinchu and the spirit of Peking University

The second president who contributed greatly to shaping the Beida spirit was Ma Yinchu, a leading economist and demographer, with a PhD from Columbia University. He became president in 1952, at the time of the reorganization of colleges and departments along Soviet lines. As a widely respected progressive thinker, he played an active advisory role in the new government, until his theory on population growth fell afoul of Mao Zedong’s ideas in 1957. Reprimanded and later exiled for expressing views that he believed to be soundly based and vitally important for China’s future, he held firm. Even the persuasion of Zhou Enlai could not move him to retract the essay he published in his own defence, “My Philosophical Thought and Economic Theories.” His parting words before going into exile were as follows: “After writing articles, one should be brave enough to correct mistakes, but one must adhere to the truth and bear all consequences, even if they are disadvantageous to his pri-

⁶ John Israel, *Lianda: A Chinese University in War and Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) pp.331-332.

vate interests or his life. I do not teach and have no direct contact with students, but I always want to educate them by means of action.”⁷

Both Cai and Ma embodied a spirit of intellectual freedom and independence, for which Beida is justly proud. Its curricular focus has meant that many of its graduates became scientists, scholars, writers and thinkers. By contrast, its famed rival, Tsinghua, was turned into an engineering university in 1952 and graduated many who became government officials in the period of socialist macro-planning. While Beida could not avoid being caught up in the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, and influenced by the political movements of the 1960s and 1970s, it retained a sense of calling as the “conscience of the nation” and a sense of responsibility to advise and critique successive governments. This became evident in the student movement that followed upon the 70th anniversary of May 4th in 1989. There is still a sense of the significance of Beida’s role in that movement, as became clear when students commented on the administration’s plan to re-develop Triangle Place (三角地), a corner of the campus which had been a focal point for student meetings in the fateful spring of 1989.

The anniversary of Beida’s 100 years of history was held on May 4th of 1998, in a national ceremony held in the Great Hall of the People, with all of China’s top political leadership present. Jiang Zemin, then Party Secretary and President, launched the slogan “Education and Science to Revitalize the Nation” and Beida’s leaders joined forces with those of Tsinghua in asking the government for significant funding to support stronger and more focused university development at the highest level. The resulting 98/5 Project, named after this anniversary, has provided substantial amounts of special funding to a total of 43 leading universities throughout the country, with the name of the project as a constant reminder of Beida’s unique status.

Peking University’s Move to Mass Higher Education: An Empirical Overview

Before considering the vision that has been developed and the strategic decisions that have been taken in the years since Beida’s centenary in 1998, we will present some base data that show the dramatic changes

⁷ Howard Boorman, *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*, Vol.2, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p.478. See also Ronald Hsia, “The Intellectual and Public Life of Ma Yin-ch’u” in *China Quarterly* No.6, April-June, 1961, pp.54-63.

which have taken place in student numbers, finance and curricular development in the context of rapid massification since 1999. With this empirical picture of change in mind, we then turn to the views and reflections of leaders, faculty and students.

Growth in Student Enrollments

The figures Beida provided on student enrollments run from 1995 to 2005, and we can see a clear decision against expansion of Beida's core undergraduate programs over this period, with the main changes reflecting the merger of Beijing Medical University with Beida in April of 2000, and the subsequent development of a small number of engineering programs in new areas that build upon strong departments of mechanics, biology and physics. Thus undergraduate enrollments increased from 9,280 in 1995, to 13,328 in 2000, and 15,125 in 2005. However numbers of students in the humanities and social sciences changed little, with 4,276 in 1995, 4,484 in 2000 and 4,914 in 2005. Similarly, students enrolled in basic sciences numbered 4,247 in 1995, 4,380 in 2000, with a slight jump to 5,449 in 2005. The increase in undergraduate numbers between 1995 and 2000 was mainly due to the merger with Beijing Medical University, with 3,818 students in medical programs by the autumn of 2000. The further increase in enrollments between 2000 and 2005 reflected new programs in engineering, with the number of engineering students increasing from 550 in 2000 to 1,787 in 2005.

Beida students are recruited from every province throughout the country, and by national policy under ten percent of places are given to Beijing residents. We were not provided with information on the family background or residential status of students, but we understand from ongoing research by scholars of education and sociology at Beida that the percentage of young people from rural and disadvantaged families has gone down.⁸ By contrast, the participation of women has increased considerably, from 35% of undergraduate enrollments in 1995, to 46% in

⁸ Liu, Yunshan and Wang, Zhiming, "Nüxing jinru jingying jiti: youxian de jinbu," [Women enter the elite group: limited progress] in *Gaodeng jiaoyu yanjiu* [Journal of Higher Education] Vol.29, No.2, 2008, pp.49-61 (in Chinese). According to the researchers, the percentage of Beida entrants from urban backgrounds has always been high over the years, but increased from 76.6% in 1990 to 79.3% in 1996, 81.9% in 2000 and 85.7% in 2005. In the mean time, the rural entrants have been on a continuous decline from 24.2% in 1990 to 20.7% in 1996, 18.1% in 2000 and 14.3% in 2005.

2000 and 48% in 2005. This may be partially accounted for by the tendency for high female enrollments in medicine, but this could not be the whole story, since enrollments in engineering had also increased considerably by 2005.

While undergraduate enrollments have largely been kept stable, except for the fields of medicine and engineering, tremendous growth has taken place in graduate enrollments, with a near quadrupling of numbers, from 4,055 in 1995, to 15,229 in 2005. Female participation has also increased dramatically at the graduate level, from 29% in 1995 to 43% in 2005. There has been real concern about preserving standards of academic quality in this rapid expansion process, and a clear differentiation has been made between professional masters degrees of two year duration in fields such as law, business and education and academic masters degrees of three year duration in basic academic disciplines. This distinction is expressed also in campus spatial arrangements, with new high rise buildings for some professional areas being erected in a newly developed part of the campus, close to the subway, where study programs for part-time students can be facilitated. Meanwhile full-time programs in basic fields remain on the traditional part of the campus, with its classical low-rise buildings.

Numbers of international students have increased from 599 in 1990, to 1,011 in 1995, 1,177 in 2000 and 1,790 in 2005, with the percentage of these students studying for degrees increasing from 30% in 1990 to 66% by 2005. These numbers are still relatively low, and there are plans for recruiting much larger numbers of international students in future, as well as for more and more bi-lingual and English medium teaching. By 2007, Beida's report to the teaching evaluation team indicated an enrolment of 2,587 international students.⁹

Overall, we can see a stable situation for undergraduate enrollments in contrast to dramatic growth in graduate enrollments, with professional programs that have relatively high fees making up about one half of the total, and considerable expansion in core academic programs.

