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Impact of the Quality Assessment of Undergraduate Education on University Change in China

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I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Abstract

This research analyses a higher education quality assessment scheme in China: the *Quality Assessment of Undergraduate Education* (QAUE) scheme. It seeks to find out the impact of the QAUE on university change, and explore the reasons why the intended changes have or have not been generated in the evaluated universities. In order to do this, case studies were conducted in three Chinese universities with different statuses. The data of these cases was collected by means of document analysis and semi-structured interviews.

The case studies show that, to a certain extent, the QAUE has caused universities to change in China, but not all the expected changes have been made. The effects on the various dimensions of quality provisions at different universities were not the same. It was found that the impact of the QAUE was not a linear consequence of policy implementation, but the result of an interaction between the external quality assessment scheme and the evaluated universities. Thus, the impact was not only determined by the design of the QAUE scheme, but was also related to the characteristics of the evaluated universities and their initiatives.

Based on the empirical findings from the QAUE and the theories about organisational change and the operating mechanism of external quality assessment, a model is proposed to describe how quality assessment interacts with the evaluated universities and causes them to change. In this model, quality assessment is regarded as being an external force which brings the external norms of "good" higher education into the evaluated universities and pushes them to adapt their operations to these norms. Change will only take place when the external force is integrated with the evaluated universities' internal motivation and capacity to implement change.

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Abbreviations

CADGEDC	China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Centre
BNU	Beijing Normal University
CCCPC	Central Committee of the Communist Party of China
HEEC	Higher Education Evaluation Centre of the Ministry of Education
HEIs	Higher education institutions
LYNC	Linyi Normal College
MOE	Ministry of Education
NWNU	Northwest Normal University
QAUE	Quality Assessment of Undergraduate Education

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research background

Quality has become a central focus in the intense and ongoing public debate about higher education in China over the last decade. Based on some earlier informal evaluation regulations, the Ministry of Education (MOE) issued the *Project of Quality Assessment of Undergraduate Education* (QAUE) in 2002. A new organisation, the *Higher Education Evaluation Centre of the Ministry of Education* (HEEC) was established in 2004 to undertake the specific mission of assessing the quality of teaching. The QAUE scheme focused on the teaching quality at institutional level. In this scheme, all higher education institutions (HEIs) were to be evaluated within a period of five years on a rolling basis. The first round of reviews began in 2003 and finished in mid-2008, and 589 institutions were evaluated (HEEC, 2010b).

Yet, after working for one full cycle, the QAUE scheme received a great deal of criticism (Du, Zhou, Li, & Xia, 2006). Some commentators considered that the enhancement of the quality of higher education was limited. The assessment policy also had many unintended consequences, such as placing bureaucratic burdens on the evaluated institutions, the homogenisation of HEIs, and a compliance culture (Liu & Rosa, 2008). As a result, many scholars and administrators in higher education called for a more effective quality assessment mechanism (Du et al., 2006; Zhong, Zhou, Liu, & Wei, 2009). Representatives of the National People's Congress (the highest state body and the only legislative house in the People's Republic of China) also proposed reforms to the quality assessment system (Wang, 2008). In this context, research is necessary to shed light on the impact of the QAUE scheme on the evaluated HEIs.

1.2 Research rationale and aims

A number of studies have been conducted in many countries to explore the impact of external quality assessment schemes on internal changes of HEIs. It has been

generally found that quality assessment causes changes within universities, such as focusing greater attention on teaching and learning (Stensaker, 2003), the standardisation of academic activities (Hayes & Winyard, 2002), more centralisation in procedures and in organisational decision-making (Stensaker, 2003; Brennan & Shah, 2000), and the systematisation and increased professionalisation of internal quality management (Stensaker, 2007). These changes are accomplished through various mechanisms, such as rewards, adjusting policies and structures, and changing cultures (Brennan & Shah, 2000). Empirical studies also show that there is a large gap between the expected and the observed actual effects of quality assessment. As suggested by Harvey and Newton (2004, p. 149), "most impact studies reinforce the view that quality is about compliance and accountability and has, in itself, contributed little to any effective transformation", especially in the core task of teaching and learning.

According to empirical studies, authors have suggested factors which may determine the impact of quality assessment on evaluated institutions: these include the characteristics of external quality assessment schemes, the national context, and the institutional profiles of the evaluated universities, as well as their initiatives and responses (Huisman, Rebora, & Turri, 2007; Brennan & Shah, 2000; Hodson & Thomas, 2003). The final impact of quality assessment schemes is a function of the characteristics of external quality assessment systems and of the national and institutional context of the evaluated universities (Stensaker, 2008). By and large, these influencing factors have been discussed discretely in the specific context of various empirical studies, but there is still little analysis of how these factors interact with each other and generate impact in a general situation. Analysis at the theoretical level is therefore missing.

In terms of the QAUE project in China, after working for one full cycle, various project evaluations were conducted by the policy implementer, the HEEC, and by independent researchers (Li, Li, & Qu, 2006; Zhang & Zhang, 2008; Liu, 2009), and a

general picture has been obtained of its impact on the evaluated institutions. The QAUE has significantly facilitated the improvement of teaching facilities, quality management and university planning, while evidence of its impact on teaching and learning is limited. The QAUE has somewhat encouraged teachers' commitment to teaching, but its effect on classroom activities, especially innovation in respect of teaching contents and methods, appears to have been trivial. Based on questionnaire surveys, these project evaluations depicted what effects have been generated, but did not empirically explore the reasons why some of the expected changes have been successfully made while the others have not. The reasons for the successes and failures of the QAUE scheme have also been discussed by other authors, based on their observations or secondary data (for example, Chen, 2008; Liu & Rosa, 2008; Zhong et al., 2009). They focused on the weakness of the design of the quality assessment scheme and made suggestions to improve it. However, the context and characteristics of the evaluated institutions, and their initiatives and responses to the QAUE scheme, have not yet been considered. (The previous study on the QAUE will be described in detail in sub-section 3.4.3.)

This phenomenon does not only exist in the case of the QAUE in China, but also in the international context. As indicated by Stensaker (2008), when explaining the reasons why quality assessment schemes have or have not generated the expected changes in universities, most of the impact studies focus on the characteristics of the evaluation system, while few of them go on to make an in-depth exploration of the interplay between the assessment scheme and the evaluated institutions. Stensaker (2008) considers that this is linked to understanding how organisational change is to take place. Most of the current studies of the outcomes of quality assessment around the world regard change as being an outcome of policy implementation. The problem to be resolved is defined first, and then the policies are designed to address the problem. Therefore, change is a consequence of hierarchical control, enforcement and technical support. Stensaker (2008) suggests applying a new perspective, which originates from an understanding of organisational change, that change is not

conceived of as being either top-down or bottom-up, but is rather interactive, in which the initiatives of the organisational actors should be identified. Following his suggestions, the impact of external quality assessment should be analysed from the perspective of the interaction between quality assessment schemes and the evaluated institutions, and based on certain theories of organisational change. At the same time, he cautions that the ideal of having a specific theory which can explain the outcomes of quality assessment should be abandoned (Stensaker, 2008).

