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# Entrepreneurship Education in China

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## 1. Introduction

The current rise of entrepreneurship education in China adapts to the requirements of the construction of an innovation-oriented country and the development of high-quality education, itself. The significant influence of entrepreneurial activities on promoting the development of economics, the progress of science and technology, the creation of jobs, and the improvement of employment structures has been widely recognized by the community. The latest data show that in the entrepreneurship rankings of more than 60 countries and regions involved in a global entrepreneurship survey, China jumped from eleventh in 2002 to second in 2012 [1]. However, compared to this increase in active entrepreneurial activities, the development level of entrepreneurship education is not mature enough to meet the needs of entrepreneurial practice. The perfection of the entrepreneurship education system, therefore, is badly needed, and we must raise the level of entrepreneurship education, promoting the entrepreneurial qualities and abilities of university students. With the posting of “Several Opinions Proposed by the Ministry of Education on Improving the Overall Quality of Higher Education” in April 2012, the Ministry of Education made some clear and specific requirements, such as: “innovation and enterprise education should run through the whole process of personnel training”, “formulating the teaching basic requirements on innovation and entrepreneurship education in universities, developing the innovation and entrepreneurship education curriculum”, “vigorously carrying out the training of qualified teachers”, and “supporting students to engage in innovation and entrepreneurship training”. Strengthening innovation and entrepreneurship education will be one of the most important directions for higher education reform in the future, underlining the profound impact innovation and entrepreneurship education has on comprehensively improving the quality of higher education.

Entrepreneurship education in China did not start until the Ministry of Education initiated a pilot project of entrepreneurship education in April 2002 at nine universities, such as Tsinghua

University, Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, and so on. Along with this initiative, Chinese universities have been promoting entrepreneurship education continuously for the past 10 years, trying to increase students' professional quality and entrepreneurial abilities. However, matters like curriculum design or teachers training are still prominent due to the short period of entrepreneurship education development that began from a low degree of development.

Taking 2002 as a starting point, and relying on investigations into Chinese entrepreneurship education in the past 10 years, this article will propose constructive ideas about perfecting the entrepreneurship education system of university students. Firstly, the paper will probe into the evolution of the aspects of educational forms, educational content, education models, and other areas of entrepreneurship education in the university, clarifying its development. Secondly, the paper will analyse the weaknesses of the curriculum system, teachers, education models, and supporting mechanism, pointing out the existing problems in universities' entrepreneurship education.

## **2. Evolution of university entrepreneurship education**

Entrepreneurship education in Chinese universities began in the late 1990s. With increasingly engagement in entrepreneurial activities, innovation and entrepreneurship are urgently needed for economic and social development, and entrepreneurship education in Chinese universities is in continued progress to conform the practical requirement.

### **2.1. Pilot project from entrepreneurship competition to entrepreneurship education**

The entrepreneurship education of university students started in the early 1980s in the United States, and was introduced to China in the form of entrepreneurship competition in the late 1990s. In May 1998, Tsinghua University and a Shanghai magazine successfully combined with several universities to hold the first Tsinghua Business Plan Competition and introduce it into domestic university campuses. With the sponsorship of the Communist Youth League, the China Association for Science and Technology, and the All-China Students Federation, the first "Challenge Cup" Chinese University Student Business Plan Competition was held by Tsinghua University in 1999, establishing its reputation. Nearly 400 works from more than 120 universities were brought together by the competition, initiating an upsurge of innovation and entrepreneurship throughout the universities nationwide, and having a broad impact on society.

Along with the nationwide spread of the business plan competition, university teaching activity had more and more to do with business plan competition counselling, entrepreneurship courses, and entrepreneurial talents training. The Ministry of Education launched the pilot work of entrepreneurship education in April 2002, which at first had nine selected universities as follows: Tsinghua University, Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Heilongjiang University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Nanjing University of Finance and Economics, Wuhan University, Xi'an Jiao Tong University, and North-western Polytech-

nic University. There is also exploration of entrepreneurship education suitable to our nation's situation, which is through an entrepreneurship education pilot to encourage universities to practice entrepreneurship education in various ways. As a result of an entrepreneurship education pilot of nearly 10 years' duration, Chinese universities have achieved the transition from active entrepreneurship competitions to initiative entrepreneurship education, as well as a beneficial exploration of the pattern of entrepreneurship education — not only forming diverse entrepreneurship educational schemes at typical pilot universities, but also forming distinctive ones at non-pilot universities, laying the foundation for the widespread use of entrepreneurship education throughout the country.