Beida's changing financial profile

The figures provided by Beida's finance office give a dramatic picture of

⁹*Beijing daxue benke jiaoxue gongzuo shuiping pinggu ziping baogao* [Self-evaluation report for the Beijing University undergraduate teaching standards evaluative review], Internal document, November, 2007, p.3.

change, from an overall income in 1990 of 115 million RMB to 2.634 billion in 2005. While 33.9 million came in through student fees in 1990, this figure rose to 48.5 million in 1995, 298 million in 2000 and 744.6 million in 2005. It should be noted that the cost sharing policy began formally in 1997. Since then, both the absolute amount and the relative share of students' fees have increased significantly. Students in professional programs are charged significantly higher fees than those in academic programs. By 2005 student fees constituted 28% of income, up from 14% in 1995 and 13% in 2000. Government direct allocations rose from 44.7 million in 1990 to 97 million in 1995, 209 million in 2000 and 357 million in 2005. Proportionately, however, they constituted 29% of income in 1995, but only 9% in 2000 and 14% in 2005. This shows how crucial has been the government's special project funding, which constituted 29% of income in 2000 and 11% in 2005.

Research funding, much of which comes from government through processes of competitive bidding, is also an important part of income. From research funds of 31.9 million in 1990, the number had risen to 62.9 million in 1995, 371.7 million in 2000 and 630.3 million in 2005. The percentage of this funding coming from prestigious national sources has increased dramatically, from 28% in 1990 to 80% in 2005. As a percentage of overall income, research funds now make up 24%, up from 17% in 2000.

The other major change has been in the scale of donations, and various forms of income generation. Whereas donations constituted only 250,000 in 1990, by 1995, there was 34 million in donations, 77.4 million by 2000 and 176.5 million by 2005, constituting 7% of income. Other forms of income generation, such as Beida's multi-national company, Fang Zheng (方正), contributed 431.3 million or 16% of income in 2005, up from 310.4 million in 2000 and 109 million in 1995. Beida's 2005 profile thus shows an institution that gains 28% of income from student fees, 25% from governmental sources, including general and special project, 24% from research, 7% from donations and 16% from its own efforts at resource generation.

On the budget side there have also been interesting changes. While faculty salaries constituted 17% of a budget of 316.3 million in 1995, this rose to 34% of a budget of 1.441 billion in 2000 and 22% of a budget of 2.710 billion in 2005. Assistance for students has remained about the same, 5% of budget in 1995, 4% in both 2000 and 2005. Teaching affairs made up 78% of the budget in 1995, 55% in 2000 and 71% in 2005. Clearly the major change in 2000 focused on upgrading faculty salaries, while by

2005 it was possible once again to give highest priority to teaching and research needs. We interpret these changes over financial priorities as Beida's endeavor to recruit the best possible talent to fill its faculty positions. This is crucial to its ambition to stand next to such world-class institutions as Harvard and Yale, which often spend close to half of their budgets to attract and maintain a top level faculty.

Curricular Evolution

As noted in the history above, Beida's curriculum has always focused on basic disciplines of the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences, with profound historical roots in the early influence of Cai Yuanpei. While its curriculum had been broadened to include medicine, agriculture and engineering in the later 1940s, its profile returned to a strong focus on basic fields in the 1950s, after the reorganization of colleges and departments under Soviet influence. Thus in 1958 there were departments of mathematics and mechanics, physics, chemistry, biology and geology in the sciences; in the humanities, there were departments of history, philosophy, Chinese language and literature, Oriental languages and literatures, Western languages and literatures, Russian language and literature; in the social sciences, there were departments of economics, law and library science. While psychology had originally been a strength at Beida, it had been placed within the department of philosophy.¹⁰

An overview of the present curricular provision gives a vivid picture of the dramatic changes that have taken place in the curriculum, mostly since the reforms of 1978 and in recent years. At present there are five main academic sections (*xuebu* 學部) in the areas of humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, information and engineering sciences and medicine. While the first four are regarded as part of the main campus (*benbu* 本部), the medical section retains an independent status, and is headed by a highly respected medical scholar, Professor Han Qide, who is also a Vice-Chairman of the National People's Congress. The merger of the Beijing Medical University and Beida in 2000, which strongly encouraged by Vice Premier Li Lanqing, has led to some curricular and research integration but not a complete administrative integration of the two institutions. While medicine functions as a sepa-

¹⁰ Du Qin and Wei Xingyan, *Beijing daxue xuezhi yange 1949-1998* [The Evolution of Peking University's academic system 1949-1998] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), pp.41-43.

rate administrative unit, the other four teaching sections are headed by scholars whose main responsibility is to see that appropriate criteria are applied for academic decisions relating to faculty promotions and curricular development – they do not function as administrative units. Nevertheless, they may help us to understand the shape and logic of Beida's current curricular provisions.

The other explanatory note that is needed at this point relates to the status of departments and colleges. Up until the mid-eighties, departments were the major academic units in Chinese universities, and the establishment of colleges bringing together several departments has been a gradual process. One of our interviewees pointed out that the merger issue has not only been at the level of universities, but also within the university, at the level of the college.¹¹ Thus Beida's most illustrious core humanities departments have elected to keep the status and title of department – Chinese literature, history and philosophy. They refused to merge into a college of arts, since this would raise serious questions of academic leadership. Nevertheless, they hold the same status as colleges within the administrative system.

The other academic units within the humanities section have all become colleges, and include the college of archaeology (1998), the college of foreign languages (1999) and the college of fine arts (2006). Of particular note is the college of foreign languages, which has programs in 19 different languages and literatures, and has particular strength in the area of oriental languages.

In the social sciences, the earliest department to blossom into a college was economics in 1985; the Guanghua School of Management was separately established on the basis of strengths in economics and management in 1993. By 1998 there was a college of international relations, based on early strengths in this area, and by 2001 there were colleges of journalism and broadcasting, government, law and information management. There was also a school of Marxism, and a graduate school of education, developed on the basis of the institute for higher education research established in 1979.

The one department in the social sciences which refused to be merged into a college was sociology. It had been founded in 1982, after a long neglect of the field of sociology under Soviet influence and the

¹¹ Interview with Wu Baoke, Vice Provost, Professor of Sociology and Party Secretary of the Department of Sociology, 12 May 2008.

radical politics of the Cultural Revolution. Its members are proud of the work they have developed in sociology, demography and social work, and prefer to maintain their status as a department.

The natural sciences section has seven colleges and one department, again reflecting both tradition and change. The college of life sciences was founded in 1993, on the basis of a strong biology department and has developed new bio-technology programs as well as collaboration with the medical section. The college of chemistry and molecular engineering was founded in 1994 and has programs in materials chemistry, nuclear chemistry and nuclear fuels, as well as basic chemistry. The college of mathematical sciences was founded in 1995, and has programs in statistics and information science as well as pure and applied mathematics. The college of physics was founded in 2001, and has departments of astronomy, atmospheric sciences, nuclear physics and nuclear technology as well as basic physics. Also founded in 2001, the college of geology and space science has departments of space science and technology as well as geology, geo-physics and geo-chemistry. In 2007 a college of urban and environmental sciences was established, bringing together programs in geography, the management of resources and the natural environment, geographic information systems, ecology and urban planning.