Thus, this present research describes the impact of the QAUE on the evaluated institutions and explains the reasons why the intended changes have or have not been generated. Both the characteristics of the QAUE scheme and the national and institutional context of the evaluated institutions and their initiatives are considered. Based on the empirical results of the QAUE in China, the ways in which external quality assessments interact with the evaluated institutions and cause university change are explored, drawing on the related theories about organisational change, the higher education system and quality assessments. A model is proposed to depict the ways in which quality assessment causes university change. It is hoped that this research will help to fill in the blanks, both at the theoretical level and in the Chinese context.

1.3 Research questions

According to the above descriptions, the empirical research question is identified as follows:

What is the impact of the *Quality Assessment of Undergraduate Education* (QAUE) on university change in China?

The central research problem can be further elaborated in the process of searching for answers to the following sub-questions:

(1) What changes does the QAUE intend to generate in the evaluated universities?

(2) What changes, both intended and unintended, have actually been generated? How?

(3) What intended changes have not been generated? Why not?

Based on the answers to the empirical research questions, a theoretical question could also be explored.

How do external quality assessments interact with the evaluated universities and cause them to change?

1.4 Research methods: case studies

The case study method was used to approach the research questions. In order to understand and compare the changes caused by the QAUE scheme in various universities, three HEIs with different statuses were chosen as cases. They are the Beijing Normal University (BNU), Northwest Normal University (NWNU) and Linyi Normal College (LYNC). The data on these cases was collected by means of document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Firstly, the related documents were reviewed, including published self-evaluation reports and reform projects based on the recommendations of external evaluators. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the internal stakeholders (university leaders and teachers) to explore their perceptions of the changes which have taken place in the evaluated universities. A total of nine leaders and 20 teachers were interviewed from the three institutions, with the aim of identifying changes in the institutions which may not have been revealed in official documents. Based on their perspectives, the ways of generating these changes, the factors which facilitated and inhibited these changes, and the reasons why some changes were implemented while others were not, were also explored in depth. At the same time, the danger that the perspectives of internal members may be biased in reporting the impact of the QAUE in which they have been involved was minimised by conducting document analysis.

1.5 Research delimitation

This research is about the impact of quality assessment on university change. Quality assessment in higher education is defined as being "every structured activity which leads to a judgment of the quality of the teaching/learning process and/or research, whether self-assessment or assessment by external experts" (Vroeijenstijn, 1995, p. xviii). The levels of the reviews include institution, faculty/department, subject/programme and individuals (Brennan & Shah, 2000). The QAUE scheme analysed in this research is an external assessment of the teaching quality at institutional level. This thesis focuses on external quality assessment, which is regarded as being the judgment of HEIs' performance against external criteria by external experts (Green, 1994). Thus, the term, "quality assessment" (unless otherwise specified), implies external quality assessment in this thesis. In addition, no distinction will be made between assessment, evaluation, review and examination, and these terms will be used interchangeably.

It is difficult to provide a clear definition of change, since the term itself is variously used to refer to alterations which vary from simple reproduction to radical transformation (Becher & Kogan, 1992). This research adopts the definition of organisational change suggested by Van de Ven and Poole (1995), i.e. the observation of difference over time in one or more dimensions of an entity. In the higher education context, university change is thus regarded as being the observation of a difference over time in one or more dimensions of a university or college. This includes both the adjustment of operations (what people do) and the alteration of norms (what people think).

1.6 Structure of the thesis

Chapter Two is devoted to finding theoretical approaches to understand how quality assessment causes university change. Firstly, studies on quality assessment in higher education are reviewed, and the context in which quality assessment emerged in the

higher education system, its purposes, and the approaches to operating it are discussed. Based on previous empirical studies, the main impact of quality assessment on evaluated universities is summarised, and the factors determining the impact are tentatively proposed. Then, the focus turns to a theoretical exploration of how quality assessment, as an external force, causes university change. Theories about organisational change, the working processes and structures of higher education systems, and the operating mechanism of quality assessment are examined. Building on these theories, a perspective is proposed to help to understand the ways in which quality assessment processes interact with universities to generate change.

The third chapter outlines the higher education system in China and its quality assessment schemes, which provide the background for the impact analysis of the QAUE. Firstly, a brief outline is provided of the Chinese higher education system, both historically and in its current state, after which the higher education quality assessment schemes in China are depicted, including the context in which quality assessment emerged in the Chinese higher education system, and its evolution and the *status quo*. The last part of the chapter focuses on the QAUE scheme, and presents the specific approaches to quality assessment and its intended impact.

Chapter Four details the research methods of this thesis. Case studies were used to examine whether or not the intended impact of the QAUE has been realised in the evaluated institutions. This chapter includes the reasons for the selection of the three cases (BNU, NWNU and LYNC), the process of data collection through document analysis and semi-structured interviews, and the approaches used to analyse the data.

The fifth, sixth and seventh chapters interpret the results of the data analysis, describing the impact of the QAUE on each of the three cases. In each case, the ways in which the university and its members responded to the QAUE are presented first. This is followed by a depiction of five dimensions of the impact of the QAUE, namely, the evaluated institutions' resource commitment to undergraduate education,

university identification, quality management, teaching and learning, and the balance between teaching and research. Whether or not the expected impact of the QAUE was successfully generated is examined, and the factors which facilitated or impeded the implementation of change are discussed in the specific institutional context. Chapter Eight summarises the findings from the case studies. Firstly, it interprets how the evaluated institutions responded to the QAUE, and why they did so. Then, the focus shifts to the impact of the QAUE on the five dimensions of university change listed above. What changed, how it happened and what intended effects have not emerged are discussed in each dimension. The forces and sources of change are explored to determine why the intended changes have or have not occurred.

In the ninth chapter, the impact of the QAUE on the various dimensions of the evaluated institutions is reviewed. The change and continuity produced by the QAUE are analysed respectively to further explore the reasons behind them. Both the external and internal forces for change are discussed. Drawing on the empirical findings from the QAUE, a model is proposed to describe how external quality assessment causes university change. The ideal conditions in which quality assessment can generate university change are proposed; meanwhile, the limitations of quality assessment, as an external force, to cause university change, are indicated.

The concluding chapter (Chapter Ten) reviews the research journey of this thesis and summarises the key arguments. It also indicates the contribution of this research, both at the theoretical and contextual levels, and its limitations.

Ever since it emerged in the higher education field, quality assessment has been criticised for its low efficiency in quality improvement. There is a widespread feeling that evaluation is more closely connected to an external requirement for accountability than to really making a positive contribution to the performances of the evaluated institutions (Power, 1997). This thesis seeks to find out whether this phenomenon is essentially attributable to poorly-designed quality assessment schemes, or to the

functional limitations of quality assessment, by exploring the outcomes of the QAUE in China.

CHAPTER TWO: QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND ITS IMPACT ON UNIVERSITY CHANGE: A THEORETICAL APPROACH

2.1. Introduction

This chapter intends to present the theoretical approaches to understanding how quality assessment causes university change. The first part of this chapter focuses on quality assessment in higher education. Firstly, it illustrates the context in which quality assessment emerged in higher education systems, and its intended objectives. Secondly, it describes the approaches to operating quality assessment. Before that, the definitions of quality in higher education are discussed, which are linked to the approaches to assessing it. Thirdly, having reviewed impact studies of quality assessment, the main effect of quality assessment on the evaluated universities is summarised. The determining factors of the impact are also proposed tentatively.

