CHAPTER 4

Fudan University, Shanghai Jiaotong University, and East China Normal University: Background and Context

Over the last two decades, a liberal arts education curriculum has been implemented in some top Chinese institutions of higher education to broaden students’ learning experience, with the aim of cultivating critical thinking, creativity, moral reasoning and innovation skills. This reform reflects a shift in education away from specialization toward liberal arts education, a shift from training experts in specialized disciplines to educating students so as to “develop understandings of a breadth of topics, enhance their critical thinking abilities, and become well-rounded, educated citizens” (Bourke, Bray, and Horton 2009, 221).

This chapter explores liberal arts education in three well-known universities—Fudan University, Shanghai Jiaotong University, and East China Normal University in Shanghai—by discussing each school with respect to its curriculum development and liberal arts core curriculum modules. It begins by examining some key dimensions of each university: historical background, educational initiatives, and the present implementation of a liberal arts curriculum. The process of how a liberal arts curriculum came into being at each university and how it differs from the old curriculum is analyzed and examined. These portraits of the three universities provide a foundation for the development of the main themes of this book in the following chapters.

Fudan University

Fudan University is unique among the three institutions as the only university founded by the private sector prior to 1949, when the Chinese Communist Party took power in China. It is affiliated with the Society of Jesus, a Roman Catholic religious order founded in 1540. This section begins with a brief historical overview as a background for understanding Fudan’s reform of liberal arts education. The overall content of the university’s curriculum, institutional policy, development of liberal arts education, liberal arts education curriculum, and common course selection are examined. The tension of course selection is then analyzed. Finally, issues arising from the predominance of utilitarianism are discussed. The conclusion seeks to identify the challenges that lie ahead.
The Jesuit and Catholic Context

Both Fudan University and Aurora University in Shanghai were founded by Ma Xiangbo, a former Jesuit, statesman, and educator. The Jesuits’ system of liberal arts education was intercontinental. Following the Latin and Greek tradition of liberal arts education, Jesuit higher education based its pedagogy, including the principle that the humanities develop moral goodness, devotion to truth, and a disposition to act for the civic good, on the study of language, poetry, history, rhetoric, logic, mathematics, and the sciences and natural philosophy. The Jesuits intended that this curriculum would open minds, sharpen wits, deepen human sympathy, and develop clarity of thought and force in expression. While a liberal arts education was complementary to traditional Catholic scholastic education, Jesuit educators esteemed the potential of poetry and oratory in liberal arts education to elicit and foster noble sentiments and ideals in their students (Scaglione 1986). The Jesuit mission to China in the sixteenth century opened up channels for communication between East and West, and it was a Jesuit missionary and mathematician from Italy, Mateo Ricci, who first provided a detailed introduction to the institution of the university for Chinese readers.

The Founding of Fudan

The founder of Fudan University, Ma Xiangbo, was born on April 17, 1840, into a well-to-do Catholic family in Dantu County, Jiangsu province. He was baptized when he was one month old and brought up in a strict Catholic tradition of faith. He was also educated in the Chinese classics in traditional private schools. The young Ma Xiangbo was not satisfied with this traditional education (Wiest 2002). At the age of twelve, he visited his married sister in Shanghai and was amazed at the city’s level of development. He then requested that he be allowed to stay in Shanghai and enroll in the newly opened French Jesuit college of St. Ignace, Xuhui Gongxue, in Xujiahui. His years at St. Ignatius (1851–1870) laid the foundation for his acceptance of Western ideas on education, especially formation of the whole person (Jiang 2011). During his studies at St. Ignatius, Ma Xiangbo not only learned the Chinese traditions and classics systematically, he was also educated in Latin, Greek, mathematics, philosophy, and other liberal arts disciplines. He was also invited to teach classical Chinese literature and philosophy at St. Ignatius.

As China faced the great challenges of the Western invasion in the mid-nineteenth century, Ma Xiangbo began to discern that his future career would lie in service to his nation. With the full support of his mother, he joined the Jesuits in 1862, underwent their theological and spiritual training, obtained his doctoral degree with distinction in 1869, and was ordained in 1870. During