Meanwhile a department of psychology was established in 1977, separating itself from the department of philosophy and choosing to be placed within the natural sciences section rather than that of the social sciences. It traces its history back to Cai Yuanpei and his efforts to introduce the scientific psychology of Wilhelm Wundt to China in 1917. It has a strong tradition in experimental psychology and has remained an independent department, similar to sociology, Chinese literature, philosophy and history.

The engineering section is entirely new at Beida, with a college of information science and technology founded in 2002 and a college of engineering founded in 2005. The college of information science and technology reflects the remarkable success of Beida scholars in physics and mechanics, as they turned their attention to information processing, microelectronics and computer science and technology in the 1980s. Their discoveries relating to the processing of Chinese language materials spurred the success of Beida's fabled company, Fang Zheng, which is now an independently owned multi-national, whose stock provides a significant source of income for Beida. The college of engineering is newer, and is developing programs in applied mechanics and the analy-

sis of engineering construction, energy and resource engineering, biomedical engineering, and new materials and nanometer technology. A conscious decision was made not to develop more traditional engineering fields.

Finally, the medical section stands alone, maintaining the integrity of its medical departments and programs while cooperating in the teaching of basic sciences and in research. The medical section has departments in basic medicine, clinical medicine, preventive medicine, dentistry, dental technology, medical experimentation, pharmacy, applied pharmacy and nursing.

This overview of the curriculum has been taken from the teaching evaluation report prepared by the university in 2007, and reflects mainly Beida's undergraduate programs.¹² Not mentioned here is the school of software and microelectronics, established off campus in 2002, and mainly serving working adults, also the Shenzhen Graduate School, which offers Beida MBAs to executives, and advanced degrees in law, sociology, sciences and engineering, in Shenzhen and South China. Students of these two schools are not counted as part of Beida's formal enrollment numbers.

In the above overview, we can see a blending of tradition and innovation, a building upon strengths in basic fields of knowledge while responding to new demands. There are also contradictions between the determination to maintain high standards of excellence in basic academic fields and programs and the pull to respond to newly emerging professional and technical fields of knowledge, and new kinds of clientele in a dynamic market economy.

Vision and Strategic Direction

We were fortunate to be able to spend a week on Beida's beautiful campus in May of 2008, and hold interviews with a wide range of university leaders, including the Party Secretary, the Head of the Planning Section, two Vice-Provosts and the head of the Provost's Office, the Deputy Director of Personnel, the Deputy Director of the International Office, the Director of Student Affairs and the Deputy Director of the Finance Office. Much was learned in these meetings about the process of

¹² *Beijing daxue benke jiaoxue gongzuo shuiping pingu ziping baogao* (Self-evaluation report for the Beijing University undergraduate teaching standards evaluative review), Internal document, November 2007, p.47.

developing a new vision and mission, curricular decision making, governance patterns, research and personnel issues, also Beida's internationalization process. Over and over again we sensed a certain tension, in university leaders, faculty and students, as they felt the responsibilities that went along with Beida's name and reputation. The pressure of high expectations from government, from educational circles and from China's millions of ordinary citizens was intense. "Many Chinese tourists who come to Beijing bring their children to the Beida campus, knowing that the chances of enrollment there are one in a hundred thousand, yet Beida still belongs to them and is accountable to them."¹³

Vision and Mission

Beida's 100th anniversary in 1998, and the government's decision to provide significant funds for a small number of top universities to achieve world class status in the 98/5 project, was a turning point for the university. This was just before the national policy decision on massive expansion in 1999. Many crucial decisions relating to curricular development, research emphasis and faculty upgrading had to be made, in order to deal with the tension between quality and quantity inherent in this process. This caused much reflection on Beida's core mission.

Li Qiang, Head of the Planning Department and President's assistant, also a professor in the School of Government and Public Policy, explained that the decision to formalize a new mission statement was made early in 2005, with the intention of having it complete for Beida's 110th anniversary in 2008. Many meetings of academic leaders, professors, alumni and students were held and a website was established, with the result that over 1,000 comments and suggestions were received.¹⁴ The final draft of the mission statement has four short phrases, which have been drawn from different periods of the university's history.

The first phrase, "mould and cast a broad range of talents" (陶鑄群才), goes back to the first President of the Imperial University, Sun Jianai (孫家鼐), in the early years of the 20th century, and emphasizes Beida's responsibility to educate people at a high level in all important fields of knowledge. Images of the potter and the casting of bronze are used to depict the all round development of every kind of talent, in moral as well

¹³ Member of Beida's Faculty Focus Group, 9 May 2008.

¹⁴ Interview with Li Qiang, President's Assistant and Head of the Planning Section, 14 May 2008.

as intellectual areas.

The second phrase, “discover new principles of knowledge” (發明新理), is found in Beida’s first charter, and clearly refers to the university’s research mandate, its responsibility to extend the frontiers of knowledge in ways that benefit the nation and open up new future directions. This is interpreted as producing innovative findings in science, technology and culture that make possible the nation’s renaissance and contribute to world peace and development.

The third phrase, “lead culture” (引領文化), goes back to Beida’s role in the May 4th Movement, as the institution that did most to build a new national culture based on critical reflection on the past and the selective absorption of ideas from abroad. At present Beida still sees itself as responsible for cultural renewal and for establishing Chinese culture within a global context of multiculturalism.

The fourth phrase of the mission statement, “serve society” (服務社會) is viewed as deriving from Cai Yuanpei’s concept of benefiting the nation through innovative scholarship in the humanities and social policy as well as the natural sciences.

While all four phrases that constitute this new vision statement carry the flavor of Beida’s history, the goals of nurturing talent, focusing on fundamental research and serving society are common to most research universities. It is the third goal, that of “leading culture,” which may be unique to the Beida spirit. We had a sense that Beida somehow embodies Chinese culture in the contemporary period, in the combination of old and new seen in its campus space and architecture, and in the sense of responsibility to nation and world that we found in many of its members.¹⁵

Li Qiang took the example of Beida economist, Lin Yifu, who heads up Beida’s Economic Research Centre and has recently been appointed as chief economist to the World Bank. In explaining elements of China’s economic development to the world, Lin will enrich and broaden economic theory in the West, suggests Li. As a scholar of government with a PhD from the London School of Economics, Li works on state building

¹⁵ This summary is based on both our interview with Li Qiang and a draft internal document he provided, which is entitled “The Mission of Peking University.” [*Beijing daxue de shiming*]. See also an interview with Beida President Xu Zhihong, in *Kexue shibao* [Science Times], 17 April 2008, where the new mission statement is elucidated.

and faces a parallel challenge to explain China's political development to the world. He remarked that he finds himself constantly in dialogue with such classical economists as Hobbes, Locke and Smith, rather than theorists who deal with contemporary social development issues. "China's changes have been so dramatic, they relate best to the ideas of Western classical theorists of an earlier period," he commented.

We found evidence in our interviews with leaders in the provost's office, student affairs and the international office that the new mission statement is seen as a helpful document. However, the development of a new charter is a somewhat different matter. Given his background in political science, Li Qiang's comments on creating a "constitution" for the university, as he viewed the charter, were thought-provoking.