The second part of the chapter explores the ways in which quality assessment affects the internal life of universities at the theoretical level. Related theories of organisational change, the working processes and structures of higher education systems, and the operating mechanism of quality assessment are examined. Building on these theories, a perspective for understanding the ways in which quality assessment causes university change are proposed.

2.2 Quality assessment in higher education

2.2.1 Emergence of quality assessment in higher education and its purposes

Concern about quality in higher education is not a new phenomenon. Universities have always possessed mechanisms for assuring the quality of their work as part of

the academic tradition, until the mid-1980s. However, these were mainly internal to the higher education institutions and systems, and had never been imposed by external authorities. The context in which it became a concern to the outside world has been examined by many researchers (Vroeijenstijn, 1995; Brennan & Shah, 2000; Morley, 2003; Huisman & Currie, 2004; Trow, 1996). They argue that the main drivers of the quality assessment movement include the massification and diversification of higher education and the decreasing unit funding, the changing relationship between higher education and the state, the general quest for better public services derived from the New Public Management theories, and the internationalisation and globalisation of higher education.

Massification and diversification of higher education

As proposed by Brennan and Shah (2000), Trow (1996) and Morley (2003), the expansion of higher education has drawn attention to the issue of quality. The prime traditional mechanisms for achieving quality (namely exclusiveness or selectivity) have been removed and replaced by the need to demonstrate it. With expansion has come diversity. The growth and diversification of higher education, along with associated changes in pedagogy, require higher education systems to surrender any idea of broad common standards of academic performance between institutions, and even between subjects within a single university. Students gain their degrees or credentials with widely varying levels of proficiency and at different levels of difficulty. The same qualifications have different values for students from different universities or departments. Consequently, quality assessment has been initiated as a way to control the quality of provisions in various HEIs, as well as to publish information about quality to stakeholders.

Decline of unit funding

As argued by Brennan and Shah (2000), expansion has made higher education more costly everywhere. Hardly anywhere have funding levels kept pace with expansion. Higher education may not always have been asked to do "more with less" but in

recent years, it has been asked to do "more with not enough" from the point of view of most higher education managers (Brennan & Shah, 2000, p. 23). Pulled in the direction of both expansion and squeezed resources, doubts about the quality of the higher education came to the fore (Barnett, 1992; Vroeijenstijn, 1995). As a result, quality assessment systems were introduced to help to maintain and improve the quality of provisions in the evaluated institutions.

Changing relationship between higher education and the state

Neave and van Vught (1994) describe the changing pattern of the relationship between higher education and the state as a shift from the model of state control to the model of state supervision. The state is supposed to refrain from making a detailed scrutiny of the daily life of institutions and to steer the higher education system from a distance. This raises a fundamental question, i.e. how will more autonomous institutions behave in a market-like competitive environment? Will institutions comply with existing and emerging governmental policies? In this context, governments tend to introduce mechanisms to ensure that institutions behave as they want them to behave (Rosa, Tavares, & Amaral, 2006). Consequently, quality assessment emerged, and *ex-post* evaluation has replaced *ex-ante* regulation.

New Public Management

New Public Management has dominated the restructuring of the public sector in western countries over the last two decades with the aim of making them more effective and responsive. Higher education, regarded as one public service setting, has also been influenced by this new managerial thinking. One of the main principles behind New Public Management is that public actors should maintain core public service values and they should place emphasis on achieving the desired results or outcomes of service, rather than on the processes and rules of service delivery. It is assumed that efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery will be achieved by means of using private sector management techniques, and performance measurement is one of the most important techniques (Ferlie, Ashburner, Fitzgerald, & Pettigrew,

1996; Meek, 2003). When it comes to HEIs, students tend to be viewed as customers or clients. Thus, influenced by New Public Management, quality assessment has been implemented to enhance the efficiency of HEIs and to try to ensure that academic provision can meet the needs of students as their clients.

Globalisation and internationalisation

In the context of globalisation and internationalisation, the exchange of students and staff, as well as the cooperation of institutions and programmes, require condensed and reliable information about the quality provided by HEIs in the global space (Brennan & Shah, 2000). Thus, quality assessment has been employed as an information publisher to support international communication and cooperation. In addition, the growth of "policy borrowing" and the prosperity of supra-national organisations have also facilitated the prevalence of quality assessment schemes in the era of globalisation (Morley, 2003; Huisman & Currie, 2004).

Clearly, quality assessment in higher education is a response to the changing circumstances. Based on the context in which it emerged, the main purposes of quality assessment can be summarised as follows:

- *Improvement:* to maintain and to improve the performance quality of HEIs;
- *Accountability*[1]*:* to provide accountability to society for the use of public funds;
- *Compliance*[2] *and control:* to ensure that HEIs do what governments want them to do (Vroeijenstijn, 1995; Brennan & Shah, 2000; Harvey & Newton, 2004; Billing, 2004).

Whether these purposes have been realised successfully was examined by empirical studies in specific contexts, which will be discussed in the following sections.

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[1] Accountability is "the obligation to report to others, to explain, to justify, to answer questions about how resources have been used and to what effect" (Trow, 1996, p. 311).

[2] In the context of organisational change, compliance means conforming to a rule, such as a specification, policy, standard or law.

2.2.2 Definitions of quality in higher education

Like "freedom" or "justice", "quality" is an elusive concept. Although everyone has an instinctive understanding of what it means, it is difficult to articulate. Many people have provided a definition of quality in higher education (for example, Harvey & Green, 1993; Harvey, 1995; Melrose, 1998; Van Kemenade, Pupius, & Hardjono, 2008). One of the most cited articles on quality in higher education is by Harvey and Green (1993) entitled "defining quality". They chose to group differing concepts of quality into five discrete, but interrelated categories: exceptional, perfection (or consistency), fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformative. The *exceptional* notion of quality accepts as axiomatic that quality is something special, which can be viewed as distinctiveness, excellence, or passing a set of required standards. In terms of higher education, this may equate to most people's perception of Harvard and Cambridge universities. The *perfection (or consistency)* approach to quality focuses on process and sets specifications which it aims to meet perfectly, with two dictums: zero defects and getting things right first time. *Fitness for purpose,* which is adopted by most analysts and policy-makers in higher education, means that quality is judged in terms of the extent to which the product or service fits its stated purpose(s). The *value for money* approach to quality implies a "high standard" specification at reduced cost and the notion of accountability is at the heart of this approach. The last definition, *quality as transformation,* does more justice to education as a process which places learners at the centre of the action: they get added value, and transformation lies in added value (Harvey & Green, 1993).

