

# *Comparison of the Chinese and Hungarian Education Systems*

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**Abstract:** As countries strive to develop competitive, knowledge-based economies, they face the challenges of a rapidly changing global landscape. Understanding the fundamental and different aspects of education systems is of great importance. This paper compares the Chinese and Hungarian higher education systems from the following four main elements: (1) administrative divisions; (2) school systems; (3) educational assessments; (4) challenges in HE. Given that every education system is deeply intertwined with a distinct cultural and social context that shapes its organization and functioning, it is imperative for academics to examine these intricacies when conducting cross-national comparisons carefully. Prior research has exclusively focused on higher education in China and Hungary separately, without comparing the two. Therefore, to understand the factors influencing higher education in Hungary and China, the researcher is prepared to provide valuable insights and more data analysis into the complexities of global education.

**Keywords:** comparative education, Central Europe, higher educational system, educational assessment, Hungarian education

## 1. Introduction

Education has immense value and importance in today's world. It is a critical concept in determining academic and social performance, and through rigorous research and analysis, teachers can identify effective teaching strategies that can improve learning outcomes and educational experiences for students of all ages. Essentially, my work focuses on Central Europe and China. Researchers have attempted to study the Chinese education system; Suzhi is also an explanatory theoretical lens to understand the complicated Chinese education system [1]. In addition, self-determination is another crucial concept in shaping the design [2], as it promotes students' sense of choice, independence, and control over their learning. In education, it is essential to highlight the significance of intrinsic motivation in facilitating optimal learning outcomes.

Additionally, the presence of well-constructed evaluations about creativity has great importance as they enable a comprehensive understanding of the distinguishing attributes of creativity and its impact on educational experiences. Simultaneously, there is an ongoing improvement in the Hungarian higher education system [3]. Therefore, drawing from the data above, it can be observed that the study of the comparative education systems in Central Europe and China is somewhat constrained, with a shortage of available information about their commonalities, disparities, and the underlying determinants that influence these systems. Hence, the present study investigates the

relative strengths and obstacles encountered by the higher education systems in Central Europe, specifically focusing on Hungary and China. This study aims to provide insight into the unique characteristics of the education systems in Central Europe and China, as well as to investigate possible avenues for collaboration and the exchange of knowledge between these two cultures.

## **2. Higher education in China**

As a Chinese saying goes, "A spring silkworm may not stop spinning silk after death. A candle's tears dry only when it burned down to ashes." This poem describes the role and status of Chinese teachers in the social hierarchy from the agency and structure, and also it shows the social expectations that people have for teachers. Since the late 1970s, China has implemented a program known as the "open door" policy, which has led to a series of reforms in higher education. These reforms have been designed to improve the capacity and quality of higher education in China, to boost its competitiveness and excellence.

### **2.1. The Administrative divisions of the People's Republic of China**

China possesses the most extensive education system globally. The Chinese constitution establishes a hierarchical system of governance to manage the vast land and populous nation effectively. This system comprises three tiers of administration: the central government, the provincial, the county, and the municipal. China comprises four distinct types of provincial-level entities: provinces, municipalities, autonomous regions, and particular administrative regions. There are 23 provinces, 4 cities, five autonomous regions, and two specially managed regions within the designated geographical areas. [4]

### **2.2. Educational Systems in China**

The Gaokao examinations play a crucial role in determining future Chinese students' prospects. Consequently, the Chinese Ministry of Education collaborates closely with provincial education authorities, universities, and college sectors to establish policies about higher education enrollment. This collaboration ensures that enrollment policies align with the priorities set by the central government. Nevertheless, the intense rivalry has prompted many educational institutions, educators, and learners to excessively prioritize achieving high scores in examinations and resort to rote memorization in primary education. Hence, it is a prevalent occurrence in educational institutions to prioritize instructing pupils on attaining exceptional exam results to prepare them for higher education while neglecting their holistic personal growth. According to several Chinese scholars, including Zhou [5], Pan [6], Wen [7], and C. Zhang [8], as discussed in their scholarly articles and books, the concept of *suzhi* pertains to an individual's relatively stable quality structure. This structure is formed through the internalization of knowledge, influenced by inherent gifts and physiology, and profoundly shaped by educational experiences and the social environment. Therefore, *suzhi* education evolved to transform the prevailing examination-oriented patterns and foster every student's holistic and individualized growth. *Suzhi* education encompasses a range of activities, such as extracurricular lectures, reading initiatives, scientific proficiency, recreational pursuits, sports engagement, and community involvement. Including a comprehensive *suzhi* evaluation of senior high school pupils as a metric in the Gaokao examination is anticipated.