He began by calling our attention to a recent speech of the President, who identified four important moments in Beida's history. The first was the period of Cai Yuanpei's leadership, the second was the Lianda period during the anti-Japanese war, the third was the period after 1952, when Beida gained top scholars in all basic fields of knowledge from other universities. The fourth has been the period since 2005, when the new mission statement has been formulated and Beida has moved forward in new ways. From 1978 up to the 1990s, Beida had had a very difficult time, due to the shortage of resources, and the necessity of seeking income from research activities that created significant profit but detracted from its academic mission. Now the new mission statement places emphasis on basic theoretical knowledge, and only those applied fields that are closely related, that respond to urgent societal needs or where there is potential for excellence within a short time frame.

Li Qiang explained that one of Beida's vice presidents is responsible for drafting the new charter, and this is much more complex than a mission statement since it is a matter of Beida's relations with government. Even though the higher education law of 1998 stipulates that universities have the status of legal persons, Li believes this status cannot yet be realized. However, he pointed to a document recently released by the Chinese Communist Party which speaks of "four divisions" that are to be accomplished by the year 2020: the division between government and enterprises (政企), between government and social organizations (政事), between government and capital management (政资), and between government and professional associations (政介). Once these "four divisions" have been accomplished, the Chinese political structure will have changed significantly. Beida is responsible to see that the government

goes forward with this plan, in Li's view, and that it meets the time goal of 2020. Only then will it be possible to enjoy real independence from government as a legal person.

Governance and Strategic Direction

This brings us to the question of Beida present governance structure, and we were privileged to have a one hour interview with Party Secretary Min Weifang on this topic. He began by stating that Beida is the most liberal campus in China with academic freedom given highest importance, and all decision-making in the arenas of policy, personnel and finance in the public domain. "We have no secrets of any kind," he stated. At the same time he gave vivid expression to his sense of his own position as one of mediating between the pressures coming from government and those coming from students and faculty. "I constantly need a kind of political wisdom to explain to top government leaders how essential it is to protect liberalism and academic freedom, on the one hand, and to request faculty and students to reflect on the constraints of the context in which they live and modify their demands accordingly, on the other hand."¹⁶

There has been no real change so far in the governance structure of higher education as a result of the move to mass higher education, in Min's view. The higher education law of 1998 specified a presidential responsibility system under the leadership of the Party Committee. In the case of Beida, as Party Secretary he chairs the Party Committee, which meets every Tuesday afternoon, and includes four vice-secretaries and all vice-presidents, including any who may not be Party members. The much larger Council of the university has deans, faculty and student representatives in addition, but meets less frequently. The Party standing committee makes final decisions in three major areas: personnel appointments at dean and director of office or above, budget decisions and such major projects as new buildings. He and the President work very closely on all matters – "we communicate every day and are like one person." While he has been appointed by the Party Central Committee and is at the same level as a vice-minister, the President's appointment is made by the State Council.

The overall structure of the university has three main parts – the provost's office, with the provost being the first of the vice-presidents, a

¹⁶ Interview with Min Weifang, 12 May 2008.

vice-president for administration and a vice-president for logistics and plant.¹⁷ Most academic decision making is made at the level of a committee chaired by the provost, dealing with research, curricular development, and all other academic decisions.

While there has been little change in the governance structure, one of the reforms for which Beida has been most closely watched is that of faculty appointments. Min made the point that he and his colleagues had initiated this reform on the simple principle that it was important for faculty to show they could perform, before being given permanent status. As a result of the reforms, those who are unlikely to be promoted now tend to leave of their own volition, allowing the university to bring in excellent scholars from all over the world. Clearly the appointment and recognition of outstanding faculty is a crucial issue for reaching world-class status, and university leaders were determined to bring about this reform, in spite of the backlash and criticism it called forth.¹⁸

We could also see the crucial importance of Min's role as chair of the standing committee, where all leadership appointments were made, in the academic sophistication and scholarly excellence of the various administrative leaders we talked with. Min made the point that Party Secretaries of Chinese universities are usually "political figures," while his appointment to this position as a scholar was unusual. It is a highly stressful position, but he has managed to hold it for more than six years, in contrast to the six party secretaries who preceded him in the period since the reforms of the early eighties, with an average tenure of three years each.

When asked about the achievements he was most proud of, Min mentioned two things. The first was campus development. Almost all of the land acquisition and new buildings have been supported through active fund-raising, and the campus will soon have a completely new look. In a new area in the North, a series of buildings in royal garden style are being built for core curricular areas. The first is the famous China Center for Economic Research, headed by Lin Yifu. In another new area in the Northeast, higher rise buildings are under construction for colleges in professional fields of knowledge, which enroll many part-time masters degree students and are accessible to the subway. Another piece

¹⁷ Interview with Wu Baoke, 12 May 2008.

¹⁸ See *Chinese Education and Society*, Vol.37, No.6, 2004, and Vol.38, Nos.1 & 2, 2005, for translations of many key articles debating the reforms and related commentary.

of land has been acquired on the East side of the campus where new faculty housing is going up, and a new international centre is under construction with a capacity to house 4000 international students. Thus, the lovely classical buildings at the heart of the campus are being protected and extended, while new areas are being developed contiguous to the campus in response to new programs and demands. The intention is to reduce traffic and maintain a tranquil atmosphere in the core, while ensuring that the new areas are accessible to public transportation.

This determination to protect and further develop classical buildings in royal garden style, in spite of the expense involved, reflected a widely held view that the most symbolic space on the Beida campus was the Unnamed Lake, with its lovely pagoda and tranquil surroundings.¹⁹ The phrase “*yita hutu*” (一塔湖圖) includes the Chinese words for one pagoda, a lake and a library, yet is also a pun that might be humorously translated as “a confused mess.” Somehow this quiet classical space embodies the elusive yet deeply felt vocation to be a leader in culture that is embraced by so many at Beida.

Photo 3.1: The Unnamed Lake



¹⁹ This came up in our faculty focus group meetings, as well as several interviews with academic leaders.

The second major achievement Min spoke about was the recruitment of outstanding academic leaders to head Beida's various colleges – including three deans who had originally been recruited to another famous university in Beijing, and had been inclined to return to North America, until they were offered positions at Beida. Min attributed it to Beida's reputation for academic freedom and spirit of liberalism. Another element that has facilitated Beida's ability to recruit and hold outstanding academic leaders has been a policy of giving high levels of autonomy to certain units, such as the China Center for Economic Research and the Guanghua School of Management. Under this policy, academic salaries and research funding are under their direct control.²⁰

Curricular Innovation

An overview of Beida's unique curricular constellation and its evolution in recent years has been presented earlier in this chapter. With the nurturing of creative talent as a kind of summation of Beida's four phrase mission statement, curricular reform has been seen as a crucial element of change in the move to mass higher education. A core principle has been the strengthening of basic knowledge, while attention has also been given to processes of integration – to foster creativity, and processes of diversification – to cater to different kinds of talent.²¹

On the undergraduate level a number of measures have been taken. All students are now recruited into colleges or departments, rather than specific programs and encouraged to select a certain number of electives. A new summer teaching term has been added to those of autumn and winter/spring, in order to provide opportunities for students to be exposed to visiting international scholars as well as giving them greater flexibility for electives. Students in the medical college are given one or two years of exposure to basic sciences and other general areas on the main campus before beginning their medical programs on the branch campus, depending on whether they are in eight year programs in clinical medicine or five year programs in pharmacy and nursing. Funding is provided for undergraduate students to participate in faculty guided research on a competitive basis, with independent research projects counting for credit in some programs.