It seems that all the definitions of quality share an interest in doing something well, but the family of concepts differs by which criteria or by whom "doing something well" is to be judged (Barnett, 2003, p. 91). Quality is a relative concept. It depends upon a "benchmark" and it means different things to different stakeholders: governments, employers, students, academics, society, and so on (Harvey & Green, 1993; Vroeijenstijn, 1995; Houston, 2008; Iacovidou, Gibbs & Zopiatis, 2009). In governments' eyes, quality may mean that as many students as possible finish the

programme in the scheduled time with a degree of the international standard with reduced costs. Employers may focus on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes graduates obtain during their period of study. For students, the quality of education may be connected to the contribution to individual development and the preparation for a position in society. The academic will probably define quality as a good academic training based on good knowledge transfer, a good learning environment and a good relationship between teaching and research (Vroeijenstijn, 1995, p. 13). Anyone in a position to define quality is in a position to decide what is good and what is not good. In the words of Robert Pirsig, "quality for sheep is what the shepherd says" (Pirsig, 1974, p. 392). Thus, different interest groups will have their own ideas about what constitutes quality and how to measure it (De Weert, 1990; Vroeijenstijn, 1995; Barnett, 1992; Barnett, 2003; Tam, 2001). In this regard, Barnett (2003) takes quality as "ideology". He claims that people are apt to regard quality as something which is pre-arranged, but quality is not a given. As an ideology, quality can never be neutral: it is not independent of certain kinds of interest (Barnett, 2003; Brown, 2004). In fact, quality "stands as proxy for those interests which, in turn, it masks" (Barnett, 2003, p. 95).

After initial, sometimes vehement, discussions on the meaning of "quality", a rather pragmatic consensus was reached in practice that quality means *fitness for purpose* as well as *fitness of purpose* (Westerheijden, Stensaker, & Rosa, 2007a). These terms originate from two basic distinctive quality assessment approaches: mission-based and standards-based evaluation. In mission-based evaluation, the higher education institution's own statement is taken as the standard to be achieved: *fitness for self-defined purpose*. In standards-based evaluation, "external evaluation will first of all establish the *'fitness of purpose'* judged against an externally given standard" (Westerheijden et al., 2007a, p. 81). To some extent, *fitness for purpose* and *fitness of purpose* are empirical terms: they can mean anything, depending on what is given as purpose(s), because there is no single understanding of what the purpose(s) of higher education is in current society (Westerheijden et al., 2007a). In this case, a quality

assessment may be a process of examining *fitness for/of purposes* in universities, or a tool to direct the changes of HEIs' *purposes*, or both.

In summary, from the perspective of benchmarks, interest groups and the like, many authors became engaged in defining quality in higher education. Although they did not construct a generally accepted definition of quality, they indicated that quality is a relative concept. There are different ways to understand quality, depending on the benchmarks adopted and the person who judges it. The understanding of quality links to the approaches to quality assessment, which is discussed below.

2.2.3 Approaches to quality assessment in higher education

Quality evaluation involves the judgment of performance against either internally or externally defined criteria (Green, 1994). An external quality assessment in higher education is defined as a means of assessing the quality of what is actually provided by HEIs against external criteria by external experts (Pearce, 1995). A general model about the specific operation of external quality assessment was proposed by van Vught and Westerheijden (1994). Based on a survey in Europe, they indicated a number of common features of national quality assessment frameworks, as follows:

- There is a national agency, tasked with the responsibility of co-coordinating and setting out the procedures and methods to be used for quality assurance of HEIs. They suggest that such an agency should have a legal status but be independent of government.
- Based on the procedures and methods set out by the national coordinating agency, institutions should undertake regular self-assessment and report to the assessment agency on a regular basis. For this process to be effective, the self-assessment should be undertaken by the academic staff of the institutions themselves.
- The institutional self-assessment would form the basis of an external peer review. Such an evaluation should include discussions with academic and administrative staff, students, and alumni. External peers would need to be selected to represent

specific expertise (such as academic and management), depending on the focus and purpose of the visit.

- A report setting out the findings of the peer review visit should be published. The main purpose of the report should be to make recommendations to institutions in order to help them to improve their quality.
- They suggest that there should be no direct link between the outcome of quality assessment and the funding of institutions (van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994).

Based on several reported comparisons, Brennan and Shah (2000) and Billing (2004) suggest that, although most elements of the general model of external quality assessment apply in most countries, they do not completely apply in all countries. There are considerable variations in the methods used, which reflect differences in purposes and national contexts. A useful conclusion, therefore, is that the "general model" established by van Vught and Westerheijden (1994) is not applicable everywhere, but it provides a starting point from which to map deviations.

Differences of ways of operating quality assessment are to be found in who assesses what, and how. Firstly, the "who" question can be divided into a whole set of subsidiary questions: who initiated the assessment? Who carries it out? In other words, it involves the owner of quality assessment schemes and the practical evaluators. In practice, quality assessment may be set up by governments, or collectively owned by the institutions, or owned by completely independent bodies (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Rosa et al., 2006). As mentioned above, external evaluators should have specific expertise in terms of the focus of the evaluation (such as academic and management). They often come from the academic world, while including minority representatives from other stakeholders is a widespread practice (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2004).

The "what" question is partly a matter of level: the whole institution, a faculty or department, a subject or programme, and individuals. It is also a matter of focus: teaching, research, management, etc.

The "how" question involves the procedures and methods of implementing the quality assessment, as well as the ways of producing and using the evaluation results. Basically, there are two ways of measuring the quality of education: by adopting fixed procedures, often quantitative, associated with performance indicators, or by means of the intrinsically subjective process of peer review, or a combination of both (Westerheijden, 2007). A distinction can be noted between standards-based and mission-based evaluation in terms of the criteria used to judge quality. If an evaluation is standards-based, it refers to objective and ideal standards; in contrast, if it is mission-based, it makes comparisons, not against assumed ideals, but against the general pattern of performance to be found in the type of activity being evaluated. Performances are thus ranked in relation to one another rather than judged in absolute terms (Becher & Kogan, 1992).

The evaluation results are either quantitative or qualitative. There is also a concern about the use of quality assessment results in terms of whether or not evaluation results directly influence institutional resource payoffs. Westerheijden (1990) suggests that there is an inherent contradiction in quality assessment linked to financial rewards. If real rewards and punishments are attached to the results of the assessment, the result may be a "game" of compliance, and the potential benefits of learning, self-criticism and improvement may all be lost. On the other hand, if quality assessment has no consequences - if there are neither rewards nor punishments attendant upon its outcomes - then why should anyone take it seriously? Despite this dilemma, every quality assessment scheme has, in practice, to find a point in the continuum from the high level of financial consequences, i.e. performance funding, to the low level of no consequences (Ewell, 2007).

The different approaches to quality assessment discussed above are summarised in Table 2.1 (on the next page). It is worth mentioning that factors which differentiate the approaches to quality assessment are inter-related. For example, performance indicators often lead to quantitative evaluation results, and the financial consequences

are often associated with unambiguous, preferably quantitative and comparable evaluation results.

