

The Evolution of Institutions of Higher Learning in the Process of Social Change: From SRCC to SPEC

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Received 16 April 2016; accepted 5 June 2016
Published online 26 June 2016

Abstract

This article discusses the evolution from Sichuan Rural Construction College (SRCC) to Sichuan Provincial Education College (SPEC) in the process of social changes. The establishment of SRCC and its reconstruction as SPEC is the result of social change. The rural construction movement has emerged in China during 1920s-1930s, a large number of intellectuals thought that the poverty and ignorance is the root of China backward, to save China, it is necessary to revitalize the rural areas. When the upsurge of rural construction movement swept the Sichuan, SRCC can be established in the jointed efforts of local government and Sichuan warlords, and the establishment of SPEC was the interactive results between central and local governments. Due to lack of financial support for SRCC itself, so that part of the course can not be carried out. After the central power into the Sichuan, Sichuan semi-independent state was broken. Due to Sichuan warlords more reluctant to investment funds led to the SRCC is facing the closed dilemma. But through the persistent efforts of teachers and students and coupled with the outbreak of the war, at this time urgent need for a large number of educational talents, leading to SRCC was reconstructed as SPEC. After the victory of Counter-Japanese War, teachers and students in SPEC designed to transform the college into a university, but their plan was thwarted as a result of the collapse of the national government.

Key words: Institution of higher learning; social changes; Sichuan Rural Construction College; Sichuan Provincial Education College

Peng, X. L. (2016). The Evolution of Institutions of Higher Learning in the Process of Social Change: From SRCC to SPEC. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 10(6), 21-25. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/8635> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/8635>

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, from the perspective of interaction between higher education and social change, it is considered that the institution of higher learning should be defined. The institution of higher learning refers to universities, the specialized colleges and schools of higher learning, where students receive higher learning on the basis of completion of senior middle-school learning. SRCC and SPEC are institutions of higher learning in the implementation of higher learning. In fact, institutions of higher learning are components of society, and its system is a branch of the macroscopic social system. Undoubtedly, higher learning is a part of the society, and the system of higher learning is a subsystem of the macro social system. However, when discussing the relationship between higher learning and society, it is separated the higher learning from the social system, and regards it as "independent" in the field of the social system, so as to examine the relationship between higher learning and social reform.

The social reform is the decisive factor and the basic motive force of the learning institutions. The establishment and development of colleges and universities is based on economic development, which must be adapted to social-economic structures. Meanwhile, the development of higher learning needs for the attention and support of the government. SRCC and SPEC are established and developed on the basis of social reform and economic development, is the result of central and local government attention and support.

1. THE MOVEMENT OF RURAL CONSTRUCTION CONTRIBUTED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SRCC

1.1 The Rise of the Movement of Rural Construction

In 1920s-1930s, the movement of rural construction was a powerful trend. In the early 20th century, the economy in China's rural areas tended to collapse because of the invasion and plunder from the western powers, as well as the exploitation and oppression from the feudal landlord (Liang, 1993, p.252). People lived in destitute, suffering from ignorance, hunger and illness. Cultural activities were negative and learning development was backward. In the early of 1920s, a large number of pragmatic and patriotic intellectuals, such as Liang Shuming, Yan Yangchu, they were familiar with Chinese traditions (high school) and influenced by the rural campaigns in America, thought that China is Chinese society is based on the country, and countryside is the main body (Ibid., p.253). Intellectuals thought the rural areas were destroyed, to save China from the national crisis, rural construction movement was immediately required. Only by reviving the backward countryside by creating new culture could China find a way for survival (Ibid., p.260). Therefore, the movement of rural construction was the top priority for national rejuvenation. Depending on some statistics, there were as many as 600 groups of rural constructions in 1934. These groups established over 1,000 experimental areas and sites for rural constructions (Qu, 1993). They placed learning as the number-one priority. They educated farmers, improved agricultural technology, organized the rural autonomy, and did research on rural constructions. At that time, rural constructions were prevalent in China, which was a significant movement in the history of China's rural development.

1.2 The Establishment of SRCC

The emerging of rural construction movement required a mass of qualified talents. With the attention and support of the local government, SRCC was established.