²⁰ Interview with Wu Baoke, 12 May 2008.

²¹ Interview with Jin Dingbing, Vice-Dean, Office of Educational Administration, 13 May 2008.

Most radical of all has been the establishment of the Yuanpei Program, an integrated undergraduate program for outstanding undergraduates to experience a broad based curriculum, considerable choice of courses and individual guidance from a professorial tutor. Named after Cai Yuanpei, it began as an experimental program in 2001 with 80 top students being selected. It now recruits about 180 students each year, for a total size of 500 students. In 2007 when the preparation of suitable courses had matured and there were appropriate conditions for student life, it took the name Yuanpei College.²² Many other universities in China have followed this initiative, in some cases moving much more quickly, but its careful and deliberate development has provided a national model for curricular reform.

Generally, Beida has been cautious about the establishment of new programs, departments or schools, with a strong determination to build upon its historic areas of excellence. Thus its highly successful college of information science and technology, which enrolls the largest number of undergraduates at 2600, arose from its traditional strengths in mechanics and electronics. The only other college of engineering sciences avoids such traditional areas as construction and civil engineering to focus on new areas such as nanometers, new materials and bio-medical engineering. “While advances in information science have been remarkable and contributed to Beida’s prosperity, the new biological sciences and biotechnology may be even more important for the future, with the advances they promise for human life and cancer research,” noted one of the Vice-Provosts.²³ He also emphasized the development of areas like medical sociology and social work, which benefited greatly from the merger with the medical university.

At the graduate level, curricular diversification has been the emphasis, with many new professional masters programs being developed, that require two rather than three years of study. In addition, many colleges are offering high level training programs to professionals in areas such as politics and business, whereby they pay fees as graduate students, but only earn a degree if they write a thesis. Many are satisfied to take courses without going on to the degree. This kind of program gives the expertise of Beida professors considerable influence.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Interview with Wu Baoke, 12 May 2008.

Internationalization

Beida's international status makes possible some remarkable opportunities for its students in the non-formal curriculum. The Deputy Director of the International Office noted that over 50 national leaders have given lectures at Beida in recent years, and students are often given the opportunity to attend and raise questions. Most recently, the new Prime Minister of Australia dazzled students with a lecture given in fluent Mandarin! Frequent visits from seasoned diplomats, such as Henry Kissinger, often include consultation with students in small group meetings.

Recent efforts to recruit larger numbers of international students also have implications for Beida's students. Thus 30 students from Yale College are now spending one term at the Yuanpei Program, sharing rooms with Beida students, and similar programs are being planned with Harvard and Stanford. Waseda University has a joint program with Beida whereby students spend two years at Waseda and another two years at Beida, for a degree in international relations. Other programs that bring international students to the Beida campus include a one year Masters of Public Administration, oriented towards leaders in developing countries, a Masters in Chinese Philosophy, a joint Master of Law with the University of Missouri, a Summer Institute of Economics, in cooperation with the London School of Economics, and a Summer Institute in Social Statistics, in cooperation with the University of Michigan. All of these programs are given in English.

At the moment, Beida undergraduates do not have many opportunities for study abroad within their programs, though these are under development. Some are able to participate in summer schools abroad. For graduate students, particularly those in the doctorate, about 300 each year have managed to gain an opportunity for a doctoral year abroad, sponsored by the China Scholarship Council, in recent years.

What is evident in this overview of curricular innovation is that Beida sees itself in a global context, with a responsibility not only to nurture creative students within China but to draw students from around the world and create a campus culture where global issues and problems are debated, and where Chinese culture and Chinese economic and socio-political development experience can be interpreted for a wider world. One of its innovative informal programs has been sponsoring the Beijing Forum every year, with financial support from a Korean Organization. Prominent scholars are invited from all over the world to enter into an inter-civilizational dialogue, with a specific theme identified

each year. The long-term goal is for this to become a kind of “Davos Summit” that can have a significant influence in global circles.²⁴

One of the most important ways of stimulating curricular change has been through the appointment of high level scholars from all parts of the world, many of whom may bring graduate students with them when they take up their posts.²⁵ This further encourages a wider use of English or other languages in graduate programs. It was mentioned that every doctoral supervisor hopes to have one international student under supervision, to encourage discussion and communication in English.

Overall, curricular integrity, cohesion and coherence is maintained through the all-important Provostial committee, which has as its members the five vice-provosts, representing each teaching section including one from the medical section, the deans of all colleges and the heads of research in natural and social sciences. All major academic decisions go through this body, and every effort is made to ensure that teaching and curriculum development closely adhere to the Beida mission.²⁶

Photo 3.2: The New Library



²⁴ Interview with Hongwei Xia, Executive Deputy Director, Office of International Relations, 16 May 2008.

²⁵ In the teaching evaluation document, *Beijing daxue benke jiaoxue gongzuo shuiping pinggu ziping baogao* [Self-evaluation report for the Beijing University undergraduate teaching standards evaluative review], November 2007, p.27, it was reported that there were 120 faculty members appointed from abroad.

²⁶ Interview with Li Ke’An, Vice-Provost, 13 May 2008.

When asked about buildings or campus spaces that might be seen to represent the Beida spirit, one academic leader spoke movingly about the new library. "It is now the largest library of any Chinese university, with over five million volumes, and it has been closely linked to the history of Beida and of China."²⁷ Mention was made of the fact that Mao Zedong once worked in this library, and that national leaders from Deng Xiaoping to Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao have visited the library when coming to campus. The new library building, which was completed in time for the 100th anniversary, combines features of classical Chinese architecture with an ultra modern and high tech interior.

Faculty and Issues of Teaching and Research

We have noted earlier that one of the two achievements of which Min Weifang was most proud was the recruitment of highly qualified faculty members and academic leaders. From 2005, Beida made a policy that no new faculty would be recruited among their own graduating doctoral students – a highly controversial decision to break the patterns of the past, whereby China's top universities tended to recruit faculty largely from among their own graduates. The second controversial policy was to stipulate that faculty members would be required to meet the standards for promotion within a specified period of time, and if unsuccessful, they would be required to leave – there would be no permanent tenure for Beida faculty until they achieved full professor status. Somewhat longer time periods for the promotion process were given for faculty in the humanities and social sciences than the natural sciences.²⁸

In this section we will look at the changing profile of Beida faculty, to give a picture of the present situation, then report on the findings of our faculty focus group, and highlight the views of faculty members on the Beida ethos.

