



Moving In Different Directions: The Changing Role of Community Colleges in America and a Comparative Look at the System of Higher Education in China

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Community colleges in the United States of America have become an extension of government's concept for initiating, supporting, and managing attempts of social planning. The hidden qualities of community colleges are, in essence, transforming them into something like "Settlement Houses"¹ of the new millennium. Selecting China's system of post-secondary education for comparative purposes, we find that while America is moving toward greater government control and influence, China has been moving in the opposite direction from total government control in quite recent times toward a more decentralized institution. This paper focuses on the convergence of social reform and public policy; a development that is leading many community colleges in the USA to adapt a broader interventionist approach to higher education

¹ "Settlement Houses" historically addressed the economic and social needs of recently arrived immigrants to urban centers, along with English classes, assistance with immigration matters, housing concerns, health care needs, etc. Today's community colleges are providing such assistance to students whom are recent arrivals to this country. See: Wald, L., *House On Henry Street*, New York: Dover Publications, 1915, for an example of such an institution.

Using China's system of higher education for comparative purposes, we can determine the extent to which community colleges in the USA have moved in the direction of government control (Hin 1998), as well as demonstrate the extent to which the Chinese system has gone to a less centralized concept in more recent years. Until quite recently, the Chinese central government controlled adult education system, epitomized an institution of higher education for purposes of economic and social development by implementing regime dictated social reforms. Looking at two major social policies in American society as examples that have come from government-welfare reform and work force development training—we see how community colleges are becoming extensions of government, socially tracking the masses of poor citizens and immigrants. By comparing these two policy reforms, we begin to determine the extent to which community colleges in the USA have come under more government control and influence. We begin to suggest the level to which low-income students truly have selected a method of reaching their educational goals in the USA, or, as been suggested by others, they are stratified and tracked away from an education and toward vocational training, on the basis of social class (Karabel 1972; Brint and Karabel 1989; and Woodbury 2005). It is worth noting that such control of educational outcome for low-income classes is not a new phenomenon. In the United Kingdom stratification in education existed for decades, separating college based students, from those who are tracked toward numerous professional institutions like City and Guilds of London Institute schools.

The first section of this paper provides a brief overview of community colleges in America. As two-year institutions that recently celebrated 100 years of providing educational services, they are now playing a prominent role in the lives of many Americans, as well as having great influence in the nation's economy.

The second section discusses the impact that welfare reform and workforce development have had in changing the role of community colleges. In recent years there has been a growing role of community colleges in the social policymaking process in the USA. As social, economic, and political changes occur, community colleges have been increasingly asked to play the particular and key role in helping with the task of preparing tomorrow's workforce in the global economy (Zeiss 1999).

In the third section the developing Chinese system of higher education is discussed, highlighting the major characteristics that made it for many years, until quite recently, the ideal typical government controlled institution of

learning. This third section also highlights recent changes to China's system of higher education toward a more decentralized structure, demonstrating how China and the USA are moving in different directions.

Finally, our analysis concludes with a comparative review of both community colleges in the U.S. and China's system of higher education, especially their two-year technical schools. In the last section we attempt to demonstrate the extent to which the USA as a nation, which is supposedly based on freedom of choice, has moved community colleges toward becoming a mechanism for socially controlling the poor, for the benefit of government, and most especially corporate elites.

A Historical Review of Community Colleges in America²

Community colleges in the USA began to develop in the early part of the 20th century. Initially called "junior colleges," these two-year schools played the key role of bridging rapidly growing communities, with high schools and traditional senior colleges. The belief of early founders of community colleges was that both the freshman and sophomore years of college could be taught outside of traditional universities (Coley 2000). Junior (or community) colleges provided an avenue of opportunity for many young people who otherwise would be denied access to higher education. Today's more than 1,100 community colleges grew from this early perspective and vision.

Major periods and events in America's history, such as the Depression of the 1930s, post World War II economic shifts, and the GI Bill, forced transformation of community colleges, expanding student enrollments, development of new vocational programs, and thereby increased revenues. By 1948, the federal government created a network of publicly funded, community-based colleges to serve local needs. By the 1960s, community colleges underwent additional shifts with higher enrollments from the baby-boom generation, the Vietnam War, and the Higher Education Act of 1965, which introduced the concept of "open enrollment" (Higher Education Act 1965). Both new student constituencies and increased funding forced community colleges to expand by leaps-and-bounds.