The rise of rural construction promoted the relevant campaigns in Sichuan province, and ignited the spark of the rural construction movements around Sichuan province. In the early 1930s, people in Sichuan suffered from endlessly tangled warfare by warlords and tyranny of illegal interest groups. Amounts of lands were left unfarmed, and grain yield was extremely low. Worse still, vexatious taxes were still imposed on people, which made people live in extremely hard conditions. Sichuan, the land of abundance, should be survived by the imported food. Before the war, in Sichuan, the industrial and commercial institutions were collapsed, the agriculture was bankrupted, and innumerable people were dead of hunger. Moreover, in the early

1930s, the normal universities in the east of Sichuan suffered from the lack of teachers, and most of the teachers were not qualified (Xu & Pan, 2005). When Liuxiang took over the control of Sichuan, in view of the expanded protection areas, numbers of specialists who were qualified in learning and agriculture were in need to promote rural constructions. Hence, the back-up supervisory bureau started its work by improving rural learning (Dean's Office of SRCC, 1935, p.1). It decided to set up SRCC and experimental farm centers. To cultivate the basic talents, in July 1932, the bureau assured the provincial appropriation and established the Academy of Education for Country Teachers in the East Sichuan Public Normal University. At the very beginning, due to money shortage, there was just one class. The class was allocated to the East Sichuan Public Normal University by then government,¹ so it was entitled as the Academy of Education for Country Teachers in the East Sichuan Public Normal University. It was aimed at researching on rural problems and cultivating qualified intermediate teachers in rural normal universities.² It recruited students twice in August. The source of the students in the academy directly came from the graduated students in class 17 in Normal High School, who was willing to enter higher learning institutions. Added enrollments were targeted at some high school graduates, prepared for the expected SRCC. Zhang Chuzhi, who had been the mentor in Shandong Rural Construction Research Institution, was appointed as the director. In spring of 1933, the school rented a larger field to build experimental farms. With the expanding of the institutions of East Sichuan Public Normal University and the increasing number of teachers and students, the former site of the university can no longer meet the needs. Besides, Liu Xiang believed that it was inappropriate that a college was accommodated in a secondary school.³ Then, college rented more than 700

¹ An overview of Academy of Education for Country Teachers in the East Sichuan Public Normal university. Chongqing Municipal Archives Collection *Sichuan Province East Sichuan Normal School Archives* (hereinafter referred to as Sichuan East Normal School Archives), Fonds 0129, Vol. 37. Quoted from Xu, Z. H., & Pan, X. (2005). The Foundation of East Sichuan Normal College and Southwest China Normal College. *Journal of Southwest China Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)*, (5), 132.

² An overview of East Sichuan Public Normal University (the 22nd year of the Republic of China, i.e. 1933). *Sichuan East Normal School Archives*, Fonds 0129, Vol. 55. Quoted from Xu, Z. H., & Pan, X. (2005). The Foundation of East Sichuan Normal College and Southwest China Normal College. *Journal of Southwest China Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)*, (5), 132.

³ Nie, R. Z. (n.d.). Report on East Sichuan Public Normal University. *Sichuan East Normal College Archives*, Fonds 0129, Vol. 63. Quoted from Xu, Z. H., & Pan, X. (2005). The Foundation of East Sichuan Normal College and Southwest China Normal College. *Journal of Southwest China Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)*, (5), 132.

acres of folk-land around the Ksitigarbha temple in the old town of Ci Qikou in Chongqing, where the SRCC and the new farms were built. Later, it bought over 800 acres of governmental areas around the Mount Phoenix and the experimental farms were formally established. In February, the Academy of Education for Country Teachers in the East Sichuan Public Normal University was formally moved to the new campus in the old town of Ci Qikou in Chongqing. Immediately, classes were increased and items are added. SRCC rapidly developed each passing day.⁴

In July 1933, the government issued *The SRCC Regulations and Organization Outline*. It appropriated funds of 40,000 RMB to transform the Academy of Education for Country Teachers in the East Sichuan Public Normal University into SRCC, separating it from the East Sichuan Public Normal University. Since then, the SRCC became an independent institution of higher learning. In August 1933, with the support of the local government and the warlords in Sichuan, the SRCC was formally established,⁵ and began to enroll undergraduates. SRCC took the courses in the Academy of Education for Country Teachers in the East Sichuan Public Normal University as its main courses, and the experimental farm centers as the experimental bases. Gan Jiyong took charge of the institution and the farms.