## **2.2. Shift from teacher-oriented training to student-oriented cultivation**

Problems with faculty form the primary block to launching entrepreneurship education. From 27 October to 2 November in 2003, with the participation of 200 teachers from more than 100 universities, the first core teacher training of entrepreneurship education was held by the Minister of Education at the Ruxin Conference Center of Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, marking the start of entrepreneurship education teaching. In the next 10 years, the Business Management Training School of Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics had held ten successful core teacher training of entrepreneurship education, which, at the beginning, included entrepreneurship education content, the curriculum of entrepreneurship, and how to help students change idea to business. In recent training courses, besides the content of entrepreneurship education, experience sharing through patterns, methods, technology, and innovative experiments in national universities is being more and more important. By the end of 2012, this training project had trained more than 1,300 core teachers for universities' entrepreneurship education.

Another important measure to promote teacher training is KAB (Know About Business Entrepreneurship Education), which has been pushed through international co-operation by the Communist Youth League and All-China Students Federation from August 2008. This is an attempt to develop Chinese entrepreneurship education, aiming to explore a Chinese entrepreneurship education that takes into account international experience. [2] By the end of March 2012, KAB (China) had trained 4,045 teachers from 1,008 universities, created university student KAB entrepreneurship club in 153 universities, founded university student KAB entrepreneurship education bases in 185 universities, had more than 300,000 university students participate in learning and practicing entrepreneurship [3], offered the course of "University Student KAB Entrepreneurship Foundation" at 850 universities such as Tsinghua University, China Youth University for Political Science, Zhejiang University, etc., published two sets of course textbooks for the preparation of teachers and students, and established four systems, as follows: course construction, teacher training, quality control, and interflow promotion.

In the wake of the run of core teacher training of entrepreneurship education and KAB (China), universities had, period by period, been increasing their reserves of teachers and the serious shortage of teachers has also been fixed, step by step. The shift from teacher-oriented training to student-oriented cultivation has been achieved due to the increase in the number of

universities setting entrepreneurship courses and placing increased importance on entrepreneurship education in personnel training. For example, entrepreneurship education in Nankai University covers the entire learning process, and in order to offer diversity courses and entrepreneurship practices the students are divided into several types according to different goals and demand: such as entrepreneurship optional courses and simulation company training camps designed for students interested in learning about the knowledge and experiences of entrepreneurship, with a follow-up service provided for students attempting to apply entrepreneurship practice to apprenticeship, pair work, and so on.

### **2.3. Transition from classroom teaching to multiple teaching patterns**

Closed classroom teaching is the most common method of traditional curriculum education in domestic universities, which can neither interest students nor improve their entrepreneurial skills if applied to entrepreneurship education directly. In the pilot process of entrepreneurship education, universities have begun to search for a variety of patterns, of which Wenzhou University and three pilot universities (including Tsinghua University, Renmin University of China, and Heilongjiang University) are selected as cases to illustrate this paper.

#### *2.3.1. Tsinghua university: Deep focus*

Relying on its strong research advantage and its promotion of entrepreneurship education to all students, Tsinghua University applied the entrepreneurship course system to the scenarios of technological innovation, technological commercialization, and high technology industry, concentrating on talent training that can increase an enterprise's capacity for independent innovation and international competitiveness. China Center for Entrepreneurial Research and technological innovation at Tsinghua University has more than 10 entrepreneurship courses. In addition, the Tsinghua-Berkeley Global Technology Entrepreneurship Program is built in partnership with Berkeley University of California, customizing courses and compulsory practical projects like "technological entrepreneurship", "characteristic industry innovation and entrepreneurship", "intellectual property management", and so on, to help students get access to the leading technology enterprises in Zhongguancun and increase the capability of technology innovation. In addition, Tsinghua has also had a special Science and Technology Innovation Center with Science and Technology Innovation Fund to support students' innovation activities and provide guidance and consultation.