The Faculty Profile

There has been no growth in Beida faculty over the period of the move to mass higher education, rather a significant number of faculty retired over the later 1990s, being replaced by young faculty with higher qualifications. The faculty student ratio has therefore risen from 1:3.5 in 1995, to 1:9.8 in 2000, and stabilized at around 1:15 by 2005. Faculty numbers for

²⁷ Interview with Wu Baoke, Vice-Provost, 12 May 2008.

²⁸ *Chinese Education and Society*, Vol.37, No.6, 2004.

1990 were reported as 2,438, falling to 2,296 by 2000 and 2,212 by 2005. The proportion of faculty in full and associate professor positions rose, however, from 28% full professor and 33% associate in 1990, to 33% full and 35% associate in 2000, 37% full and 42% associate in 2005. Meanwhile those in lecturer level positions dropped from 26% in 1990 to 20% in 2005, and assistant teachers dropped from 13% in 1990 to 1% by 2005. The faculty qualification profile also improved greatly, from 38% of faculty holding doctoral degrees in 2000 to 66% in 2005.

The most telling figures on the faculty profile have been provided in a recent report from the personnel office, which shows the changing pattern of qualifications. Of 1,882 faculty members with doctorates in 2007, 45.7% were Beida graduates, 23.2 graduates of other universities in China and 31.1% graduates who had returned from abroad. For faculty members who had been appointed since 2000, the picture had changed considerably, reflecting the reformed appointment policies. Only 34% held Beida doctorates, while 25.9% held doctorates from other universities in China and 39.9% held doctorates earned abroad.²⁹ The Deputy Director of the Personnel Office informed us that recruitment of top-level faculty at full and associate professor level continued to be a high priority, and that the third round of government funds for the 21/1 project would be dedicated mainly to these efforts.³⁰

Beida faculty members are expected to be highly productive in both teaching and research. The recently implemented undergraduate teaching evaluation was seen as a useful exercise to ensure that due importance to upholding high standards of teaching. At the same time it was felt the university should be able to take responsibility for teaching quality, and it would be wasteful of time to go through such an exercise again.

On the research side, Beida faculty are very successful in competing for prestigious national research funding, with a total of 800 million in research grants won in 2007, up from 630 million in 2005. Of the 800 million, 20% came from the National Natural Sciences Foundation and another 30-40% from the 86/3 Fund of the Ministry of Technology, with some coming from international sources. Faculty publications are carefully monitored, and the yearly output has been around 2000, since 2005.

²⁹ Yuanshan Jizhi baozhang youhuazhizi peizhi [Improving the mechanisms for ensuring faculty upgrading], Internal document from the Personnel Office of Peking University, provided by Liu Bo, Vice-Director of the Personnel Office, 14 May 2008.

³⁰ Interview with Liu Bo, Deputy Director, Personnel Office, 14 May 2008.

Citations and influence factor are considered in evaluating these publications. Beida's Medical Section has contributed significantly to the attraction of research funds and to the number and quality of publications, with their share of publications rising from 100 to 300 over recent years.³¹

Perspectives from Faculty

Eleven professors took part in the faculty focus group meeting, two from history, two from sociology, two from international relations, two from mathematics, two from information technology and one from engineering. There were six women and five men. One of the sociology professors was reluctant to sign the consent form, preferring to observe the discussion at first, yet later become one of the most active participants and agreed to sign before departing.

The conversation ranged widely, beginning with reflections on their identity and responsibilities as Beida professors, and going on to issues of the merger, curricular change and the opportunities of their new community-oriented programs. Views on civil society and issues of equity were also shared.

An older history professor began the discussion with the comment that Beida's mission had linked the university to China's destiny in profound ways. From the May 4th Movement of 1919 onwards, it had been involved in every significant cultural and political movement. "In its teaching and research Beida has a very special responsibility for the areas of history, literature and philosophy and it should be a treasure store of ideas for society. It is also an institution that belongs to the world, not only to China, and that is called upon to create a platform where China and the world can meet For these reasons, Beida professors must be clear-minded in their thinking, and seek the truth above all. Colleagues from other universities, in China and abroad, look to us to be guardians and developers of the culture. If Beida should take the wrong direction, the consequences for the whole country would be serious."

A younger international relations scholar spoke about the pressure of being a "Beida teacher" that came from the high expectations. "This is true not only within China but when we are presenting a paper at an international conference in Japan or other parts of the world. If it is

³¹ Interview with Liu Bo, Deputy Director of the Personnel Office, 14 May 2008. Dr. Liu had worked in the research office from 2002 to 2006, before moving to Personnel.

known that we are Beida professors, we are likely to be asked to give the first word or make the first comment.” “Any reform at Beida is likely to become a model for others – since we are seen as setting a standard. On the other hand, if we do not meet people’s hopes and expectations, we will be the first to be criticized. In the problem of commercialization of education, for example, Beida is likely to be criticized much more severely than other universities, because expectations of us are so high.”

Another professor said that Beida scholars traditionally feel a sense of responsibility for the great problems of the country, and that they tend to form students who are independent in character and thinking. This is something much deeper than the phrase about “nurturing creative talent” in the mission statement, which faculty see as a mere political slogan. Others then commented that students had been genuinely independent in thinking and concerned for the country at the time of the events of 1989, while now they have become more pragmatic. Nevertheless, Beida has kept its tradition of a very strong political culture, oriented towards democracy and science. Faculty and students share a fundamental mindset – that of questioning everything, and casting doubt on all orthodoxies. “Beida students are much more outspoken in challenging their professors and asserting divergent viewpoints than is the norm for university students in other parts of East Asia,” commented one professor, who had observed classrooms in Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan and Singapore.

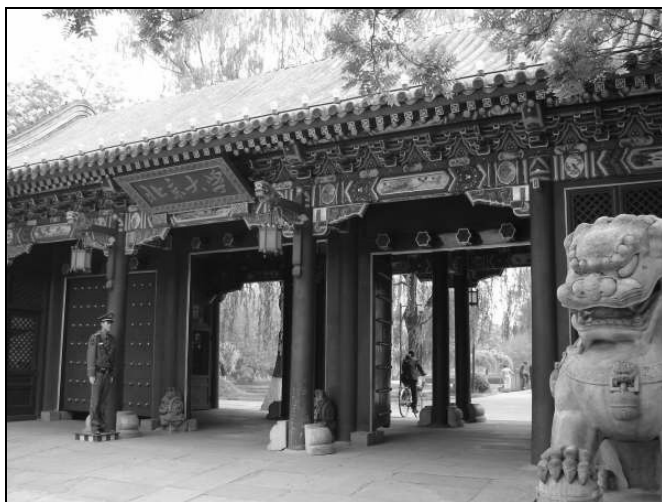
A theme that recurred through this discussion was the need for Beida to keep a certain distance from society, and research problems in a deep way for the long term. Beida professors have to be clear minded and extremely careful about what they say, since the influence may be long lasting. “We do not need people to like us, so we can afford to take a different line on issues, and to think for the long term.” “We also have to be solid and principled, not frivolous or easily changing.”