### **2.3. Three strategies in Chinese Higher educational system**

China's education system has experienced ongoing transformations since the early 1950s. During the 1950s, Chinese universities adopted the educational model of the Soviet Union and established a

specialized approach to nurturing talents within higher education institutions. The initial method implemented was the National College and University Adjustment. This process involved restructuring colleges, universities, and their respective departments per the principles and practices seen in the Soviet Union. This initiative was carried out between the years 1952 and 1957. The second approach involved the government's directive for all colleges and institutions to implement the Soviet Model within their education systems. The third option entailed the implementation of a highly centralized administration structure inside the school sector. Nevertheless, the progression of higher education in China since the late 1990s exhibits two notable characteristics: an increase in quantity and a quality improvement [9]. This encompasses factors such as student enrollment, the physical dimensions of the campus, and the amount of higher education establishments. The Chinese government aims to achieve a 15% gross enrolment rate in higher education by 2010. This goal was outlined in the comprehensive "Action Plan of Educational Promotion for the 21st Century," officially released by the Ministry of Education in 1998 [10].

#### **2.4. Education Assessments in China**

China demonstrates notable proficiency in both summative assessments and formative enhancements. [11] Since 1999, a total of 72 Chinese universities under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education (MOE) have been designated as participants in the "985 Project" and "211 Project". These initiatives were established to cultivate a select group of universities that would serve as exemplary institutions in teaching, research, and societal engagement, thereby influencing other universities in China. [12] As an illustration, Tsinghua University has made revisions to its assessment method. As per the most recent assessment framework, the established criteria assign pupils a range of grades, including A+, A, A-, B+, B-, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D and F. Simultaneously, it is stipulated that the proportion of students receiving an A+ grade (indicating exceptional performance) in the course shall not exceed 5% of the overall student enrollment. There is no stipulated criterion for the proportion of pupils who receive a failing grade (F). In addition, following the transition from a percentage-based grading system to a ranking system, the university's approach to suggesting exemptions for graduate students does not involve the provision of a comprehensive list of rankings. Instead, the university only supplies a list that includes the top 10%, 20%, 40%, 80%, and other similar percentile ranges. Subsequently, the assessment of students' research ability and quality will be enhanced by using interviews and other methodologies. [13]

#### **2.5. Challenges in Chinese higher education**

The expansion of student enrollment and the increased magnitude of higher education have resulted in a shortage of adequate resources and mechanisms to guarantee quality. These include the quality of entry-level and the shortage of qualified teachers. [14] Another significant issue is the disparity between rich and poor social groups. In the context of mass higher education in China, although there have been advancements in bridging the gap between urban-rural and social class disparities in access, many marginalized populations still face challenges in attaining higher education opportunities [15].

### **3. Higher education in Hungary**

#### **3.1. Administrative Divisions in Hungary**

The Ministry is responsible for the comprehensive regulation and supervision of the Hungarian higher education system, as a study indicates [16]. The Deputy State Secretariat for Higher Education assumes responsibility for the most significant duties. For example. The preparation of legislation, the formulation of the higher education sector strategy, and the planning and implementation of

systemic interventions. Hungarian higher education institutions are classified as either state(public) or non-state(church or private) institutions by the legal provisions outlined in the National Higher Education Act. [17] Hungary has a long tradition of higher education, with 39 universities (including ten universities of applied sciences) and 25 colleges. Some universities (5) are state-run, 18 are private, and churches run 6.

### 3.2. Assessments in Hungary

The techniques most commonly used in Hungary to evaluate individual performance can be divided into two methods. The first is the complex method, which includes the grading scale and the work standard. They assign a grade to each factor on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 stands for unacceptable and no progress. 2 stands for not yet acceptable but progress, 3 for just fine, 4 for above requirements, 5 for well above requirements.[18]. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Hungary's academic credit system is aligned with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), which ensures transparency and facilitates the recognition of learning achievements across various European countries. F means fail (1), E stands for sufficient (2), D for satisfactory (3), C for good (4), A,B for excellent, very good (5). [19]. The year 1989 signifies the commencement of a significant transformation in Hungary's elementary and secondary education system.[20] The central government's function underwent a progressive reduction and was subsequently supplanted by a three-tier management system comprising the central government, self-governance, and institutional levels. For institutions, the actors can be divided into four main groups: external actors, management, administrative managers, and the academic world. These will be the "branches of power". From 1989 to the present, the change process can be delineated into nine distinct periods. Several key factors have been identified in the context of education. Firstly, decentralization and the augmentation of local autonomy have emerged as significant trends. Secondly, there has been a decline in national funding and a rise in various funding sources. Thirdly, educators continue to face challenges regarding their low status and salaries. Fourthly, there has been a decrease in the school-age population. Additionally, the number of schools has increased, leading to heightened competition among schools for students and among students for school placements. Furthermore, there is a growing disconnect between professional education and the evolving demands of the new economy. Lastly, two noteworthy developments are the increasing structural diversity and the expanding diversity of curricula.[21]

