Doctoral Education in China

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Major Topics

1. Overview of Doctoral Education in China
2. The Basic Concepts for Doctoral Education
3. Doctoral Education System and Regulations
4. EU-China Doctoral Education: A Comparison
5. Expectations for EU-China Cooperation in Doctoral Education
1. Overview of Doctoral Education in China

A prevailing saying goes in China that human beings fall into three categories: male, female and female doctor. However, due to the increase in enrollment of higher education and employment pressure, female doctors, as well as male doctors, have enjoyed remarkable boom in recent years.

In fact, doctoral education is being sought after in large numbers and China stands among the top when it comes to the number of doctoral students. The past 20 years have witnessed the “Great Leap Forward” in China’s doctoral education.
2. The Basic Concepts for Doctoral Education

Generally speaking, doctoral education is committed to enhancing doctoral students’ academic and professional abilities, improving their ideological and moral cultivation, and raising their awareness of serving the society and people.
As a leading force of technological innovation, doctoral students should be trained to be conscientious talents who are willing to shoulder the responsibility for the sustainable development of the country.

More specifically, doctoral students are required to have a good command of the theoretical foundations and systematic expertise of their fields so that they can be able to do research on their own. Therefore, a qualified PhD graduate is expected to become an advanced expert in his/her own research field.
3. Doctoral Education System and Regulations

Doctoral disciplines and specialties in China cover philosophy, economics, law, education, literature, history, science, engineering, agronomy, medicine, military science, and management.

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In China, doctorate generally falls into two categories, i.e. professional doctorate which focuses on improving and consolidating students’ professional knowledge and fostering their professional ability and academic doctorate which is aimed at students’ capability in doing academic research.
Doctoral education system and regulations in China generally consists of four parts, that is, admission, cultivation including curriculum and the instructional method of advisors, PhD degree conferring consisting of paper publishing and doctoral dissertation, and financial supporting for doctoral students.

3.1 Admission

- Number of admission
- Doctoral admission
Number of admission

Whether an advisor is entitled to enroll doctoral students and how many he can enroll are determined by his research funds and academic ability. Accordingly, an advisor is permitted to enroll an approved number of students in a year within his ability.

Doctoral admission

◆ Recommendation
◆ Public examination
◆ Master to PhD program
◆ Bachelor to PhD program
Students can find their way to a doctoral program in four ways. If recommended, they can get the chance to proceed to doctoral degree without the entrance examination. They can also take the public examination for pursuing a doctorate.

- An MA candidate can apply to be a doctoral student after two years’ MA study. In other cases, undergraduates can apply for doctoral study directly if they are well-equipped and qualified.
3.2 Cultivation

In China, doctoral students can get a PhD degree within three years under the condition that they have completed their courses and other related academic tasks as required, such as publishing a certain number of papers. But if they are not well-prepared in this period, they will be confronted with a delay of graduation until they are ready, usually 6 years.

Basic requirements

◆ Academic year: Three academic years (3-6 years)
◆ Requirements:
  1) Courses
  2) Conferences, lectures and presentations
  3) Mid-term evaluation
  4) Publishing research papers (as required)
  5) Doctoral dissertation
Elimination system

An elimination system has been introduced into doctoral education in many universities. Performance of doctoral students shall be evaluated in their second year. According to their evaluation results, some may be eliminated or faced with a delayed graduation.
3.3 PhD Degree Conferring

- Paper publishing
- Dissertation proposal
- Dissertation defense rehearsal
- Dissertation review
- Dissertation defense

Paper publishing

- Certain number
- Appointed journal
- Dissertation-related contents
**Dissertation proposal**

Doctoral students are required to present their dissertation proposal, usually in the third semester. A committee consists of five members including at least two from other universities. Only if the proposal wins the agreement of the committee can students conduct their research.

**Dissertation defense rehearsal**

Usually, a dissertation defense rehearsal is organized before the dissertation is sent to be reviewed. In the rehearsal, five committee members will offer their advice to students. Only if the rehearsal wins the agreement of the committee can the dissertation be sent for review.
Dissertation review

The dissertation has to pass a review, which is realized in two ways, i.e. unconcealed review and anonymous review. In the review, the dissertation is sent to experts in other universities. Only an agreement from those experts can qualify the student for dissertation defense.

