Keynote Speech for the Asian Roundtable of Presidents of Universities of Education, The Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong, May 22, 2009.

The Idea of a University of Education

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It is a great honor for me to be invited to speak at this dinner, with so many presidents of universities of education from around the world. I hope you will permit me to begin on a personal note, with some reflections on my experience as the second director of the Hong Kong Institute of Education. I took up the position in October of 1997, an exciting time, just after Hong Kong returned to China, and just as the new institution was moving from the nine original campuses of the colleges of education to this beautiful campus in Taipo.

My own scholarly background is in comparative higher education, and I had spent many years doing research on China's universities and supporting Chinese normal universities in developing their first doctoral programs in the 1980s and early 1990s. Before that I had been a secondary school teacher in Hong Kong. Yet in all those years of teaching, research and development work I had never heard of a university of education!

When I came to the Hong Kong Institute of Education in 1997, the task was clear: – to lead in the upgrading of the Institute from a primary emphasis on sub-degree training programs for early childhood, elementary

and lower secondary school teachers to programs that would allow all students to attain degrees or postgraduate qualifications. It was clear that we had to upgrade the content of our courses, the qualifications of our faculty, our teaching and our research to the level expected at a university. At the same time I was profoundly aware of the rich professional and craft traditions of the five colleges of education that had been combined to form the Institute in 1994. These included close links with kindergartens and schools across Hong Kong, excellent standards of professional practice in areas such as lesson planning, integrated curriculum development, early learning in language and mathematics, and the so-called "cultural subjects" of music, visual arts, physical education and dance.

So we faced the question of how we could preserve and build upon pedagogical traditions developed over a long history, while at the same time raise academic standards to a level equivalent to Hong Kong's other universities. How could we initiate kinds of research that would be both academically rigorous and relevant to the actual concerns and needs of teachers, pupils and schools in Hong Kong?

Reflecting on these questions gave me a sense of profound conflict between the core values of the university, as it has developed in the Western world, and the values of the normal school or college of education, which became integrated into the university only in the 20th century. This conflict in values is not surprising, since the two institutions were born in very different historical periods. Universities emerged in 12th century Europe, at a time of newly developing economic guilds and merchant towns; normal schools were created in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when new nation states were coming into being, with a commitment to educating

all children in republican values and preparing them for the needs of industrializing societies.

As I puzzled over the tensions between these two distinctive institutions, I had a sudden flash of insight. I saw how East Asian traditions of knowledge and higher learning, which were profoundly different from those of universities in Europe and North America, might constitute a kind of bridge between the normal school and the university. It was thus interesting to reflect on the fact that the first institution to call itself a "university of education," appeared in Japan in the 1960s, and that many others have sprung up in various countries of Asia.

The model of the university of education, as a university-level institution with education as its leading field, offered a clear answer to the question of how to upgrade the Hong Kong Institute of Education while still preserving and enhancing the rich traditions of the five historic colleges of education. In the rest of this paper I'll present a brief comparative historical narrative as a background for understanding the core characteristics of the university of education. I look first at the values of the European university when it emerged in the 12th century, and then consider the contrasting values of the normal schools that were founded in the 19th century. The normal university, which emerged first in France after the Revolution, might be seen as a kind of hybrid of these two sets of values. I then turn to East Asia and develop a comparative reflection on China's traditional academic institutions, whose core values were strikingly different from those of the European university but had parallels with those of the normal school.

The University of Medieval Europe

In many ways the emergence of universities in 12th century Europe was an important moment in educational history. Their core values of academic freedom and autonomy drew upon three important institutions of medieval Europe. From the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church, they obtained independent legal status and the right to own property, enshrined in a charter, which protected them from interference by local political or church authorities. Before the existence of nation states, they were effectively international, as the charter conferred the right to teach everywhere (*ius ubique docendi*). Masters and students were thus free to move around among universities across a wide region, with Latin as the common language of teaching and learning.

From the medieval craft guilds, they gained the model of a self-governing organization which decided who should be admitted to membership based on their knowledge and skill. They were thus almost always established in merchant cities where guilds had fostered economic activity independent from the landowning fiefdoms that dominated the countryside. From the monasteries, they inherited an approach to knowledge that emphasized the long-term cumulative collection of texts, rather than applied forms of knowledge relevant to local social needs.