² Historical overview based on Richard J Coley, *The American Community College Turns 100: A Look at its Students, Programs, and Prospects*, Educational Testing Service, Policy Information Center, Princeton, NJ, 2000, and Tony Zeiss and Associates, *Developing The Worlds Best Workforce: An Agenda for America's Community Colleges*, American Association of Community Colleges, Washington, DC, 1999.

While in their early years of development community colleges provided vocational training, in the 1960s these schools began to introduce more traditional liberal arts curricula. It was argued, that community colleges were a good "stepping stone" for students interested in transferring to a four-year baccalaureate program. This was especially true and beneficial, it was further argued, for working-class and poor students since community colleges cost less to attend than traditional four-year schools. This rational perhaps was true between the 1960s through the late 1980s; however, research shows that "baccalaureate aspirants are much less likely to receive a bachelor's degree if they enter a community college" first (Dougherty 1992, p. 188). Studies have shown that a gap exists between community college entrants and four-year college students in rates of attaining a bachelor's degree. More specifically, while 70 percent of four-year college entrants receive a baccalaureate degree, only 26 percent of public two-year college entrants who wish to transfer reach this goal (Astin et al. 1982; and Velez 1985). Today, community colleges are still articulating this notion of they're being a good stepping stone to a four-year school, while at the same time continuing their hidden transformation by accommodating new low-income student (e.g., welfare recipients), all the while shifting from vocational training to workforce development for corporate America.

Welfare Reform and Workforce Development: The Catalysts for Change in America's Community Colleges

This section examines two recent and major social changes in American society that have pushed the nation's community college system to act as the mechanism by which government introduces cultural, economic, and social values and characteristics upon their low-income population. Specifically, "welfare reform" and "workforce development" have in recent years been the social forces pushing community colleges to serve the function of socially reconstructing the value systems of their low-income students through a process by which more government intrusion introduces changes. While for the purposes of this paper, these two concepts have been separated for analysis; they are not mutually exclusive but instead have worked hand-in-hand to afford these changes and influences.

Welfare Reform

The concept of "regulating the poor" developed by Cloward and Piven (1971) is useful in providing a better understanding of how welfare reform in 1995 helped develop the new role of community colleges. More specifically, Cloward and Piven argued, "expansive relief policies (were) designed to mute civil disorder, and restrictive ones to reinforce work norms," (p. XIII). In this way, government regulated discontent, channeled potential unrest toward acceptable behavior, and generally controlled the poor. It is evident that government policies toward the poor have historically been designed to stifle any real or perceived discontent from the masses of poor people, or in other words for social control.

We must recognize the fact that the existence of poverty among people in the USA is not through conscious choice or behavioral characteristics as have been suggested by some (Moynihan 1967; and Jensen 1969), but often due to race, ethnic background, and gender (Jennings 1999). Development of the welfare system and its various periods of reform throughout American history was essentially attempts to alleviate potential discontent and social disruption that poverty and any movement of the poor precipitated (Cloward and Piven 1978). Prior to 1995, welfare reform had historically been used to "tighten" control over low-income people, and they have taken three basic approaches (Gueron 1986). One approach was to change the rules for determining eligibility. The second was to treat entitlement as a "bargain" by which benefits required the obligation of looking for work, accepting a job, and/or participating in a job training/education program. The third strategy had been to cut back cash benefits and rely more on alternatives like child support through enforcement, changes in tax policy, and job placement. From the mid 1960s to mid 1990s the government implemented a variety of such policies within the welfare system in order to instill work ethics and values among its recipients.

In 1995, however, welfare reform included all three previous approaches, as well as term limitations imposed by both federal and state governments. It is at this point when we begin to see more restrictive policies for participation in order to reinforce work norms, values, and expectations. Both state and federal governments set up a myriad of new policy and structural reforms that resulted in short-term training for most welfare recipients, culminating with a job (thus termed "welfare-to-work" in describing this transition). These requisites were to be met by most recipients if they were to continue receiving non-cash benefits (e.g., Medicaid health care coverage). Perhaps the most significant change of the reforms was setting a time limit of receiving welfare to five years in a person's