2. THE EVOLUTION OF SPEC, THE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE CENTRAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

After the outbreak of the war against Japan, China was threatened to perish. When the central government came to Sichuan, the local warlords were reluctant to allocate funds to SRCC. Considering the lack of the talents with higher learning, SRCC was reorganized as the SPEC by the support of the local government.

2.1 The Difficulties Over the Operation of SPEC

In the first three years of the establishment, SRCC had made some achievements. Nevertheless, there were still some problems. Firstly, the lack of funding was the biggest obstacle for China's higher learning in

⁴ East Sichuan Public Normal University Official Letter (March 1st, the 22nd year of the Republic of China, i.e. 1933). *East Sichuan Normal School Archives*, Fonds 0129, Vol. 63. Quoted from Xu, Z. H., & Pan, X. (2005). The Foundation of East Sichuan Normal College and Southwest China Normal College. *Journal of Southwest China Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)*, (5), 132.

⁵ The previous 37 years investigation form of the general survey of Sichuan province public and private schools above college level. *Chongqing Municipal Archives Collection SPEC Archives* (hereinafter referred to as Sichuan Education Institute Archives). Fonds 0122, Dir. 1, Vol. 670.

1920s-1930s.⁶ Then, China was poor and backward. The endless war and unrest from home and abroad, the corruption in administrations, the negligence in education made it hard for the development of higher learning institutions. In January 1935, He Guoguang led the Nanchang Military Staff Committee move to Sichuan, the central power coming to Sichuan. Therefore, the semi-independent state of Sichuan was broken. Sichuan warlords are no longer funded for education. The budget shortage influenced the classes on schedule, and some classes were unable to be carried out. Secondly, the endless fights among Sichuan local warlords affected the normal operation of the institutions. Moreover, the short time of the establishment was not long enough to testify to the effects. The national government successively sent inspectors there, and held that the title of SRCC was inconsistent with then learning system (Xu & Pan, 2005). In August 1935, the Ministry of Education of the National Government ordered to rewrite the articles of association and the budget draft for approval. In November, the national government ordered it to be transformed as Sichuan Rural Construction Research Institution. In January 1936, the Sichuan government commanded that the research institution to find a new way of development. Meanwhile, Sichuan Construction Department also wanted to transform the institution into temporary classes for technical personnel training.

2.2 SRCC Was Successfully Transformed Into SPEC

The orders and commands of the national government aroused dissatisfaction and strong oppositions from teachers and students in SRCC. Before long, they launched the campaign for their college. They used postal telegram to state the significance of rural education construction. The aggression from the Japanese imperialist had made China in ruins. However, the quality of nationals was not high, and talents in the field of education were severely in short. The whole Chinese nation was in desperate need of teachers, of appeals for countering Japanese, of system reforms, and of talents who met the social demands. The then President of SRCC Gao Xianjian, appointed in 1935, visited the administration and argued for transforming SRCC into SPEC regardless of his own interest. Owing to the unremitting efforts of the teachers and students, as well as scholars in and outside Sichuan, the Sichuan government reconsidered the poverty conditions, the fact of pervasive illiteracy and the urge of cultivating highly qualified learning talents, and it revoked the commands

⁶ Chen, N. Z. (1983). Funding issues in Chinese university education 10 years before the war. *Journal of History, (Taiwan Normal University)*, (11). Quoted from Wang, D. J. (n.d.). *The political, social and cultural perspective of the university "nationalization": Take Sichuan university as an example (1925-1939)* (p.13). Excellent doctoral dissertation, Source: Sichuan University.

with the support of the central government. Finally, in August 1936, the local government instructed the transformation into SPEC and appointed Gao Xianjian as the chairman.⁷ On February 2, 1937, the Ministry of Education approved to issue the proposal.⁸ The experimental rural constructions continued.