Table 2.1 Different approaches to quality assessment in higher education

Who	**Evaluation's owner**	State, institutions collectively, independent bodies
	Evaluators	Representatives with expertise
What	**Evaluation levels**	Institution, faculty/department, subject, individuals
	Evaluation focuses	Teaching, research, management
How	**Evaluation methods**	Performance indicators, peer review
	Evaluation criteria	Standards-based, mission-based
	Evaluation results	Quantitative, qualitative
		Consequences of evaluation results

2.2.4 Impact of quality assessment on HEIs

Overview of impact studies

A number of studies on the impact of higher education quality assessment schemes have been conducted in many countries throughout the world during the last 30 years. Based on case studies in 14 countries, Brennan and Shah (2000) investigated the impact of quality assessment on HEIs. They used a model which distinguishes between the institutional level and the mechanism of impacts. In this model, the impact could occur at the level of the individual, the basic unit (faculties/ departments), the institution, or the national system, and through three mechanisms: rewards, changing policies and structures, and changing higher education culture.

- Firstly, quality assessment could lead to rewards through an enhanced reputation, status allocation, increased funding, and greater influence. Direct financial rewards were rather rare, while rewards in terms of reputation, influence and status allocation were quite common. These were more likely to occur when the assessment included a clear summative, preferably quantifiable, judgment. These rewards could result in increased morale among both staff and students, and hence, in higher levels of productivity. By the same token, quality assessment could also lead to the opposite of all these benefits when a bad result was obtained. Rewards could occur at all levels, from the salaries of individual

academic staff, to the influence of basic units in an institution, to the status designation of a whole institution.

- Secondly, they analysed the impact through changing institutional structures and policies in terms of fundamental structural and policy changes within institutions and substantive changes in a specific area of policy or part of an institution. They found that, on the one hand, it was the general complexity of the environment, rather than the specific impact of external quality assessment systems, which seemed to be the prime generator of fundamental structural and policy changes within institutions. On the other hand, assessment activities may have led to substantial changes in a specific area of policy or part of the institution, such as the curricular and organisational changes. These changes were heavily dependent upon the contextual features of the institutions. An external quality assessment, particularly when focused on the institutional level, tended to be associated with the development of institution-wide quality management policies and procedures. This process generally involved a shift in authority from basic academic units to the administrative centre of the institution.

- Thirdly, the impact of quality assessment through changes in institutional cultures manifested itself in two main ways, the first of which was in the promotion of a managerial ethos across institutions by developing evidence-based approaches to decision-making. The second was in terms of attitudes toward teaching. The introduction of a quality assessment of teaching caused considerably more attention to be paid to the teaching function within institutions, such as talking about teaching, monitoring teaching, and seeking ways to improve it. In addition, subject-based culture at the level of basic units appeared to have been weakened by the centralisation of internal quality management procedures. This was done by weakening the group boundaries between departments and other units, and by supporting the imposition of increasingly explicit values and regulations from the centre of the institution (Brennan & Shah, 2000).

Minelli, Rebora, Turri and Huisman (2006) paid particular attention to the impact of quality evaluation in three respects, namely, organisational learning, the development of resources, and power systems. They also discussed the undesired consequences of quality evaluation. The details of the impact involved are as follows:

- **Organisational learning:** This means the capacity to gain knowledge, renew aims and adopt innovative behaviour and schemes for action. It involves effects on strategies and policies, culture, changes in professional practices, increase in knowledge of university practices, attention to evaluation, etc.;
- **Development of resources:** This involves effects on technical infrastructure, reputations, university funds, allocation of economic funds within the university, human resource management, etc.;
- **Power systems:** This includes effects on institutional relationships, organisational structure, management operating systems, the evaluation system and bodies in charge of it, variation in decision-making capabilities and leadership, etc.;
- **Undesired consequences:** This involves increased paperwork, over-riding of institutional objectives, standardisation and flattening of processes, behaviour aimed at maximising evaluation results, etc.

Minelli et al. (2006) provided a comprehensive framework, which was developed from studies on organisational change, to analyse the impact of quality evaluation. The empirical study conducted by Huisman, Rebora, and Turri (2007) in three European universities in the Netherlands, the UK, and Italy adopted this framework and demonstrated that the greatest impact of evaluation was in the area of organisational learning, and the least was in the area of the development of resources.

Stensaker (2003) studied the impact of external quality assessment on the "inner life" of European universities in terms of teaching and learning, and organisational and academic leadership. He argued that the impact of quality assessment on teaching and learning seemed quite mixed. There were positive effects, such as increased

institutional attention toward teaching and learning, and more active discussions and co-operation within academic units. Some negative effects were also revealed, such as the feeling academics had of being scrutinised and inspected, and the evaluated institutions' compliance with the requirements of quality assessment. As for the impact on organisations and management, he concluded that one trend was more centralisation in terms of procedures and organisational decision-making, and thus HEIs became more "bureaucratic". Another trend involved a more autonomous role for the institutional management, including giving managers greater responsibility for taking action to follow up external evaluations (Stensaker, 2003). Hayes and Winyard (2002) also discussed the results of quality assessment in terms of teaching and learning, and organisational management. They focused on the negative results, and argued that quality assessment drives academic activities to further standardisation and leads to modern forms of bureaucracy where rules and regulations are substituted by internal evaluative mechanisms which produce legitimacy.

Morley (2003) explored the power relations involved in higher education quality assessment. Empirical evidence for her study was derived from a sample of 36 academics and administrators in 35 HEIs in the UK. She investigated how quality assurance influenced cultures, relationships, subjectivities and identities in the academy. In her opinion, the quality assurance mechanisms could be used as instruments of suppression, resulting in overt compliance, "counterfeit reflexivity" (which means academics are forced to present themselves in the language and discourse of quality assessors), reduced creativity and less meaningful teaching and learning. In some instances, the emergence of quality regimes has led to more surveillance, and a decline in trust in the power relationships within HEIs (Morley, 2003). Some of Morley's findings seem less reliable. For example, the "counterfeit reflexivity" of academics was not evidenced by the other research, such as Hoecht (2006). Nevertheless, Hoecht also found that academics felt that they were less trusted and more controlled, and thus the power relations have been shifted as a result of external quality assessment.

Based on empirical studies in specific contexts, Brennan and Shah (2000), Minelli et al. (2006), Huisman et al. (2007), Stensaker (2003) and Morley (2003) examined the impact of quality assessment on various dimensions of the evaluated universities and colleges. Their findings helped to develop a framework of the dimensions on which external quality assessment could have effects. However, their conclusions about the extent to which these dimensions have been affected are not necessarily applicable in other contexts, such as in China.