#### *2.3.2. Renmin university of China: Class extension*

To improve the overall entrepreneurship ability and quality of students, Renmin University of China combined curriculum education with practice education through class extension. "The First Class" is the core class of teaching, with entrepreneurship courses like "entrepreneurial spirit", "venture capital", "entrepreneurship management", and so on [4]. Courses are improving on several fronts, simultaneously: on the one hand, increasing the proportion of optional courses to broaden the students' choices; on the other hand, advocating participatory teaching to develop students' creative thinking. "The Second Class", also known as the extracurricular practice class, is the extension of "The First Class", encouraging students to



join in various social practice activities and social welfare activities. Adopting entrepreneurship education lectures and competitive activities, entrepreneurial practice groups came into being in the form of projects and social organizations relying on professions.

### *2.3.3. Heilongjiang university: Entity experience*

Relying on the construction of entrepreneurship practice base for university students, Heilongjiang University insisted on the combination of theory and practice in the pilot process and paid more attention to fostering students' entrepreneurship practice ability. School sources were integrated in various ways to create conditions of entity entrepreneurial experience for students. For instance, scientific laboratories are open to students so that they can come into contact with advanced equipment and the newest scientific achievements, stimulating students' entrepreneurial enthusiasm to use the leading technology. Beyond that, operational entities are also be founded to enhance students' entrepreneurial practice experience: such as a technology services company, students' supermarket, students' bookstall, students' tutor department, and so on. These entities are managed and operated by entrepreneurial practice students, letting them experience the entirety of entity operating and entrepreneurship under the guidance of teachers, fostering their entrepreneurship spirit and entrepreneurship ability.

### *2.3.4. Wenzhou university: Position entrepreneurship*

Driven by its training in position entrepreneurship sense and ability, Wenzhou University promotes entrepreneurship education successfully and has become a state level experimental area of entrepreneurship talent training outside the Ministry of Education's pilot universities. An entitative entrepreneurial talent training school has been founded, and a unique entrepreneurial talent training system has been structured, through the setting of classes like entrepreneurial pioneer class, manager developing class, enterprise successor class, and bi-major of entrepreneurship and management. There is also a 3-level linkage practice carrier of entrepreneurship education, consisting of a professional entrepreneurial studio, an entrepreneurship centre of school, and a pioneer park of university with the functions of transformation, enhancement, and incubation. In addition, with the integration of social sources with a local advantage, Wenzhou University combined with Wenzhou's chamber of commerce nationwide, constructing students' position entrepreneurship practice bases outside of the school with well-known group companies such as Red Dragonfly, AOKANG, CHINT, etc. [5] This enterprise has the aim of training students to become position entrepreneurial talents with the expertise to be highly entrepreneurial on three levels: position entrepreneurial sense training, position entrepreneurial ability training, and position entrepreneurial management practice.

## **2.4. Transition from knowledge impartment to quality-oriented education**

At the beginning of domestic entrepreneurship education in universities, there was more concentration on the impartment of knowledge and theory to students and less focus on quality-oriented entrepreneurship education, leading to the shortage of entrepreneurial enthusiasm and practice ability among the majority of students, even after they had completed

their education. In practice, universities changed this situation after exploring the different levels of their provision, shifting from knowledge impartment to quality-oriented education. For instance, pilot universities like Tsinghua University, Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, and Heilongjiang University comprehensively improved their students' entrepreneurial quality from practical skills, entrepreneurial spirit, and anti-risk ability, through the building of a pioneer park, establishing entrepreneurial funds, or offering entitative business platforms. Moreover, other universities are trying to integrate entrepreneurship education into quality-oriented education, such as Wenzhou University, which is attempting to integrate contemporary Zhejiang merchants, Wenzhou merchants, and students' entrepreneurial stories into the ideological and political theory course. This would not only improve the effectiveness of the ideological and political theory course, but also enrich and update quality-oriented educational content such as courses in philosophy, entrepreneurial spirit training, psychology, and business ethics.

### **3. The problem of entrepreneurship education in Chinese universities**

In the development of entrepreneurship education in a decade of development in China, we have made some achievements. Compared with foreign comprehensive entrepreneurship education systems, however, there is still a big gap. This article will focus on the following points to elaborate why this should be the case.

#### **3.1. The unreasonable design of curriculum**

Teaching is the most basic form of education, and the higher education curriculum is the core of the teaching process. Through the analysis of a decade of entrepreneurship education in Chinese universities, the unreasonable design of the curriculum is mainly reflected in the following aspects.