3. THE ABORTION OF PEIDU UNIVERSITY UNDER POLITICAL DISPUTES

After the victory of the war against Japan, teachers and students strived to transform SPEC into Peidu University. They spared no efforts for the transformation and got supports from governments and communities in different levels. However, the outbreak of civil war led to the crisis within the national government. As its regime crumbling, the nation government no longer attached importance to education development, eventually leading to the abortion of Peidu University.

3.1 The Efforts of Transformation SPEC Into Peidu University After Counter-Japanese War

After the victory of the Counter-Japanese War, faculty and students of SPEC strived to expand SPEC as a comprehensive university, which covered arts, science, pedagogy and agriculture the three or four departments.⁹ In the autumn of 1945, the Student Council of SPEC proposed to the president Yan Qin that the SPEC should be transformed into a comprehensive university. They stated that after the victory of the Anti-Japanese War, universities removed to Sichuan were settled. Living expenses in Nanjing, Shanghai, Beijing and Tianjing were extremely high, and transportation fees were soaring. The high school student graduates could do not have the means to leave Sichuan for further study. SPEC was qualified in terms of the scale of arts, science, pedagogy and agriculture, the standard of university departments awarding system. Sichuan had a population of more than 40 million, and so many high schools, while there were few universities. In addition, SPEC had sound environment, complete school buildings, full equipment, and qualified teachers, including famous scholars from home and abroad. All these could contribute to the reconstruction of a comprehensive university. Then, the campaign of school expansion and university transformation arose. They petitioned the national political council, the ministry of education of the Sichuan

government and the provincial council. They proposed to the title of the comprehensive university as Peidu University in memory of the temporary capital. Students' efforts were supported by college leaders and teachers, and appreciated by different communities in Chongqing and Sichuan. The proposal was successively approved by the national political council and the provincial council.¹⁰ The government promised to prepare for the transformation at due time. In the autumn of 1946, SPEC added four departments, while the government failed to allocate funds for the expansion. SPEC was in heavy debts, and lost in struggles. In May 1947, SPEC sent representatives again to submit the petition to the provincial government. School leaders also respectively made the plea for the approval to the provincial government, the ministry of education and Chongqing administrations. They argued that the transformation conformed to the public voice. Sichuan government also reported the qualified conditions of SPEC for the ministry of education and applied for the title of National Peidu University. In August, the new president Cai Youheng stated 10 reasons for the transformation into a comprehensive university,¹¹ and he assured the faculty and the students of the success of the transformation. In autumn, SPEC added three departments. Since then, SPEC possessed a scale of nine departments.

In January 1948, the Expansion College Committee of SPEC agreed the resolution to boycott classes¹² for the expansion plea until the plea was approved.¹³ In February, Sichuan government decided that the Committee was responsible for the preparations and details of the expansion. If the plan has complied with the requirement, the formal expansion could be accepted.¹⁴ At the same time, it supported 60,000 dan grains to purchase equipment and promised allocation of 2 billion yuan for the expansion.¹⁵ The government also laid down the regulations for the committee, appointed the president of the provincial government as the chairman of the committee, the provincial secretary and the provincial learning minister as the vice chairmen, who were responsible for the transformation issues. In that month, the provincial learning minister met with Cai Youheng and students representatives. He promised to recruit students in that autumn under the title of Peidu University. All the transformation efforts finally resurrected a gleam of hope.

¹⁰ The official letter of expansion college committee of SPEC. *SPEC Archives*, Fonds 0122, Dir. 1, Vol. 665.

¹¹ A report on the expansion college committee of SPEC. *SPEC Archives*, Fonds 0122, Dir. 1, Vol. 665.

¹² Chongqing municipal government instructions. *SPEC Archives*, Fonds 0122, Dir. 1, Vol. 665.

¹³ The official letter of the expansion college committee of SPEC. *SPEC Archives*, Fonds 0122, Dir. 1, Vol. 665.

¹⁴ Sichuan provincial government official letter. *SPEC Archives*, Fonds 0122, Dir. 1, Vol. 665.