From a broader perspective, Stensaker (2007) summarises the impact of quality evaluation on the dimensions of power, professionalisation and permeability. Firstly, power issues are heavily related to quality assessment (Barnett, 1994). There is a rather clear trend: quality processes support the development of a stronger institutional leadership in higher education (Askling, 1997). "This can be seen by the increasing centralisation of information quality systems produce, and the much clearer lines of responsibility that most institutions develop in this area" (Stensaker, 2007, p. 60). In the process, responsibilities that the individual academic had in the past have been removed (Henkel, 2000). On the other side, there is evidence that quality assessment tends to trigger discussions and debates about the institutional identity of universities and colleges, which may force them to reinvent themselves as organisations, and rethink their mission and profiles (Stensaker, 2006). Secondly, the systematisation and increased professionalisation of the work related to quality processes is another consequence of evaluation. "Perhaps the most noticeable effect is the formalisation that has swept over so many HEIs in forms of written routines, scripts and rule-driven handbooks providing hints of when to do what, and the persons in charge" (Stensaker, 2007, p. 60). This may be seen as a sure sign of increased bureaucracy in the sector, or be viewed as being a much needed visualisation of the old "tacit knowledge" which dominated quality assurance in the past. These processes may also stimulate new forms of cooperation between academic colleagues, and between academics, administrators and students where practice with respect to teaching and learning can be discussed, tested and contested (Massy, 1999). Thirdly,

quality evaluation produces information which makes universities and colleges more transparent and open. This has led to more informed decision-making processes, where data and information about performance, relevance, and quality are used more systematically (Brennan & Shah, 2000). Based on a brief summary of the various dimensions where impact may be found, Stensaker (2007) illustrates a paradox of quality evaluation: while improving teaching and learning is the main purpose of quality evaluation, surprisingly few studies show that this link exists. There are studies indicating changes in organisations, infrastructure, attitudes and responsibilities, and while there may be good reasons to believe that these factors indirectly improve teaching and learning, the whole field of quality assurance would greatly benefit from thorough studies providing better evidence of the impact on teaching and learning (Stensaker, 2007).

Main impact of quality assessment on evaluated institutions

Empirical studies show that the impact of quality assessment is quite complex, with both direct and indirect effects on various dimensions of higher education. As Stensaker (2007) indicates, it is almost impossible to find a one-dimensional and "pure" effect of quality processes, or to enumerate all of the impacts of quality assessment. Moreover, as previously discussed, the emergence of quality assessment schemes *per se* is the response of higher education systems to the changing external and internal environments. Thus, it is very difficult to distinguish whether the change in a university is a response to quality assessment schemes or to changing circumstances: the causal relationship is hard to map (Stensaker, 2003; Harvey & Newton, 2004; Rosa et al., 2006).

By and large, the main impact of quality assessment schemes can be summarised from the empirical studies cited above (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Huisman et al., 2007; Stensaker, 2003; Hayes & Winyard, 2002; Stensaker, 2007; Morley, 2003). Four dimensions of impact are involved, including resource allocation, professionalisation of quality management, teaching and learning, and organisational re-identification.

- ***Resource allocation:*** Resources include funding, reputation, status allocation, and the like. Resource allocation associated with quality assessment includes the allocation of resources among HEIs and within universities. The latter involves resource deployment among basic units (faculties and departments), among individual staff through incentive schemes, and among various fields (such as teaching and research) within universities. Resource development can result in the improvement of technical infrastructure, the adjustment of staffing policies, and a change in the morale and attitude of staff and students within universities, which will probably indirectly influence the process of teaching and learning.

- ***Professionalisation of quality management:*** The systematisation and increased professionalisation of work related to quality processes is another consequence of evaluation, such as the establishment of internal quality assessment committees and more explicit regulations for quality management. In this process, the authority shifts from the basic academic units to the administrative centre of the institution, and this may lead to a modern form of "bureaucracy". In addition, the information provided by quality evaluation contributes to a more rational and evidence-based approach to decision-making. However, this information may also be manipulated and become a tool of a power struggle among interest groups. In the decision-making process, this information could be used in favour of certain kinds of actions and considerations which would strengthen the position of some groups rather than others (Brennan & Shah, 2000, p. 38). They are more likely to lead to action when such action does not run counter to the interests of powerful groups within the institution.

- ***Teaching and learning:*** Firstly, quality assessment has resulted in greater attention being paid to teaching and learning, and this is often related to the issue of redressing the balance between teaching and research (Ewell, 2010). This kind of attention may give rise to increased productivity through related incentive schemes, but it may also lead to the reverse because academics may feel that they

are not trusted. Furthermore, quality evaluation also stimulates more active discussions and co-operation with respect to teaching and learning within academic units. This process may contribute to sharing experience and learning from each other and, at the same time, it may also result in the standardisation of academic work. On the whole, the impact of quality assessment on teaching and learning could be either positive or negative.

- ***Organisational re-identification:*** As already mentioned, as a result of the ambiguity of the purpose(s) of HEIs, quality assessment may not only be a process of examining *fitness for/of purpose* in universities, but may also be a tool to direct changes in HEIs' *purposes*. With the increase in knowledge of university practices, a university may rethink its mission and development purposes, and define a new organisational identity.

In summary, the impact of quality assessment may involve resource re-allocation, the professionalisation of quality management, teaching and learning, and organisational re-identification. The impacts on these dimensions are not discrete but inter-related, and they may occur on three structural levels of HEIs: institutions, basic units (faculties and departments), and individuals. The impact may occur before the quality assessment is carried out or after (Brennan & Shah, 2000).

However, on the whole, the impact of quality assessment on university change is not as great as expected. Harvey and Newton (2004) argue that most of the impact studies they reviewed reinforce the view that quality is about compliance and accountability, and contributes little to any effective transformation of the student learning experience. The three functions of quality evaluation indicated have been performed to different extents. Compared to the extrinsic functions - accountability and control - its intrinsic function, namely improvement, seems to be less realised. Quality assessment is more like a strategy with consensus and orthodoxy to show that "something is being done" under the pressure of accountability, rather than an effective way to facilitate the

reforms of the evaluated HEIs and improve their quality provision (Cartwright, 2007; Milliken & Colohan, 2004; Rowley, 1995; Findlow, 2008; Huisman & Currie, 2004; Hoecht, 2006; Shin, 2010; Pratasavitskaya & Stensaker, 2010; Harvey & Williams, 2010; Power, 1997, 2003; Westerheijden, Stensaker, & Rosa, 2007b).

Factors which determine the impact of quality assessment

The factors which determine the impact of quality assessment on the evaluated institutions have been explored by many authors based on empirical studies. Brennan and Shah (2000), and Huisman et al. (2007) concluded that the impact of evaluation can be understood as being a function of the characteristics of the evaluation systems and the universities that use them. The structure of the evaluation system, the concept of evaluation, the methodology used, the characteristics of the evaluation bodies, and the ways of using the evaluation reports all influence the impact of evaluation on universities. At the same time, the impact of evaluation also depends on the specific characteristics of the universities being assessed, as well as their initiatives and responses. In this regard, Hodson and Thomas (2003) argued that an impact analysis needs to be sensitive to the historical and changing relationship between state and institution, and to the managerial and academic culture of institutions. Rebora and Turri (2011) also indicate that "an accurate analysis of organisational aspects within universities and the meaning that organisational actors give to the use of evaluation" is very important (p. 534).