life. What had historically been a boundless entitlement program was now limited to five years, with new strict eligibility criteria. The push to get as many welfare recipients into short-term training and into the labor force initially produced a boom of potential students for community colleges. The Bush administration, however, proposed policy changes that decreased "participation in education activities to only 16 hours within a 40-hour work week" (Kent 2002). The decline of welfare consumers within more traditional community college student cohorts, as a result of the 1995 reforms,³ increased the number of low-income immigrants of color from urban settings, shifting also the cause of poverty from economic terms to that of gender and race (Jennings 1999). This help conjure up an environment for these educational institutions to take a more significant role as social reformers. By positioning themselves to serve as the vehicle by which government could introduce reforms to the indigent, community colleges increased enrollments and developed new revenue streams at a time of declining traditional funding. In many states, there was a transformation for community college students on welfare from full time, working toward an associate's degree, to workforce trainees in short-term, non-credit, and non-credentialed training programs. The position of government was clear when it made available less money for social services, or public assistance, and more resources for what they termed "workforce development" for those on the public dole. Legislation aimed at workforce development training, at a period when the nation's economy was enjoying an unparalleled boom, made available more money for short-term preparation, job placement, and "credentialing" (Carnevale and Desrocher 2001) and less for longer-term education for an Associates Degree. This shift was especially prominent among initiatives aimed at the low-income student on welfare who originally were afforded the benefits of a real education via the 1965 Higher Education Act and "open enrollment." A formal education and degree has been historically argued to benefit an individual on a longer-term basis than short-term training, which usually benefits employers. While education has not realized its objective of economic equality among the different classes as has been envisioned, it is still nevertheless better than short-term training (Bowles and Ginitis 1976). Many job-training providers took advantage

³ See: Chacon, R. Welfare Law Changes Hit Community Colleges Hard. *Boston Globe*. March 21, 1998, for an example of how welfare reform in Massachusetts impacted the 15 publicly funded community colleges.

of this shift and new revenue stream, especially the community college system. The institutions of post-secondary education in the USA are stratified by social class, with one-half of all low-income students in community colleges. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), an organization in Washington, D.C. that community colleges belong to, indicated that by the late 1990s approximately 53 percent of 1,124 community colleges surveyed had developed welfare-to-work programs, illustrating that many of these institutions were taking advantage of this new funding source (1998). It is apparent that participating community colleges that had developed workforce development initiatives under the rubric of welfare-to-work became the "social buffer" between the low-income classes and the elite (Pfeffer 1994). Workforce development, as has been developed by these community colleges for low-income students, reinforce norms, values, and work habits consistent with the American work ethic, for the benefit of corporate America in terms of increased profit, as well as for realizing the goal of government social reforms.

Workforce Development

Most of the welfare reforms that took place in the mid 1990s shifted emphasis from income maintenance and education to that of a shorter term on public assistance along with a "work first" modality (Leonard 1999). Education, as a formal option for those on the public dole was dropped in many states, and instead short-term training, something quite different from a formal education, was put in its place for the poor on public assistance. For many community colleges, initiatives directed toward welfare consumers were categorized under the training activity of "workforce development."

In the last 45 years, the role for community colleges has been to help students' transition into a four-year educational setting (Coley 2000). Government sponsored reforms, such as we witnessed in the welfare system of the USA during the mid 1990s, however, provided opportunities for community colleges to shift the role of "professional reformer" on to themselves. Community colleges, positioned themselves as the major avenue by which the low-income student can be indoctrinated into the labor force. Under the rubric of workforce development, significant numbers of welfare recipients were provided short-term non-credit training in order that they enter the job market. According to AACC data, 44 percent of the 1,123 community colleges responding to the 1998 survey reported that job-readiness instruction was the most common type of training activity for welfare recipients. Further, according to the AACC survey, "welfare-to-work programs at community colleges primarily emphasized entry-level

