

In each case, these academic leaders are talking about qualitative and quantitative factors, an ethos of intellectual exploration and creativity, and a focus on the long-term role of universities as well as the short-term contributions that institutions can make to their society. An internationally recognized scholarly ethos, however, may take longer to develop than many academic or political leaders in China are willing to admit. Simply buying state-of-the-art laboratory equipment or pushing for more journal articles will not guarantee the kind of intellectual atmosphere that has developed over centuries on European and American campuses. A number of Chinese academic leaders acknowledge this reality when they say that it will take a generation to create truly world-class universities in China.

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THE DESIRE FOR WORLD-CLASS STANDING

The discussion of world-class universities has led analysts of Chinese higher education to ask about the long-term consequences of grafting Western academic practices onto a Chinese base. Will these changes also lead Chinese universities to adopt the highly individualistic ethos that characterizes American institutions, with all the institutional frustrations that ethos entails? Will those values spill over into the larger society with unintended consequences? Will government bureaucracies allow practices that promote academic freedom in the Western sense? Will Chinese academics continue to look outside their borders for standards of excellence, which would imply that Western educational norms are superior and that Chinese universities remain inferior? And, at the extreme, what will distinguish a Chinese university from its international peers once it achieves world-class status?

This article is based on a chapter in the forthcoming volume, *Bridging Minds Across the Pacific: U.S.-China Educational Exchanges, 1978–2003*, edited by Cheng Li, to be published by Lexington Books in March 2005. ■

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Catholic Universities in Central Europe

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In most Central and Eastern European countries, universities and the rest of society were ruled by the Communist Party, with the curriculum and the faculty heavily indoctrinated by a totalitarian Marxist ideology. After the collapse of communism, the region initiated the process of modernization and structural reform when possible. However, after the initial period of enthusiasm, the efforts were soon blocked or delayed—as it became obvious that the inherited problems and resistance to reforms constituted a greater challenge than anticipated. Frustration grew in many segments of society, especially among Catholic intellectuals, who were foremost among the victims of the communist regimes.

This state of disillusionment led, among other things, to the idea of establishing Catholic universities. In 1992, Peter Pazmany Catholic University was established in Budapest as a successor to the educational institutions started by the Catholic Church back in 1635. In 2000, in Rúomberok (Slovakia), a new Catholic university was set up with just two faculties (philosophy and pedagogy). In Croatia, the Bishops' Conference recently decided to establish a Catholic university, although specific details about the institution have yet to be provided.

HIGHER EDUCATION TRADITIONS

It should be noted that Catholic universities in Central Europe do not share the traditions of countries that have a long history of private higher education. This article refers to countries where public universities traditionally dominate, though many of the oldest and most prestigious universities were established centuries ago by Catholic Church authorities. In fact, the original religious schools usually form parts of public universities in Central Europe (e.g., in Austria, Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Croatia), with the exception of Poland and Hungary. Some of these institutions faced many difficulties in the past: the Faculty of Theology, from which the University of Zagreb developed in the 17th century, was expelled from the university by the communist authorities in 1952, though this decision was never officially accepted by the academic community. After 1990, the process of reintegration started and was formalized in 1996 with the Agreement on the Status and Activity of the Faculty of Catholic Theology at the University of Zagreb.

DEFINING THE MISSION OF A CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

Possible definitions of the mission of a Catholic university include (1) a denominational school of theology and related subjects, intended to train future priests and members of religious orders; (2) a university for Catholics; or (3) a standard university based on a Judeo-Christian value system.

The first definition certainly does not match the original intention of providing modern higher education free of the ideological pressures of the past. Moreover, Croatia, for example, already has two faculties of theology, as parts of the public universities in Zagreb and Split, that function relatively well with state support. While these faculties of theology share all the problems and difficulties facing the academic community, they show no intention of changing their present status.

The second definition—a university for Catholics only—is hardly feasible or desirable and is in conflict with the legislation concerning accredited higher education institutions. Furthermore, this concept might be seen as implying that public universities are not for Catholics, in spite of the fact that public universities are supported with taxes paid by the population, which is largely (in Croatia more than 85 percent) Catholic.

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The third possibility is defining the Catholic university as a university based on a Judeo-Christian value system. However, if this is to be the only distinction, one could argue that *all* universities, like all institutions in our society, should share the value system accepted by the majority of the population. In this particular case that would mean that the education system should reaffirm the traditional values of European civilization—that is, the moral and ethical standards on which our democratic system is based—and this is an especially urgent task in postcommunist countries.

Therefore, the creation of a parallel (i.e., Catholic) university system might be taken by the rest of the society as an indication that Catholics are prepared to give up the desire to be in the mainstream and withdraw again into their separate institutions (“ghettos”), this time of their own free will and not under pressure and persecution as before.

POSSIBLE MODEL OF A CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

There is little doubt in Croatia, and probably in other postcommunist countries as well, about the need for reform in higher education with greater involvement of Catholics and consideration also of the creation of Catholic universities. Precisely defining the mission of a Catholic university is certainly the crucial element of this project, but one should also analyze other aspects. Are there enough financial and intellectual

resources to support both systems of education—public and private (Catholic)—in the present economic and political context in which the Catholic Church cannot adequately support even the existing faculties of theology? One should consider not only the difficult economic situation in the region, but also the long-term erosion of the middle class and academic community in particular, including the brain drain of young intellectuals.

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In order to find its place alongside the existing public universities, a Catholic university as a small private university should find its own specific *niche* that is both realistic and will produce optimal results. Excellence will play a decisive role. One possible model would be for the university to concentrate on the final stages of the academic program—postgraduate and doctoral studies—with small and carefully selected groups of qualified graduate students, thus avoiding expensive, massive undergraduate programs and related financial and personal challenges. With a modern and flexible structure, these academic centers of excellence could enhance their resources and activities in teaching and research through international collaboration and exchange with similar institutions, as well as working with intellectual elites within the country. Also, the positive impact of this project would be immediate and cost-effective, both in the academic community and in the society.

Obviously, determining the feasibility of Catholic universities in Central Europe and their most effective structure will require careful consideration of several nontrivial questions: definition of mission, available intellectual and financial resources, and possible political and social implications. ■