Thus, empirical studies show that the impact of quality evaluation schemes is firstly determined by the characteristics of the assessment schemes, i.e. "who evaluates what and how". Furthermore, the impact also depends on the national and institutional context of the evaluated institutions and their initiatives. Relatively speaking, the organisational features of universities have not been emphasised as much as the technical and methodological aspects in impact analysis of quality assessment, as indicated by Rebora and Turri (2011). In this regard, Stensaker (2008) suggests that the perspectives of the studies on the outcomes and impact of quality evaluation

depend on understanding how organisational change is to take place. He criticises the phenomenon that most of the current studies around the world focus on implementation: the belief behind them is that there is a well-understood and defined problem to be resolved; that it is easy to identify and agree the aims and objectives of policies to address the problem, and that change is a consequence of hierarchical control, enforcement, and technical support. This belief is regarded to be an important reason behind the failure of change interventions (Clegg & Walsh, 2004; Kondakci & Van den Broeck, 2009). Stensaker (2008) suggests applying a perspective of "translation" instead of "implementation". This perspective originates from an organisational theory that change is not perceived as being either top-down or bottom-up, but interactive, where dimensions such as organisational learning, actor and network interaction, and translation come to the fore. In this case, the context surrounding institutional behaviour is exposed, enabling an explanation of the rationale behind the given decisions and solutions rather than only decision-making *per se*. At the same time, how individuals working in, and studying at, a given institution, interact and relate to each other should be identified (Newton, 2000, 2002; Stensaker, 2008).

In summary, impact studies on quality assessment have explored the main dimensions of impacts, and the timing and levels at which they may occur. At the same time, many studies argue that quality assessment has not caused university change as much as expected. These empirical studies have found that the impact of quality assessment is related to the characteristics of the quality assessment scheme, the context of the evaluated institutions, and their initiatives. By and large, a few authors have mentioned these factors in the specific context of their empirical studies. However, there is still not much analysis of how external quality assessment schemes interact with the evaluated HEIs, and generate change there in general. The suggestions of Stensaker (2008) will be followed in the next section with a view to finding theoretical approaches to understanding the impact of quality assessment on university change.

2.3 Quality assessment and university change

2.3.1 External quality assessment causing university change: a theoretical perspective

There is substantial agreement that quality assessment is an effective technology for supporting change in HEIs (Kogan & Hanney, 2000; Daniel, 2004; Stensaker, 2006; Houston, 2010). In some countries, "quality assurance has proven to be the most potent change agents" (Kogan & Hanney, 2000, p. 240). As indicated by Daniel (2004, p. 36), "many changes that we might like to see will remain dead letters unless they are supported by a credible system of evaluation." The potential of quality assessment as an external force to influence the behaviour of universities is embodied in its functions, as summarised by Trow (1996). He indicates that quality assessment is claimed to sustain or raise the performance quality of institutions by forcing those involved to critically examine their own operations by means of self-assessment and by subjecting them to critical review from outside. Furthermore, quality assessment can be (and is) used as a regulatory device, through the kinds of reports it requires, and the explicit or implicit criteria the reporting institutions are required to meet. That is to say, both the improvement and control functions of quality assessment are linked to change. Change could be generated when the evaluated universities improve their performance, and when they meet the evaluation criteria.

This section will focus on exploring the ways in which external quality assessment affects the internal working of universities by referring to literature about the working processes and structures of higher education systems and the operating mechanism of quality assessment. Becher and Kogan (1992, p. 10) separate two components in the everyday life of the academic world which are not sharply distinguished in practice. The first of these is designated as the normative mode, which relates to the monitoring and maintenance of values, i.e. what people in the system perceive as being important. The second, the operational mode, refers to the business of conducting practical tasks at different levels within the system, i.e. what people actually do, or are institutionally

required to do (Becher & Kogan, 1992, p. 10). The normative and operational modes interact. In principle, the normative mode would be expected to exercise dominance over the operational mode, in that value preferences tend to be represented through actions, rather than actions defining value preferences. However, there are many instances in which internal operations arguably condition internal norms (Becher & Kogan, 1992, p. 16).

Each mode is further seen as having an internal and an external aspect. The internal norms and operations embody the features which stem directly from the nature and purpose of the enterprise of higher education as a whole, while the external norms and external operations denote those which impinge on the system from outside in some way (Becher & Kogan, 1992, p. 10). As shown in Figure 2.1, the outer framework, with both external norms and external operational requirements, impinges on the inner core of the system in a variety of ways.

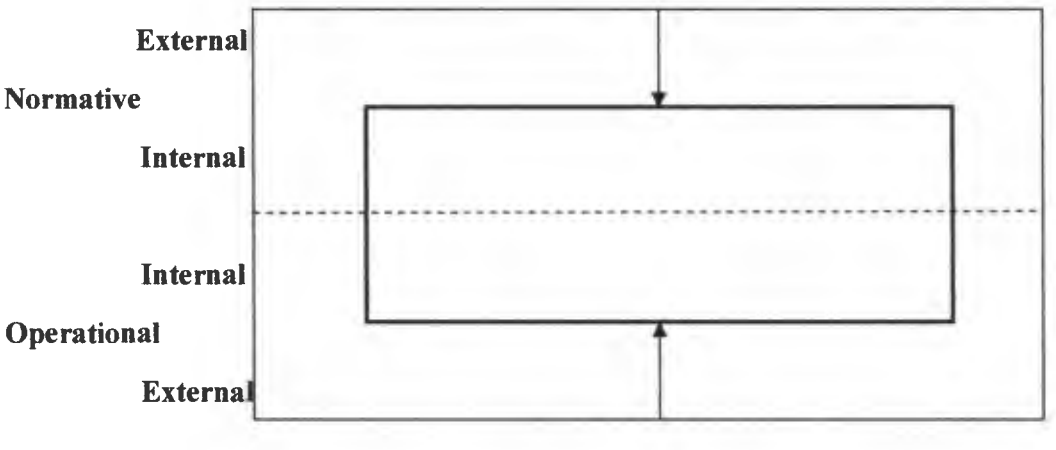

Figure 2.1 Model of higher education systems and its elements (adapted from Becher and Kogan, 1992, p. 11)

An external quality assessment can be regarded as being one of the ways in which external norms and operational requirements impinge on the internal components. It is defined as a means of judging the operational performances of HEIs against external criteria by external experts (Pearce, 1995; Green, 1994; Vroeijenstijn, 1995). Based on

empirical studies, Brennan and Shah (2000, p. 1) indicate that quality assessment is a way of linking the private micro-world of the institution with the public macro-world of society, economics, cultures and politics. In the process of quality assessment, a group of external evaluators examine the internal operational performance and make judgments against certain evaluation criteria. The evaluated institutions are supposed to match their behaviour to the evaluation criteria (Trow, 1996), and change is expected to emerge in the process. The adjustments may be made either before or after the quality assessment (Trow, 1996; Brennan & Shah, 2000; Bovens, 2007). The awareness that quality assessment is going to happen can induce change based on a critical examination of their own operations in a self-evaluation and the anticipation of the assessment criteria, to satisfy the expectations of the external quality assessment. After the site-visits of the evaluators, the institutions may initiate changes to improve themselves in the light of the information revealed by the quality assessment (which could show them the gap between their behaviour and the evaluation criteria), as well as suggestions from the external evaluators (Brennan & Shah, 2000).