The two names which came to the fore in this discussion were Cai Yuanpei and Ma Yinchu. All agreed that no later president ever reached the depth of Cai’s scholarship or the strength of his cultural leadership. As for Ma Yinchu, one professor remembered meeting him in the 1950s, and commented on how modest he was in some ways. “I remember him telling students that they should take a cold shower every morning for the sake of their health.” “At the same time, no-one could forget the stand he took, holding to the truth and refusing to retreat, at the cost of having to step down and suffer a long exile.”

When asked about architecture, and which buildings or spaces best

expressed the Beida spirit, mention was made of the Unnamed Lake and the pagoda scene depicted earlier. (see Photo 3.1) “Water is very important for Beida, and the lake, pagoda and surroundings are its most important symbol.” Beida’s famous West gate was also mentioned by several, as a historic place on the campus that evokes the Beida spirit in important ways. (See Photo 3.3) However, the space which aroused the most vehement discussion was the new library. One scholar said he had been determined to stay long enough to voice his dislike of the new library building, though he had to leave early. “It has filled the beautiful grassy space in front of the old library where students and faculty used to enjoy quiet conversations and lively dialogue and debate. Both the architecture of the new library and that of the Guanghai School of Management are sudden and disruptive; they do not fit harmoniously into the campus environment, in spite of superficial elements of Chinese tradition in their style. They were designed by an architect who does not understand the Beida spirit.” (See Photo 3.2)

Photo 3.3: The West Gate



Merger Issues

Several members of the faculty focus group raised the issue of the merger with Beijing Medical University. There was a strong consensus that this had been beneficial for both sides. For the medical university, it became possible to recruit students at a higher level, and for all students to have their courses in the basic sciences and some electives in social sciences

and humanities on the Beida campus. One of the professors in information science noted how she had begun teaching medical students in 2001, shortly after the merger, and found their ways of thinking about problems and their learning styles were quite different from the norm of Beida students. However, they quickly adapted and benefited from the more critical attitudes and diverse views that they found in the Beida culture.

In terms of curricular development, there were considerable benefits for Beida also in the merger. One of the engineering professors talked about the cooperation between the new engineering college and the medical school, with programs in the basic sciences as a kind of bridge between them. New programs in biotechnology are one example. Also the sociology department is developing a program in medical sociology, which has only become possible since the merger. The social work program within sociology is now active in liaison with the network of hospitals around the medical section, with opportunities for student placements and for cooperation in research.

Beida has also benefited greatly in its research profile from having the medical section, since its faculty are able to bring in significant research funding, and their contribution to research publications has increased substantially over recent years. Thus faculty saw the merger as bringing considerable benefits to both sides, while no negative implications or outcomes were mentioned.

Curricular change and Adult education

When asked what they were most proud of in recent reforms, faculty mentioned the efforts to provide bilingual programs, embracing areas such as history, social statistics and international relations, as well as many science programs. While this put considerable pressure on them, it was regarded by most as a positive trend, facilitating greater integration into the world community, and providing opportunities for Beida students to interact with international students. One professor from sociology expressed strong objections, however, saying that sociology students don't have a strong enough basic understanding of the field in Chinese, so that teaching some courses in English can only undermine their grasp of the field.

The other point raised by faculty was Beida's outreach beyond its formal student body, with programs at both undergraduate and graduate level for the community. Typically these programs are managed at the

department or college level, bring in considerable funding, and make Beida's expertise in various fields accessible to the wider community. Undergraduate students are likely to be working adults in a wide range of fields who are seeking to upgrade their qualifications. Graduate students are often administrative or political leaders, who find it attractive to enroll in graduate programs that relate to their professional field, and are more interested in the learning experiences than the qualifications. Thus only about one third of those enrolled in community oriented masters program in sociology ever complete a thesis and get a degree, yet many benefit from the affiliation with Beida.

Views on Civil Society and Equity

Focus group members welcomed the chance to talk about the concept of civil society. Even though Beida has a centre for research on civil society, they expressed fundamental doubts as to how the concept could be translated into Chinese and whether it is appropriate for describing Chinese society. "Civil society is a Western concept with a strong association with human rights, and it can be questioned whether China has human rights as such." "China certainly has a society, if not a civil society, and Chinese leaders have launched the idea of a harmonious society in order to avoid sensitive issues and encourage people to accept their place in a docile way." "China does have a notion of citizenship, and a concept of the courageous citizen who is willing to speak out. Can Chinese universities fulfil the mission of nurturing courageous citizens?" This ideal seemed to faculty members a better fit with the Chinese conception of a continuous interaction among different polarities, as against the western concept of a firm line that separates civil from governmental institutions.

The intriguing discussion of civil society led on to some consideration of issues of equity. Faculty felt that higher education still remains rather elite, and economic background tends to be the most important factor affecting access for young people. Thus rural girls are still disadvantaged, and there are growing gaps between their opportunities for education and those of urban girls. Generally the level of economic prosperity of various regions determines the opportunities of their young people in education; while national programs address some of these inequities they are not able to reach all students. There is also a skewing of disciplines, with areas such as law and management having become very popular and attracting top students, while traditionally prestigious areas such as philosophy, literature and history are strug-

gling to attract good students. The job market has become an all-important factor.

Finally, faculty members commented on Beida's personnel reforms which have aroused so much controversy on the national scene. Some felt that Beida cannot maintain some of its famous "scholarly brands" in a situation where it is not allowed to recruit its own doctoral graduates as young faculty. This puts it at a disadvantage in comparison to other Chinese universities which are not so constrained. The fact that most of the new appointments are coming from other institutions, often with postdoctoral experience abroad, means it takes them time to adapt to the Beida environment. However, the reforms have been implemented in a more flexible way than the debates would suggest, and most faculty seem to have come to terms with them.³²

Perspectives from Beida students

The student focus group meeting involved eleven students, from the fields of mathematics, mechanics, sociology, history, international relations and information science, five men and six women. Students wanted to talk about the Beida spirit and Chinese culture, also the theme of civic responsibility and participation.

The Beida spirit and Chinese culture

In the first comment on the Beida spirit mention was made of Cai Yuanpei, his support for intellectual freedom and the inclusion of diverse viewpoints, also the lively debates among figures such as Hu Shi, Li Dazhao (李大釗) and other luminaries at Beida in the 1920s. "This is something I was aware of long before coming to Beida," stated this student. A second student followed up by saying this had established the Beida spirit and continued to give students and faculty a sense of mission up to the present time. A third student spoke of Beida as a platform for free exchange, with students and faculty having a sense of responsibility to lead in thinking through major problems for the nation, and so opening up a way into the future.

Students also mentioned their sense of being linked to a world community, through the opportunities of attending lectures by visiting national leaders as well as outstanding scholars from around the world.

³² All of the quotations and viewpoints expressed in this section come from the Faculty Focus Group Meeting, 9 May 2008.