The traditional professions of medicine, law and theology dominated the early universities, together with the trivium of grammar, rhetoric and logic, and the quadrivium of arithmetic, astronomy, geometry and music. Theology was viewed as queen of the sciences, and was expected to integrate all other fields of knowledge in a hierarchy, that placed law and medicine above the basic arts and sciences. Logic and theoretical knowledge was more highly valued than practice and applied knowledge. With the emergence of modern science through the application of mathematics to

experimentation in the natural world, the inherent tendencies to specialization increased. The Kantian separation between facts and values allowed wide-ranging exploration in the natural sciences and the development of such new social sciences as economics, sociology and political science. Yet it also strengthened the tendency to value theoretical and specialist disciplines of knowledge most highly.

While universities contributed to the development of European civilization in important ways, they had their limitations. They remained highly elite up to the late 19th century, with most applied technological and industrial education being developed in alternative institutions. Although women had been active as students and teachers in the abbeys and cathedral schools that pre-dated the medieval universities, they were excluded from universities for nearly seven centuries. Feminists have argued that the university's objectivism, orientation towards narrow specialization and linear approach to logic have resulted from this historical situation of male domination.

These characteristics may also explain why universities were not considered suitable institutions for forming the large number of teachers needed for the mass schooling systems that were created in the 19th century. Rather, an entirely new type of institution was created, which was open to women, favoured integrative and morally explicit forms of knowledge and offered a direct service to community and nation.

The Normal School and the Normal University

The terms normal school and normal university are derived from French, where "normale" means "setting a moral standard or pattern." The first Ecole Normale Supérieure or higher normal school was founded in

1794, a few years after the French Revolution, when universities had been abolished and new institutions were being created to serve the modern French state. The decree passed by the National Convention stated that professors in this new institution "will give lessons to the students in the art of teaching morality and of shaping the hearts of young republicans to the practice of public and private virtues."[1] Citizenship and moral development were thus key purposes of the new institution, and its curriculum focused on reading, arithmetic, practical geometry, history and French grammar. This stood in striking contrast to the traditional professions that dominated the university, and the use of Latin as the language of study. Graduates were to go back to their local districts and establish normal schools where all the teachers needed for the newly established state schooling system could be educated along lines learned in this new institution.

While the first Ecole Normal Supérieure had a very short life span, each of France's *académies* or university districts established normal schools for men and women. These were populist institutions open to young people from the working classes, and recruiting many young women for the new career of elementary school teacher or *instituteur*. Their core values and characteristics stood in striking contrast to those of the university: an emphasis on excellence in pedagogical practice rather than theory; a curriculum characterized by integrated learning in basic knowledge areas such as mathematics and language, in contrast to the highly specialized disciplines of knowledge and professions fostered in the university; a commitment to the explicit moral formation of students in contrast to the tendency towards value neutrality that came with the increasing prestige of

[1] Robert Smith, *The Ecole Normale Supérieure and the Third Republic* (Albany: State University of New York, 1982), p. 7.

the basic sciences in the university; a nurturing environment with strong ties of affection and mentorship between teachers and students, in comparison to the impersonal environment of the university, with students being free to select the lectures they wished to hear and move freely across institutional boundaries; a tendency towards close state regulation and professional accountability in contrast to the autonomy and academic freedom of the university; a strong sense of responsibility to offer direct service to the local community and the nation, in contrast to the university's internationalism and tendency to social detachment.

Normal schools played such an important role in forming teachers for the public schools of France that they were widely emulated – in other parts of Europe, in the United States and Canada, in Japan and China, and elsewhere. In parts of the Anglophone world they were called normal schools, while in England, and thus in Hong Kong, they were called colleges of education. Everywhere they were the first higher institutions open to women, and women contributed greatly to teaching as a modern profession.[2]

Meanwhile the Ecole Normale Supérieure was re-established under Napoleon in1806 as one of France's Grandes Ecoles. These were highly elite institutions attached to various ministries of the French government. Students were selected by competitive examination and educated to become top civil servants. This new higher education system was probably influenced by China's traditional civil service examination system, which was greatly admired by French intellectuals of the time. Higher education was integrated into the state bureaucracy to ensure a supply of well qualified

[2] Christine Ogren, *The American State Normal School: An Instrument of Great Good* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

civil servants in all important knowledge areas needed for modern development.

The Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) still exists as a leading institution in France, and three others were founded in different parts of the country during the 19th century. They have set a model for the normal university, with a curriculum that reflects both the emphasis on specialized disciplines in the basic sciences and humanities that is central to the university curriculum, and the embrace of education as a multi-disciplinary and applied field responsible for ensuring excellence in teaching from early childhood to tertiary education. In reality, the ENS in Paris, and its sister institutions, have mainly educated scholars and teachers for universities and academic secondary schools, leaving the other levels of education to be served by the normal schools.

It is interesting to note that this model of the normal university was influential in both China and Japan. A number of such institutions were created in the early part of the 20th century under French influence, and set high standards in terms of basic disciplines of knowledge and the education profession. It is also instructive so see the fate of these institutions in the development of education over the twentieth century. In Japan they prospered in the period before the Second World War, under eclectic educational influences from Europe and North America, but disappeared after the end of the War, when American influence alone dominated educational reforms. In China, the historical trajectory was opposite. Under American influences of the early 1920s, the main higher normal school in the southern capital of Nanjing was merged into a comprehensive university in 1922, while higher normal schools for men and women in Beijing were merged to form Beijing Normal University in 1932. The Nationalist

government gave minimal support to this institution, yet Beijing Normal University came into its own after the Revolution of 1949 under Soviet influence. Five more national normal universities were established in China's major regions in the early 1950s, and have given the country important educational leadership ever since.

Meanwhile, in the Anglo-American world no such institution as the normal university ever developed. Normal schools or colleges of education were upgraded to university level as the teaching profession struggled to gain the same status and recognition as the professions of medicine, law and engineering. This happened earliest in the United States, through two distinct processes. Some normal schools were merged with major comprehensive universities and became faculties of education. Because they were seen to have low status in the university world, there has been a constant struggle to balance the academic demand for specialized, theoretical and internationally oriented research and teaching, and the needs of schools and school boards for practical professional knowledge relevant to local needs. Other normal schools were upgraded to become local universities, where education was given greater respect as a major field within the institution but was never included in its title.[3]

Thus the term "normal school" has disappeared from the Anglo-American academic discourse and the term normal university has never been well understood. Most Anglophones are unaware of the original French meaning of "normale" as "setting a moral standard or pattern." When they

[3] Ruth Hayhoe, "Teacher Education and the University: A Comparative Analysis with Implications for Hong Kong," in *Teaching Education*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2002, pp. 5-23.

encounter the term, therefore, they are likely to say "do you mean an institution that is not abnormal?"

In spite of the enormous influence of Anglo-American models of higher education internationally, China's Ministry of Education has made a firm decision to maintain and further develop its normal universities in the 21st century. At a time when specialized institutions in medicine and engineering are being merged to form larger comprehensive universities in China, five of the six leading national normal universities have retained their title and enhanced their leadership in education. Not only are they responsible for teacher education at all levels, from early childhood to tertiary, they are also taking on important leadership roles in adult education, lifelong education, education for the professions, and new areas such as public administration and media. This has broadened the original character of the normal university in the French context and given the field of education a wider mandate and higher prestige. [4]

Meanwhile the university of education emerged in Japan in the 1960s, when many Japanese normal schools were upgraded to become local universities. The establishment of three public universities of education in Japan in the 1970s, in the prefectures of Niigata, Tokushima and Hyogo, and the establishment of the Korean National University of Education in 1985, gave significant status and recognition to this new type of university. I would like to emphasize at this point that the precursor to the university of education has been the normal school of the 19th century, not the normal university with its hybrid values. Thus the values of integrated, multi-disciplinary and morally explicit forms of knowledge that offer direct

[4] Ruth Hayhoe and Jun Li, "The Idea of a Normal University in the 21st Century," forthcoming in *Frontiers in Education*, Vol. 5, No. 4, December 2009.

service to community and nation are found in a more pure form in the university of education than in the normal university.

In conclusion, I'd like to reflect on two intriguing questions that arise out of this comparative narrative. Why is it that the university of education has emerged and thrived earliest in Japan and South Korea? And why has the normal university flourished in the Chinese context, even though it is absent from the Anglo American world? Some closing reflections on the educational traditions of East Asia may serve to answer these questions.