training (69.9 percent of respondents), adult education and remedial education (53.3 percent), as well as basic technical training (47.6 percent)" (Phillippe 2001, p. 91). Such workforce development efforts were not construed to benefit the students attending these institutions. Instead, as has been argued above, such short-term, mostly non-credit, training was developed for corporate employers seeking a better-trained, cheap labor pool in order to eke out more profit. In addition, from government's perspective, welfare recipients forced off public assistance by the reforms of 1995, workforce development programs in the community colleges provided a mechanism for indoctrinating these poor people into a work ethos that served the function of social oversight. There was, and continues to be, little "freedom" for these students to pursue a traditional liberal arts education. Instead, it is predetermined by government and corporate sponsors, with the help of community colleges. For many low-income individuals not based in the traditional "welfare population," community colleges have devised a method of tracking them toward a similar fate as their counterparts on the public dole. The major group affected is that of recent immigrants of color. "Workforce development" as defined by the AACC and its member institutions involves preparing individuals specifically for American employers in order that these companies may compete more effectively in the global economy (Tony Zeiss & Associates 1997). More and more American corporations are turning to community colleges, as partners, to help with the task of providing training for employees already on the job according to the AACC.⁴ Looking at what he described as a "complex set of forces" that structurally changed America's system of higher education, Karabel highlighted six characteristics of community colleges and their environment in stratifying individuals on the basis of social class tracking low-income students away from a traditional academic education and into what was then vocational training (or workforce development training today) (Karabel 1972, p. 233). He argued that, while at face value, the community colleges were consistent with American society's ideology as "the land of opportunity" and "open admission" to its system of public education; these characteristics were in reality false for poor students since they were "tracked" away from a four-year education and "stratified" into low-paying vocational careers. Studies have shown that keeping students at the lower end of the educational scale (whether by tracking or other

⁴ See American Association of Community Colleges, *Businesses to Advocate for Two-Year Colleges*, Community College Times, December 5, 2006.

means) usually translates to limiting employment opportunities to the lower end of the wage scale (Carnavale 1999). On average, in 2002, a male student kept to just a two-year associates degree earned 732 dollars a week while those who continued their studies and were awarded a bachelor's degree earned about 1,089 dollars according to data from the U.S. Department of Labor (2003). For females the figures were 545 dollars and 809 dollars respectively. These data highlight the importance of helping all students acquire the highest educational level so that they can reach a much higher pay scale. From the general point of view, diverting so many individuals from acquiring the highest educational levels limits America's economic growth. The key components of Karabel's premise are highlighted in Table 1. Data show that 68 percent of employers, who choose community colleges for workforce training, do so because of its cost effectiveness (Phillippe 2000). Further, about 55 percent find that the level of customization of training curriculum is why they also choose community colleges; and about 52 percent feel it is convenient. The belief system of community colleges in the USA maintains a posture that they are open to all students so long as they have a high-school diploma or its equivalency. It provides the illusion that just about anyone can attend college. In reality, however, these institutions serve the purpose of channeling low-income individuals away from particular academic programs that may have led to four-year colleges, through a complex process of "cooling" them off⁵ in order that they never reach their educational goals. Data from the National Profile of Community College (Phillipe 2000) found that, although most students in community colleges express an interest of transferring to a four-year baccalaureate program, most never do. For example, the data for the academic year 1995-96 in this study demonstrated that, of those students expressing an interest of going to a four-year school, only about 42 percent actually transferred. Community colleges on the public dole serve the role of tracking, as well as the much higher function for government of controlling any real or potential discontent among the poor by "diverting the dreams" (Karabel 1972) of members of these social classes toward lower level

⁵ This process is most prominent in community colleges that have their environment demographically changed with the influx of poor people of color. In addition, English as Second Language (ESL) initiatives often are used as major components of the "cooling-off" and "tracking" systems. See: Santiago, J. *The New Social Reformers In Massachusetts: The Changing Role of a Publicly Funded Community College Within a Latino Community*, Private Communication.

career options, and indoctrinating them into America's capitalistic work ethos under the auspices of workforce development initiatives.

Table 1. Framework on the major functions of community colleges

(based on Karabel, 1972)