“What amazes us most is the fact that visiting presidents want to hear from us and get our views, not only speak to us! We treasure these opportunities for interaction, and the sense that even while we are still students our ideas may have an influence beyond China.”

This comment led on to a discussion of the role of Chinese culture in the world. Can it be regarded as a “missionizing culture” and do Chinese people have a responsibility to present it on an international stage? Several students made the point that Chinese culture is actually rather introspective, and that it does not have an impulse to dominate or even influence the world. “China’s culture will flow out into the world in a natural way, less through the efforts of Chinese people to assert or explain it, than in response to those who may come and ask what lies behind our recent economic and social developments. The Confucius Institutes and the Chinese diaspora will all play a part in this, but Chinese culture will never seek to dominate the world.”

“More than anything else Beida is a place where great scholars have congregated, and formed the heart of the university and society.” Students expressed great affection for the Unnamed Lake, and several commented on the library as a symbol of the way in which Beida brought together old and new, past and future. The classical architecture reminded them of the past, while the internal facilities, which are extremely modern and futuristic, give them a sense of being on the cutting edge of knowledge. At the same time, the part of the campus which students felt touched them most deeply was the Lang Run Garden (朗潤園), where famous scholars have had their residences up till now. “This quiet and

Photo 3.4: The Lang Run Garden



peaceful place is the most important part of the campus, since so many great teachers and great scholars have lived here, and some still live here now.” Students commented on how the Beida campus made them feel a great sense of responsibility to carry forward the achievements of past members of Beida, a sense of the power to serve and change society. These reflections led naturally into the topic of civil society and civic participation.

Civic Responsibility and Participation

One student commented that on his way to the focus group meeting, he had seen a group of students fundraising for victims of the Sichuan earthquake. “It is natural for Beida students to show this kind of concern,” he commented. Most of the students were involved both in various formal student bodies, as well non-formal associations of various kinds. One student noted that he represented the university’s student association on a number of university bodies, and felt it was his responsibility to supervise the administration from the perspective of students’ rights and interests. Several had served in responsible positions of the student associations at college and department level, while others were involved in the university’s Communist Youth League. One who was secretary of the college level student association said she felt this was a significant position from which to represent student demands and expectations to academic and administrative leaders. She was proud that she had been able to stimulate leaders of the college of international relations to organize a visit to the Ministry of External Affairs, which made it possible for students to have a memorable and exciting meeting with Minister Li Zhaoxing.

Some students made the point that they preferred to engage only with the non-official associations and groups, including those relating to their professional field and those organized to offer educational or social assistance. A number of students made reference to a recent decision of the university administration to close down the well-known Triangle Place, and re-develop the area. This has been a focal point for student meetings on campus for decades, and was the centre of the student movement in 1989. The student who brought up the topic said that students now exchange information with each other through the BBS (university website for students) and no longer need Triangle Place. Several other students took the opposing view. “We care a lot about this place and do not want to see it closed down – it is part of the Beida

spirit." "Beida's leaders did not consult us about this, and when we have sent letters to ask for an explanation, they have not replied."³³

In these views of students, it was interesting to see considerable consonance with faculty views, as well as a perspective on the global role of Chinese culture that had its own unique flavor. It was also notable to see evidence of the continuing outspokenness and independence of thought, which has characterized the Beida spirit since the time of Cai Yuanpei.

Conclusion: Cultural Leadership and the Beida spirit

This picture of Beida gives some interesting insights into the experience of one of China's top universities in the move to mass higher education. Perhaps most striking is the sense of a strong and persistent identity, as an institution whose destiny has been to take the lead in China's cultural development over the 20th century. While the reform period, between 1978 and 1998 had been a difficult one for Beida, due to inadequate resources and enormous pressures to raise funds through entrepreneurial activity, the infusion of government funding through the 98/5 Project opened up a whole new phase of development, a phase that coincided precisely with the nation's move to mass higher education. Beida's approach to that move was to expand and diversify its graduate programs, to integrate its newly merged medical section with its other programs, and to build upon its historic curricular strengths in the humanities, social sciences and basic sciences.

Leaders, faculty and students all shared a strong sense of identity, relating to Beida's tradition of liberalism, of intellectual freedom, and of the responsibility to speak out and be critical, even when such criticism was costly. All agreed on the continuing importance of the spirit of Cai Yuanpei and Ma Yinchu, leaders who had left their imprint in critical periods of the university's development. Yet this sense of identity and call to cultural leadership was expressed differently by different groups.

In Beida's leaders, we could see remarkable qualities of scholarly sophistication combined with a commitment to maintaining the university's autonomy and pressing for wider changes in national political governance that would make it possible to realize the legal person status provided for in legislation. There was also a determination to encourage

³³ All quotations and viewpoints found in this section were garnered from the student focus group meeting held on 13 May 2008.

and protect scholarship in fields such as economics, politics and sociology that would address sensitive yet vital questions of national development. This was just as important as the cutting edge research in basic sciences, medicine and new fields of engineering. There was no hesitation about taking steps to reform the faculty appointment system in such a way as to attract top talent from within China and around the world, and prevent the kinds of inbreeding that had been common in Chinese universities since the 1950s. The fact that this policy sparked nation-wide controversy did not result in any significant retreat.

In the faculty group whom we talked to, there was a sense of how heavy was the responsibility of being a Beida teacher – not only within China, but in the wider East Asian region. They felt much was expected of them and they had much to live up to. They must nurture students to be critical thinkers and to think deeply for the long term, if Beida was to retain its cultural leadership. This in turn made it necessary to keep some distance from the immediate demands of society and government. They did not hesitate to express critical views, including fundamental questioning of the concept of civil society in a Chinese context, and a strongly negative opinion about the library building, which both students and leaders felt was a symbol of identity and progress. Overall, there was a clear sense that they would inhabit the space which university leaders carved out for them in ways that were responsible but not necessarily either predictable or comfortable.

In the student group, there was a surprising diffidence about the role of Chinese culture in the world, and a conviction that China would never seek to dominate global circles. At the same time there was a lively awareness of Beida being on a global stage, with the visits of many national leaders, and opportunities for students not only to learn but to express their views to these leaders. There was also a profound appreciation of the Beida heritage, of the great scholars past and present, who had lived on campus and made this the place that it was. There was further a strong sense of civic identity and responsibility, and divergent views on how far this should be exercised within the frame of officially established organizations or in non-official or even dissident settings.

Perhaps we could conclude this chapter with some reflections on the spatial configuration of Beida's campus in the move to mass higher education. In a sense one can see a core tension in the decision to protect and further sequester the classical low rise buildings that form the heart of the campus, on the one hand, while developing whole new campus

areas that connect to public transport and have high rise buildings for new professional programs, on the other hand. While the aura of mystery and distance emanating from the Unnamed Lake and the surrounding architecture in Royal Palace style is maintained and enhanced, the periphery of the campus is more firmly connected to the main arteries of the city and the dynamic changes that have overtaken it. There is thus a balancing act between opposed polarities that expresses a fundamental dimension of Chinese culture in these campus developments.