### 3.3. 2nd language acquisition in Hungary

It is currently mandatory for Hungarian higher education (HE) students to complete at least one intermediate-level general or professional language examination to obtain a degree. However, starting in 2020, an intermediate language examination will be a prerequisite for admission into higher education institutions. The acquisition of a second language or learning a foreign language among higher education students is influenced by factors such as ambition, motivation, and, notably, attitude rather than solely by efficiency. Based on the findings of Ildiko's study [22], it can be inferred that one's social background plays a significant role in the process of language acquisition within higher education settings. The language learning orientation of kids with parents who have lower education levels tends to prioritize attaining a language certification to obtain a degree. In contrast to other students, master's students exhibit higher levels of commitment in several academic domains and demonstrate greater self-assurance in their proficiency as foreign language users. This phenomenon can be elucidated by the observation that students enrolled in MA/MSc programs possess a language certification and an understanding of the advantageous nature of engaging with diverse cultures by utilizing a foreign language.

### 3.4. School systems in Hungary

The Hungarian higher education system offers mainly 3-4 year bachelor programs (alapképzés), 1-2 year master programs (mesterképzés), and 2+2 year doctoral programs (doctor képzés) (Doctor of Philosophy/ Doctor of Liberal Arts)[23]. Some institutions also offer vocational higher education courses based on a baccalaureate, but not leading to a higher education qualification. Higher education institutions may also provide postgraduate specialist training, known as "szakirányú továbbképzés" for individuals who have obtained Bachelor's and Master's degrees. A specialized qualification can be acquired by completing 60 to 120 credits.

Applicants are assessed and rated based on their academic performance in secondary school, specifically their grades and érettségi vizsga (secondary school leaving certificate) results. Alternatively, applicants may be evaluated solely based on their érettségi vizsga results, with consideration given to their interests. [24]

Higher education studies are available at two distinct types of higher education institutions in Hungary: egyetem (university) and főiskola (college). In this area, some disciplines offer so-called "undivided"(osztalan), longer-term master's programs, which lead directly to a master's degree based on a baccalaureate. These include medical training (5--6 years), architecture (5 years), law (5 years), teacher training (5 or 6 years), and some agricultural and artistic courses. [25] Moreover, the Erasmus program is famous as a scholarship initiative in Hungary. This implies that individuals from the European Union possess the right to submit applications for Erasmus+, a program that offers a range of prospects encompassing education, training, internships, and youth development.

### 3.5. Challenges in the system of higher education in Hungary

Based on a scholarly investigation [26], Hungarian graduates between 2004 and 2022 are significantly below the EU average and the region's countries. It seems to outline the limits to Hungary's catching-up process. Also, a significant withdrawal of resources from Hungarian higher education starting in 2012 may be corrected by the considerable amount of money promised to foundation universities in a government decree in 2021. The expenditure ratio is thus below both the EU and OECD averages.

## 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this comparative research highlights the education systems in Hungary and China. China excels in academic achievements and uniformity, whereas Hungary's system is praised for fostering critical thinking and adaptability. The proportion of Hungarian individuals who have completed their education at the university level or are pursuing higher education has been increasing or remaining stagnant for one to two decades. However, it is worth noting that Hungary's rate of university graduates is one of the lowest among European Union member states. Furthermore, the country has not been able to make much progress in enhancing the opportunities for individuals to access higher education. This information is supported by reference [27]. The education strategy in Hungary has demonstrated efficacy in augmenting the participation rate in higher education within the community. However, it has not achieved the desired outcome of equalizing opportunities for individuals across different social strata. In China, specific issues have emerged primarily due to the growth of higher education. [28-30] The issue of disparities in accessing education has emerged as a significant concern. There is a mutual benefit for both nations, and policymakers in the field of education can get valuable insights from exchanging ideas and practices across different cultures. In response to these challenges, the Chinese government initiated the National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020). Consequently, the Chinese higher

education system is anticipated to enhance and adapt its capabilities through various strategies to address increasingly intricate circumstances in the forthcoming decades effectively.

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