Dissertation defense

The final dissertation defense is organized this way. The committee is composed of five or seven members with at least two, including the chair, from other academic institutions. In the defense, the candidate is required to present his/her dissertation before the experts question him/her. Then based on the candidate’s performance, the committee will decide whether or not to confer the PhD degree through anonymous voting after the discussion.
3.4 Financial Supporting for Doctoral Students

- Academic scholarship
- Merit scholarship
- Scholarship for dissertation research
- State financial support
- Financial support through TA and RA
- Researches grants from the advisors
- National students loan

Doctoral students can seek for financial supports in various ways. Such supports include academic scholarship, merit scholarship, living subsidies from the university, job subsidies (T.A., R.A., etc. subsidies), research grants from the advisor, and national student loans and so on.
4. EU-China Doctoral Education: A Comparison

◆ Similarities
◆ Differences

4.1 Similarities

◆ **The period of learning** (at least 3 years)

◆ **Objectives:** doctoral students are required to have a good command of the theoretical foundations and systematic expertise of their fields and are able to do research on their own. Two aspects are focused on: **elevate the capability of doing research and foster the capability of innovation.**

◆ **Requirements:** demanding

◆ **Orientations:** practice-oriented
4.2 Differences

- Differences in admission
- Differences in cultivation
- Differences in dissertation defense
- Differences in financial supporting

Differences in admission

- Final determination of admission
- Ways of admission
Final determination of admission

In Europe, doctoral advisors are entitled to determine how many doctoral students they will admit and whether a certain student will be enrolled according to their own needs, which is different from the practice in China as discussed above.

Ways of admission

As for the ways of admission, a student can apply for a doctoral program of a certain advisor by handing in his/her relevant materials. After careful consideration and examination, the advisor will finally decide whether the student will be admitted or not according to his/her academic, cooperative and innovative competence.
Once a student is admitted, the advisor will sign formal contracts with the student. Normally, these contracts specify salary, days of vocation and specific job responsibilities, etc.

Differences in cultivation

- Curriculum setting
- Power and responsibility of the advisors
- Relations between advisor and student
- Ways of doing research
**Curriculum setting**

In general, doctoral curricula in Europe consist of two categories, one that is highly specialized, and the other one is used for enriching students’ knowledge. In contrast, students have to take politics and a second language as required courses.

**Power and responsibility of the advisors**

Advisors in Europe are endowed with more power than their counterparts in China. They can determine not only the number of admission and whether they will enroll a certain student or not, but also how they will cultivate their students and whether their students are qualified to get the PhD degree and so on.
Meanwhile, they are not only the guide in students’ way to academic research, but also responsible for their holistic development.

Relations between advisors and students

In Europe, the relation between advisors and students is more like that between employers and employees. Students help their advisors with their research and get paid by their advisors. In China, the advisor-student relations are characterized by a master-apprentice one, so students usually give up the payment if they help the advisor.
Ways of doing research

Doctoral students in China usually have already determined their research topic even before they get admitted. After admission, under the guidance of their advisors, they often collaborate with post-doctoral students who have extensive experience in relevant topics instead of doing research on their own.

Differences in dissertation defense

Whether a doctoral student is qualified for dissertation defense after three or four years’ research is determined by his advisor. When the doctoral dissertation is completed, it will be sent to two reviewers including the advisor and one professor from another university. Only when both of the two reviewers agree that the doctoral dissertation is qualified, can the student take the defense.
Differences in financial supporting

Apart from scholarships, students often have stable income paid by their advisors as they “work for” them.

5. Expectations for EU-China Cooperation in Doctoral Education

In spite of those differences in doctoral education, China and Europe share many common interests. Both of us are committed to the cultivation of high-end talents so we should seek common grounds while shelving differences so that we can learn from each other. There is a vast potential for our future cooperation in the following fields.
Communication and cooperation of Chinese and European doctoral advisors and students

Cooperation in the cultivation of doctoral students

Cooperation in the reform of doctoral cultivation systems

Thank You!