##### *3.1.1. The single course forms*

The enterprise education must break the traditional teaching model, which is closed, and increase the proportion of the curriculum that addresses other forms of education: including entrepreneurship training and combat simulation, as well as practical experience in entrepreneurship. However, there are only a few schools that could do this at present, and many colleges in different places still regard the "classroom" as the core model, which is supplemented by a number of other activities. These courses cannot provide opportunities for students to participate in entrepreneurial practice actively, with the consequence that students cannot play a role effectively with initiative, enthusiasm, and innovation. As a result, it affects the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education.

##### *3.1.2. The limited number of courses*

Only 41 in 107 universities which are in the "211 project" offer entrepreneurship courses in China, while there are over 1,600 universities providing more than 2,200 entrepreneurial

courses in America [6]. In contrast, the entrepreneurship courses provided by many universities in China are very limited, there is only one course called “Entrepreneurial Management” or “Graduate Employment and Entrepreneurial Guidance”. This makes it difficult to meet the needs of students who want to learn entrepreneurship theory and train in entrepreneurial skills.

### *3.1.3. The insufficient course subdivision*

As the pioneer of entrepreneurship education in China, Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics has set up the “School of Business Management Training”, offering three required courses in entrepreneurial management introduction, business communication, business practices, and five optional courses such as team training, development training, entrepreneurial market research, corporate and contract law, and business finances. However, compared with Stanford University (with 21 entrepreneurship courses) and the Berkeley University of California (with 23 entrepreneurship courses), this curriculum is still not large enough and lacks the support to develop different types and levels of students.

## **3.2. The shortage of qualified teachers**

Entrepreneurship education is a comprehensive discipline. It requires teachers to have not only high quality professional and teaching skills, but also to have the ability to guide business practices. In the teachers’ construction of entrepreneurship education, our universities are facing a huge gap in demand [7]. The shortage of highly qualified teachers of entrepreneurship education has become the bottleneck that constrains the rapid development of entrepreneurship education.

### *3.2.1. A limited overall number of teachers*

As an emerging discipline and curriculum, most training of universities’ entrepreneurial management teachers, especially teachers with the relevant professional backgrounds, still cannot meet the needs of actual teaching in recent years.

### *3.2.2. Shortage of teaching skills*

Most university teachers engaged in education enter work directly after graduating from school. Many teachers have instructed students after they had received relevant knowledge and training. The majority of the content is theoretical explanation, and the entrepreneurship education courses are academic. This cannot truly cultivate students’ entrepreneurial awareness and ability.

### *3.2.3. Teachers’ weak ability in practice guidance*

In order to strengthen practical entrepreneurship education, most universities employed a group of entrepreneurs as visiting teachers. Although this arrangement was widely welcomed by students, limited lectures were lack of systematic. In addition, some of the entrepreneurs were so lacking in teaching experience that the effect was sometimes unsatisfactory.



### 3.3. Entrepreneurship education model needing to be perfected

Entrepreneurship education is a systematic project, which is engaged in economy and management, humanities, and other fields. To bring entrepreneurship education into the orbit of the university, there should be plans to perfect the entrepreneurship education model. However, the following problems still exist in entrepreneurship education of Chinese universities.

#### 3.3.1. *The lack of a systematic education model*

Although more and more teachers in Chinese universities are engaged in entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurship has not yet been fully integrated into the national system of discipline construction and universities have to rely on teachers and teaching conditions in other disciplines in order to expand entrepreneurship education. This meant that the model was heavily influenced by traditional teaching models, leading to the lack of independence, pertinence, and an appropriate system of entrepreneurship educational patterns. Simultaneously, in addition to providing a small number of "entrepreneurial foundation" courses, most universities lacked a completely systematic entrepreneurship education curriculum, and instead classified entrepreneurship education as one category within career planning or careers guidance, rather than forming independent entrepreneurship courses and a systematic entrepreneurship curriculum group.

#### 3.3.2. *The lack of planning in education model*

The promotion of entrepreneurship education should be planned and designed according to students' different levels and majors. Reasonable planning is reflected in systematic management, adopting certain entrepreneurship education models relating to educational goals, educational programs, educational implementation, and the evaluation of education. Entrepreneurship education in most universities cannot meet the above requirements: on the one hand, teacher training of entrepreneurship education and supporting policies in many universities is not yet fully in place, thus failing to meet different types of students' needs for entrepreneurship education; on the other hand, entrepreneurship education in many universities is still at the stage of observation, learning, and exploring, and cannot form stable and mature entrepreneurial education models, leading to a lack of long-term arrangement and design.