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1. A changing economic structure in the environment of community colleges fosters alterations in the role of these institutions.
 2. As a result of "educational inflation" particular groups within society (the poor) have their opportunities narrowed.
 3. Community colleges are "the bottom of a tracking system within higher education" because of their "open admissions" posture. Ultimately, their students are tracked into vocational training (workforce development) that keeps them away from a four-year education and in low-paying jobs.
 4. Community colleges use a complex system of pre-entrance exams, remedial classes, counseling from advisors, test scores, certain required courses, and probationary status as a "cooling-out" process with the function of convincing the student that they were at fault for not achieving their educational goals.
 5. The "cooling-out" process is directed toward the "latent terminal" student who desires to transfer ultimately from a two- to a four-year degree program, but does not meet entrance qualifications.
 6. Community colleges, with this elaborate system, serve to "track" students both within the college itself, and among these institutions of higher education on the basis of social class. They keep poor students in vocational programs (workforce development training), and away from academically oriented course of studies within the confines of the particular community college, as well as keeping these individuals away from four-year schools.
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Further, it gives the students from the lower social classes the false impression that if they fail to reach their educational goals of a higher education, it is mainly their fault and not the community colleges' "system" of cooling them off. It "blames the victims" (Ryan 1975) of workforce development not the system, which purposefully tracked them. Similar to what Cloward and Piven argued in the 1970s about the welfare system as a whole, social institutions under the tutelage of government (e.g., publicly funded community colleges), give the false

impression that they provide concessions and real opportunities to movements of the poor (1971). In reality, they serve only to regulate the poor.

Previous Structure and Recent Changes in China's System of Higher Education

In reviewing China's system of higher education as one that for many years has been controlled by government and only recently is moving toward decentralization, we must keep in mind that the entire structure is relatively new when compared to the 100 year old community college system in the USA.⁶ Chinese post-secondary education as it appears was established in December 1977 when the government introduced the formal process of examination; and in 1985 new programmatic, structural and oversight changes were implemented (Xiao and Tsang 1999). China's system of higher education represents a good example of a controlled system since national and party leaders continue to determine who attends, curriculum, credentialing, what area one will study, what instructors will teach, and when you finish in spite of the 1985 changes (FBIS 1985). Still, there have been improvements with an increase in decentralizing higher education from Central Government control in total to more local and provincial decision-making. Although the 1985 reforms gave faculty, administrators, local community leaders, and provincial governments more authority and oversight (Lofstedt 1987), agencies of the central government and the Communist Party still have final approval of any changes. Among the changes, was a shift within higher education from focusing exclusively on social reforms, to also tying education to China's urgency of economic development (Hayhoe 1993). Current Chinese leadership realizes that China's continued economic growth and modernization are closely tied to the nation's colleges and universities. "Chinese political leaders wish to transform knowledge patterns within (higher education) curriculum to serve explicit goals of economic modernization" (Hayhoe 1987, p.197). Before the 1985 reforms, all students were assigned jobs by the central government after completing their studies. Later, as a result of the reforms of 1985, "a considerable portion of the students will still be admitted and deployed in agreement with the long-term needs of China as a society, but greater efforts will be made to reconcile these national requirements with the individual preferences of the student, the recommendations

⁶ See *The American Community College Turns 100: A Look at its Students, Programs, and Prospects*, Educational Testing Service Policy Information Center, Princeton, New Jersey, 2000.

of the educational institutions, and the requisites of employers" (Lofstedt 1987, p. 329). Standardized teaching plans, teaching outlines, and textbooks were regulated nationally by the Ministry of Education (Hayhoe 1987). The Ministry of Education made all major curriculum decisions, in spite of more authority and oversight given to provincial, local, and autonomous regional input according to Lofstedt (1987). While college and university leaders have more authority and power today, communist party supervisors remained as an important determinant of any changes (FBIS 1985).

Besides trying to make sure that any changes in higher education are directly related to economic development and modernization for maintaining final say, national leaders also want to make sure that American capitalist ideals do not take root. Hayhoe (1993) notes:

While they (Chinese leaders) support and encourage scientific and technological development (especially as they pertain to economic development), the Chinese government is attempting to purge reflective and theoretical social sciences and the humanities of Western influences that (attempt) to mobilize support fostering a "peaceful evolution" towards capitalism-(Hayhoe 1993, p. 291).

As such, it seems that national and party leaders preferred European and Soviet curricular influences, "with their focus on classical disciplines of knowledge and narrowly defined technical specializations, over Anglo-American ones" according to Hayhoe (1993, p. 291).

By 1996, there were some 1,000 adult educational institutions in China of various types, including general universities, technical universities, specialized institutions, and teacher training colleges that comprised China's system of higher education.⁷ The State Education Commission administratively continues to supervise the system of post-secondary education.⁸ The Commission still largely oversees all aspects of post-secondary institutions, except for military schools. This government body maintains oversight of curricula, publishes the required textbooks for all fields of study, and formulates admissions guidelines to mention only a few of its functions. Within this larger structure of post-secondary education there are two-year technical institutions, non-university in nature, but which nonetheless are considered college level.