Education in the classical civilization of East Asia

The great historian of Chinese education, Thomas Lee, has noted that the purpose of classical education in China was to bring about a harmonious integration between the individual good and the benefit of society. *The Great Learning* expressed this in the following way: "to let one's inborn virtue shine forth, to renew the people and to rest in the highest good."[5] This focus on moral development and the social good is something that East Asian higher education has always kept as a high priority, even as it developed new disciplines of knowledge under Western influence and adapted Western models of the university to its own context.

It is reflected in the organization of the classical curriculum in China, with four major subject areas, classics, history, philosophy and the arts, forming the content for the civil service examinations. All other subjects, including medicine, mathematics, agriculture and engineering, were viewed as technical knowledge to be developed for the good of society. The four core curricular areas were not discrete, nor were they organized into the kind of hierarchy that characterized the European university curriculum; rather

[5] Thomas Lee, *Education in Traditional China: A History* (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2000), pp. 10-11.

they were integrated around the central concept of the Way. "The Classics expresses the way in words, history in deeds, while philosophers and literary artists illustrate various other aspects of the Way."[6]

Clearly education, in its broadest sense, was the most highly respected area of knowledge in the East Asian curricular tradition, as an applied inter-disciplinary field, with a high sense of responsibility to serve the good of both society and the individual. Theoretical, specialist and technical knowledge were seen as subordinate to the applied social knowledge of the Confucian Classics. There were also deep relations of personal nurturing among teachers and students, in both the official institutions preparing young people for the imperial civil service and in the informal academies or *shuyuan*.

The core values of academic freedom and autonomy, that have been so important to the Western university, are not found in the same form in the institutional traditions of East Asia. There was rather a kind of intellectual authority, expressed in the important role of scholar-officials who served both the people and the Emperor on the basis of their knowledge. There was also considerable intellectual freedom in the *shuyuan*, where scholars who did not hold public office discussed, debated and revised the classical curriculum, integrating new and diverse views from a wide range of sources. The *shuyuan*, however, were not protected by law, in the way that the charter protected Western universities. Their vitality and ability to express criticism of government was based on the independent thought and strong social conscience of individual scholars.

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[6] Bernard Luk, quoted in "Lessons from the Chinese Academy," In R. Hayhoe and J. Pan, *Knowledge Across Cultures: A Contribution to Dialogue among Civilizations* (Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, University of Hong Kong, 2001), p. 327.

The point I would like to make here is that there are parallels between the values of China's scholarly tradition and those of the normal school, and striking contrasts with those of the European university. There is thus a need to explore ways in which the Chinese scholarly tradition may enrich contemporary universities as they face the pressures of globalization in the 21st century. And it is universities of education and normal universities that are best equipped to take the lead in this important task.

In contemporary conditions of globalization there is considerable debate over whether universities are becoming more or less autonomous. While the dominance of the Anglo-American model has led to greater autonomy in terms of legal person status, new forms of accountability, including performance indicators and quality assurance systems, are enabling national governments to regulate higher education more and more tightly. The main objective of many governments is the fostering of high level scientific expertise for economic competitiveness in the global arena. In this situation, the Western model of autonomy, which emphasizes protection by law, needs to be enhanced by values of the East Asian tradition, where scholars view themselves as the conscience of the nation and take on direct moral responsibility for the education of the young and the safeguarding of the social good. Here we see a special role for the university of education, as an institution with a unique responsibility for leading the way in moral and spiritual values, nurturing citizens who will be responsible for the higher good of their societies, their world and their natural environment.

Finally, a word about the role of women in this vision. The values of the normal school and of China's traditional knowledge system might well be described as having feminine characteristics - integrative, morally explicit, nurturing, socially responsible. They stand in contrast to the

university's tendency towards narrow specialization, value neutrality, detachment and the view that theory precedes practice, both chronologically and in terms of importance. While women were excluded structurally from China's traditional system of higher education, its knowledge patterns were remarkably close to women's ways of knowing, as defined in recent feminist literature.

The university of education thus has an important heritage to draw upon in East Asian scholarly traditions. I am convinced that these have the potential to deepen and broaden the capacity of the still dominant Western model of the university so that it can embrace a vision of social justice, global harmony and environmental health in addition to nurturing scientific achievement in the service of national economic competitiveness.