### 3.4. The unsound supporting mechanisms of entrepreneurship education

In recent years, entrepreneurship education in Chinese universities has been gradually developing, but many universities are concerned only with the entrepreneurial activities of a small group of people rather than the majority. Some universities prefer utilitarian exploration with quick results, hoping to rapidly achieve the effect of releasing employment pressure by entrepreneurship [8], leading to failed entrepreneurship education, supporting mechanisms such as matching funds mechanism, hatch mechanisms, policies safeguard mechanism, and hindering the development of entrepreneurship education of university students.

#### *3.4.1. The shortage of funds to support entrepreneurship practice*

Funds are the primary problem to be solved for entrepreneurship education in Chinese universities. At present, funds used to meet the need of students' entrepreneurship practices mainly consist of the entrepreneurial fund established by the government, the investment and risk fund established by private entrepreneurs, and the entrepreneurial fund established by schools, though the amount of most entrepreneurial funds are very limited. Even the entrepreneurial fund of Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics that first started entrepreneurship education is three million (and the entrepreneurial fund of Fudan University is 10 million) its exemplary role is still limited. Universities are different from profit-making organizations, after all, and it is difficult for the majority of universities to spend large amounts of money on supporting students' entrepreneurial practice with the immature conditions of models such as alumni donations.

#### *3.4.2. The unreasonable supporting of incubator space with entrepreneurship*

The problem of incubator space has become a bottleneck, restricting the development of entrepreneurial practice teaching in Chinese universities. Incubator space can be the business practice field to simulate entrepreneurial aspects, and it can also be the simple laboratory space and an important place where students can enter the market; practice business activities; experience technological innovation, results transformation and commercial activities; achieve self-development; and run an enterprise. These all require universities to provide buildings, land, and hardware facilities as support. However, due to the limitation of funds, conditions, and emphasis on entrepreneurship, many universities failed to provide the necessary incubator space or the limited space, and have impeded the entrepreneurial practices of some students.

#### *3.4.3. The inadequate policy security supporting entrepreneurship practice*

The inadequate security supporting policies related with entrepreneurship education in Chinese universities has become another bottleneck, restricting the development of entrepreneurship education in Chinese universities. In the past ten years, although state and local governments have successively introduced a number of policies to encourage students to establish a business — such as proposing to allow students to remain on the school roll for entrepreneurship, relaxing the standards of loans of university student entrepreneurship, reducing and eliminating the revenue for university student entrepreneurship, and other many preferential policies — the genuine impact that these policies have on entrepreneurship education is very limited. On the one hand, most policies are encouraging university students to leave the campus and participate in entrepreneurship, but failed to support the entrepreneurship education of all students; on the other hand, most universities failed to develop specific safeguards or implement rules for providing ancillary support, thus affecting the effect of the implementation.

## **4. Conclusion**

With increasingly active entrepreneurial activities in China, entrepreneurial contributions to the nation and local economies have become increasingly prominent, and the need to

vigorously develop entrepreneurship education has been the general consensus among universities. Universities have explored entrepreneurship education adapted to the actual needs of our country since the Ministry of Education started the pilot project of entrepreneurship education. After decades of development, the audience and penetration of entrepreneurship education at universities is gradually increasing, and entrepreneurship education has also gradually changed from the early entrepreneurship competitions, teacher-oriented training, classroom teaching, and knowledge impartment into focusing on entrepreneurial ability training, raising quality, and diversified educational styles. Overall, entrepreneurship education at universities has experienced profound change in terms of educational forms, content, models, and so on. However, because of the short period and the undeveloped starting point of entrepreneurship education in Chinese universities, the present entrepreneurship education in Chinese universities still experiences problems like the unreasonable design of curricula, the shortage of qualified teachers, the single model of entrepreneurship education, and the lack of supporting mechanisms. In future development, to catch up with the pace of European and other developed countries', our country should further strengthen the construction of curriculum systems, entrepreneurship practice systems, faculty systems, educational model systems, and education evaluation systems. Through perfecting the entrepreneurship education system; further enhancing entrepreneurship education quality in Chinese universities; and cultivating high-level entrepreneurship talents with excellent creative thinking, entrepreneurial skills, and entrepreneurial practical ability, we can provide personnel security and intellectual support for implementing the development strategies of the innovation-oriented country.

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