⁷⁻⁸ General information on China's system of higher education was obtained from two web sites: www.unesco.org/iau/educn.html; and www.sh.com/china/edu/chedu.htm.

Similar to what community colleges in the USA considers workforce development, these post-secondary technical schools offer more than 400 specialties, including light and textile industries, construction engineering, and commerce. As two-year institutions, these technical schools provide students with a "vocational education and training...for a specific job"⁹ targeting particular employers. Yang Xu Hin of Wuyi University highlighted some key and salient "problems" (his term) in China's system of higher education.¹⁰ An examination of these problems is important since they highlight the areas and level of government control over China's post-secondary institutions in spite of the 1985 reforms.

Specifically, Hin listed six problems including:

- a system is so specialized and detailed that students only learn the particular field and no knowledge beyond their major;
- no real and original research going on among scholars;
- too many tedious required subjects that students just cram for;
- textbooks produced by the Commission contain much irrelevant subject matter;
- instructors teach obsolete material, what they learned years ago, reflecting traditional not current scientific knowledge;
- required assessment examinations do not measure the student's knowledge but only how much they memorized in class and from textbooks.

By coupling together, both the structure of post-secondary education in China and the problems that Hin presents, we can see the extent to which government controlled this system.

Within the more recent system of higher education in China we see that several key characteristics are essential for labeling it still a "largely controlled" government post-secondary institution. Table 2 lists these major characteristics along with their particular explanation. Of significance among them is the fact that government continues to control all content within the classroom, the textbooks, and areas of specialization.

⁹ General information on China's system of higher education was obtained from two web sites: www.unesco.org/iau/educn.html; and www.sh.com/china/edu/chedu.htm.

¹⁰ See: Yang Xu Hin, Chinese Higher Education, In My Eyes, The Forum, Vol 7, Issue 1, Fall 1998, hakatai.mcli.dist.Maricopa.edu/labyforum/fall98/forum4.htm.

Further, it is through government controlled assessment tests that Chinese students gain entry to post-secondary education, as well as determine whether they are ready to receive their diploma. Finally, government determines the course of study for many Chinese students in technical/vocational training with a specific job in mind, thus determining what they will do for a living. With these facts in mind, the question is: To what extent does the publicly funded community college system in the U.S. compares with the recent government controlled post-secondary two-year technical schools in China?

Table 2. Summary of major similarities between China's two-year technical colleges with the US community colleges (based on Yang Xu Hin, 1998)

Major Characteristics of Recent China's System	Major Characteristics of US Community College System
1 Centralized Decision Making	Government education bodies make major decisions; centralizing decision making
2 Government Controls course content	State government employees as administrators (e.g. Deans) review and influence if necessary course content, determine curricula, etc.
3 Students have little ability to determine what they will learn	Students are tracked into specific areas of specialization and how far they can go based on social class.
4 Admission into and completion of course of study determined by government controlled assessment examinations	Most States have "high-stake tests" at K-12 level for diploma before entering college.
5 Little scholarly work by instructors	No real research going on; nor is it encouraged.
6 Education often targets a specific job	Workforce development efforts track many toward specific job areas.
7 Instructors have little input into course content	Instruction often controlled by various methods from administrators (e.g., course outlines must be approved by Deans).

Conclusion: A Comparative Review

While the publicly funded community colleges in America do not have overt government control of course content, workforce development efforts funded by specific corporations, who determine curricula in these cases, do have the tacit approval of government. Government encourages corporate America to seek out

institutions like community colleges to help with their workforce development needs. As such, these efforts within community colleges in the USA are often driven by corporate elites. In reality, it is questionable as to whether we can call these corporate programs "workforce development" or more accurately "human resource development" initiatives since they are driven by particular companies, for their specific purposes, with specific curricula. Data on workforce development demonstrate that initiatives specific to a company tend to more often than not benefit professionals and managers, and are not directed toward entry-level workers who may benefit from such training for job advancement (Training Magazine 1999). Thus, using the term "workforce development" for the type of training currently being offered to students in community colleges is therefore misleading.