¹⁵ Sichuan provincial government postal telegram. *SPEC Archives*, Fonds 0122, Dir. 1, Vol. 665.

⁷ A general survey of SPEC. *SPEC Archives*, Fonds 0122, Dir. 1, Vol. 640.

⁸ The previous 37 years investigation form of the general survey of Sichuan province public and private schools above college level. *SPEC Archives*, Fonds 0122, Dir. 1, Vol. 670.

⁹ Proposal of the Committee members and director of education bureau. *SPEC Archives*, Fonds 0122, Dir. 1, Vol. 665.

The faculty and students were so inspired and they sold all the allocated grains in a short time.¹⁶ They bought lands, lots of books, instruments specimens, and increased teaching buildings for agriculture and science, processing factories, dormitories for students, big playground, new desks and chairs, experimental desks and display stands and other teaching equipment.¹⁷ In April, Expansion College Preparation Committee was established, which was in charge of the expansion issues. Expansion activity was systematically carried out.

On May 20, the Meeting of the Assembly of SPEC made a decision that the next enrollment should adopt the title of university determined by the committee, and departments of pedagogy, arts and science, agriculture respectively recruit students. In June, the ministry of education approved the filing of the three departments. At the end of June, the president of SPEC submitted the reported to the government that applies for the approval of the formal title of Peidu University during the enrollment in the next semester. All the required expansion conditions were in place.

3.2 The Collapse of the National Government and the Abortion of Peidu University

The personnel change of chairmen in Sichuan government frustrated the expansion of SPEC. It was until August 1945 that there was no clear response to the proposal of Peidu University titling. It seemed that the expansion which was expected to approach was in ruins. The Expansion College Preparation Committee sent representatives group to Chengdu once again to petition the chairman of provincial government, director of the education bureau in Sichuan, and the provincial administration and recounted the reasons for expansion, for the formal approval of enrolling in name of Peidu University. However, the national government was to collapse. The central government could no longer focus on education development. Sichuan government was also in crisis and its finance was already stretched thin. There was not any effective reply for the expansion petition of students. Cai Youheng offered to resign. Students staying in school were outraged and they strongly upheld president Cai. They refused anyone who took over the management of SPEC. The professors in SPEC also held meetings to discuss the issues of expansion and contact the provincial government for the immediate approval of transforming SPEC into Peidu University.

In early 1949, the construction of science and

agriculture buildings, the new agricultural products processing factories, the dormitories for students, and the big playgrounds were almost completed. Nonetheless, at that moment, the national government was to be defeated. The national liberation was around the corner. The national government was beset with troubles internally and externally. It is no more took account of the development of a college. Therefore, the expansion petition was unable to receive any reply. It was until on September 3, 1949 that the Sichuan government sent the official document drafted on June 27 by the Ministry of Education that the petition of renaming the SPEC as Peidu University was not approved taking into account of the tight political situation.¹⁸ In October, the SPEC had to still recruit student under the title of college. It even had to reduce enrollment due to the reduced funding. The faculty and students in SPEC spared no efforts to run for the expansion petition, struggling for three years. However, the reform of social system, the upheaval of situations and the collapse of the national government eventually led to the abortion of the expansion efforts. The SPEC was kept in operation until the year of 1950. Later, its pedagogy department and other six departments were reorganized with National Women's Normal College, and they were combined as Southwest China Normal College. Agriculture and science departments were constituted with relevant academic departments of West China University and Xianghui College, and they made up Southwest Agriculture College. Hence, SPEC became a historical term.

Construction and development of SRCC and SPEC took place over the period of social transition. Social changes contributed to the emergence of SRCC and SPEC. SRCC and SPEC evolved with the changes in turn, which occupied a unique position in the history of modern education in Chongqing and Sichuan.

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¹⁶ A report on the general situation of the expansion of SPEC. *SPEC Archives*, Fonds 0122, Dir. 1, Vol. 665.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Regulation on Sichuan youth educational organizations and instructions on the issue of teachers' appeal for the improvement of living standards through strikes forwarded by SPEC. *SPEC Archives*, Fonds 0122, Dir. 1, Vol. 732.