Like their recent Chinese counterpart, publicly funded community colleges in the USA have a variety of assessment examinations aimed at determining whether an individual has the wherewithal to enter a post-secondary institution, and ultimately graduate once they complete course requirements. Such examinations in the USA are, in most states, required and approved by some government appointed board of higher education. In China, these examinations, determined by the State Education Commission, help determine the individual's course of study and the educational institution they will enter. It is these examinations in the community college system of the USA that analysts like Karabel, Brint, and Woodbury, for example, see as mechanisms for diverting the educational dreams of low-income students away from an education and toward vocational (workforce development) training—two vastly different things.

While faculty may have more input in determining course content in American community colleges, the fact is that workforce development initiatives often have their material selected by the particular company financing the training. Further, in many post-secondary settings in America faculty members are required to provide department heads and/or the college with copies of their course outline to "review" for informational appropriateness and completeness. Thus, while faculty in the community colleges of the USA has a slightly higher level of academic freedom in determining course content than their recent Chinese counterparts, there are nonetheless boundaries in which they must work within, especially if a corporation is financing the workforce development training.

Perhaps the most significant area of comparison between community colleges in the USA under the oversight of government and the two-year technical schools of China is in the area of students being able to select their

course of study. Americans truly believe that they have the ability to choose the level, as well as the type, of education they wish. The fact is however, that, perhaps to the surprise of students, social class predetermines the type and level of their education, and thus how much they will earn. Once students complete their education, earning levels do not necessarily reflect the individual's earning potential. As noted above, entrance examinations, direction in which career counseling takes, assessment testing, and the system of "tracking" all conspire toward determining whether a student is given the opportunity to pursue a four-year education and beyond, or whether they are steered toward training for an entry-level job. In China, the government determined needs for a particular economic development initiative and job and this way strongly affected a student's educational fate. Thus, while Chinese assessment testing is more direct in making such decisions for the student, in the community college system of the USA processes and structures have the dual function of making this decision while at the same time giving the student the false impression that they made the choice themselves.

There are many similarities between the more recent post-secondary education in China and that of the community college system in the USA. As America leaves behind the industrial age of the twentieth century and enters the technological era of the twenty-first, it finds itself in need of preparing a workforce capable of working with the hardware and software necessary for producing the goods and services needed globally. America's economic and political leaders cannot afford to let low-income social classes develop a consciousness based on the understanding that they do not determine their educational fate. To do so government in the USA would be itself sowing seeds of discontent. As such, it must control any real or potential discontent, and it has accomplished this task by devising this complex system of tracking individuals from low-income classes while also providing the illusion that: 1) through an education beyond high school an individual will increase the likelihood of economic success; 2) community colleges represent the best avenue of acquiring such an education, especially if you are poor; and 3) it is the individual himself who determines their level of educational attainment. Of major difference between the recent system of education in China, and community colleges in the USA is that the former directly informs its people that its system is devised for benefiting society through the job they are destined to be educated and/or trained for, while the latter selects one's education on the basis of social class, provides the illusion of free choice, all for the benefit of major corporate elites.

The driving force nonetheless is the same in both systems - government! Their purpose is basically the same, social planning by government, much of which is driven by economic forces. In both societies not everyone can attend college since there are not enough resources to allow such to happen. Mechanisms are therefore in place to determine whom gets an academic education versus job training, and at what levels. While in China government overtly and directly determines these issues for its people, in the USA government covertly makes such determination. In the USA the community college system plays a critical role in this determination by providing the façade that there is an "open admissions" policy when, in reality, social class determines the kind and level of education that an individual will receive. In both systems, however, the results are the same, control of masses of people.

It is vital to understand the differences, similarities, and functions if we in the USA, as a nation, which prides itself in valuing "freedom," and professes to be "the land of opportunities," are to truly move closer to these ideals. Surely, not all of the hundreds of thousands (even millions) of low-income recent arrivals are incapable of performing well in a four-year course of education. Yet, the system in place discriminates against the poor, and tracks them toward the same dead end workforce development for the purposes of providing cheap productive labor to corporate America, while also maintaining control socially. This massive waste of human potential raises a research question that looms high above all others: Can we change the community college system in the USA to provide a good education to their constituents, not on the basis of their social class but on the basis of their dreams and potential? A challenge for American society!

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