Quality assessment is also a means of challenging and attempting to change existing educational values (Brennan & Shah, 2000, p. 14). As discussed above, quality is a relative concept, and different interest groups have their own ideas of what constitutes quality. The evaluation criteria of an external quality assessment reflect the certain values and norms of "good" higher education from outside. As Barnetson and Cutright (2000) argue, although performance indicators are objective on the surface, they are "conceptual technologies that shape what issues we think about and how we think about those issues by embedding normative assumptions into the selection and structure of those indicators" (p. 277). That is to say, external values and norms are introduced into the evaluated institution through the evaluation process. In this regard, Barnett (2003) takes "quality" as meaning "ideology". According to his illustration, it is ideology which has the power to shape the understanding of what constitutes good practice in higher education, and alternative visions for the institution are undermined

or cast aside in the process. The motives for changing the curriculum, hiring practices, or course delivery methods, are accepted without question under the cover of terms which are difficult to find fault with, like "quality" (Barnett, 2003).

However, the change which accompanies a quality assessment is not certain to equal improvement. Barnett (2003) argues that quality, as an ideology, has the potential to become either pernicious or virtuous, depending on the ways in which it is realised. However, as Brennan and Shah (2000) found, "in much of the literature on quality assessment, the question of impact is treated as one of the extent of presumed improvement or enhancement" (p. 13). They argue that this is one of the ideological problems of debates about quality in higher education. The notion of "improvement" is ideological, assuming values and criteria against which educational quality is to be judged as good. However, quality is a relative concept: what is "improvement" from one point of view may be "damage" from another. For example, some people believe that the use of advanced educational technology (such as multi-media assisted teaching) is beneficial to teaching effectiveness, while others hold an opposite view. Moreover, there is a failure to distinguish between organisational action and educational consequences, and intentions do not mean outcomes (Brennan & Shah, 2000, p. 13). Thus, it should not be assumed that the change generated by an external quality assessment is necessarily an improvement.

Thus, having referred to the literature about the operating mechanism of quality assessment and the working processes and structures of higher education systems, quality assessment can be regarded as being an external force. It can impinge on the internal life of universities and generate the adjustment of operations and/or the alteration of norms. Based on this understanding, change processes and possible outcomes will be explored in the next section.

2.3.2 Change processes and outcomes

Becher and Kogan (1992, p. 16) describe the process of university change based on the binary model of higher education systems (operational and normative modes). They believe that, as long as the normative and operational modes are in phase with each another, the whole system retains a dynamic equilibrium: if not in harmony, then at least in a state of balanced tension. However, when the two modes become significantly out of phase, some form of adjustment is necessary to restore the possibility of normal functioning. In other words, the process of change can be observed to involve a disequilibrium between normative and operational modes and their subsequent realignment within a new equilibrium. The most effective, because ultimately the most stable, change depends on the alignment between normative and operational modes, the one having interacted with the other to achieve a state of equilibrium (Becher & Kogan, 1992). In the context that an external quality assessment causes university change, the normative mode concerns what constitutes good practice of higher education, while the operational mode is how to achieve high quality, that is the approaches to good higher education. As previously described, universities are expected to adjust their actions (operational modes) to match the evaluation criteria; at the same time, the norms of good practice of higher education defined by the external quality assessment are expected to replace the existing ones in the evaluated institutions. According to Becher and Kogan (1992)'s model, change or no change depends on whether the external quality assessment can break the existing equilibrium, or correct the previous disequilibrium between the normative and operational modes in the evaluated institutions, and then create and maintain a new equilibrium.

Becher and Kogan's (1992) understanding of change can be regarded as the application of social-cognition models of organisational change in higher education. The social-cognition model is one of the ways to understand the nature of organisational change (Morgan, 1986; Scott, 1995; Weick, 1995; Kezar, 2001; Kezar

& Eckel, 2002). Change is regarded as being a reaction to cognitive dissonance. People in an organisation reach a point of cognitive dissonance at which values and actions (norms and operations) clash, or something seems outmoded, and they decide to change (Collins, 1998). Habits and organisational identity are examined within social-cognition models. Facilitating change is sometimes explored as a process of assisting people to let go of the habits (operational mode) and identity (normative mode) attached to past strategies (Morgan, 1986; Argyris, 1982; Levy & Merry, 1986). The social-cognition model is different from other models of organisational change, such as the evolutionary model which focuses on the impact of the external environment on organisational change, and the teleological model which concerns the roles of leaders and the internal environment (Kezar, 2001). The social-cognition model pays particular attention to organisational identity and values, which are believed to be important for HEIs (Kezar, 2001).

Argyris's single-and double-loop learning theory reflects the social-cognition perspective, and is a key concept in organisational learning and change. This theory describes the tension between normative and operational modes (values and actions), and the possible outcomes (Argyris, 1999). Single-loop learning refers to retaining the existing values and norms (the governing variables in the word of Argyris) and improving on current actions. It seems to be present when goals, values and frameworks are taken for granted, and the emphasis is on techniques and making them more efficient. It occurs to create a new equilibrium and/or to correct the existing disequilibrium by changing actions. In contrast, double-loop learning refers to a process which involves both the alteration of existing values and the shift of strategies. It involves critical reflection upon goals, beliefs, values, conceptual frameworks, and strategies. Argyris (1999) indicates that it may be difficult for individuals and organisations to accomplish double-loop learning, because it is hard to remove the existing value systems (governing variables). Single-and double-loop learning can be also regarded as reflecting the different degrees of change. The single-loop learning is adjustment, which only involves behavioural change; and the double-loop learning is

usually considered to be transformative change, with paradigmatic shift (Eckel & Kezar, 2003).

Besides single-and double-loop learning, Argyris (1999) indicates that, in some cases, the new norms and values are espoused but without the corresponding changes of actions and operations. In this case, people may state that they have initiated a change or believe in a change, but may not enact it. Some people may hold certain views, but they may not act on them. This can be explained by the theories of action, which typically include an espoused theory of action and a theory-in-use. The espoused theory of action is a theory of action to which individuals or a whole organisation gives allegiance, and which they communicate to others when they are requested to do so. However, the theory which actually governs their action is their theory-in-use, which may or may not be compatible with their espoused or publicly-stated theory. People may live with the incompatibility of two theories without even being aware of it. In this case, there is equilibrium between the theory-in-use and the practical operations in organisations. However, at the same time, they state that they espouse some other values and theories (Argyris, 1999).

Based on the single-and double-loop learning theory, the possible outcomes of an external quality assessment could be inferred. Firstly, universities may only adjust their strategies and techniques of achieving high quality (i.e. operational mode), with the aim of matching their operations to the external evaluation criteria, while the norms of "good" higher education they believe (i.e. normative mode) remain the same. This is defined as single-loop learning. Secondly, the change may not only involve the strategies and techniques of achieving high quality but also involve the understanding of what constitutes "good" higher education. When both normative and operational modes are transformed, double-loop learning will occur. In this case, people in the evaluated institutions not only act differently, but also think differently. That is to say, there might be two different degrees of changes: the ones with operational change only (single-loop learning), and the ones with both operational change and normative

transformation (double-loop learning). Thirdly, there is also a case where the normative mode defined by the external evaluation may be espoused by people within the university, but without a corresponding change of operations. Of course, there may be a fourth type of outcome, i.e. neither operational adjustment nor normative shift, in which case no change occurs. Table 2.2 depicts the possible outcomes caused by external quality assessment.

Table 2.2 The possible outcomes of external quality assessment

Normative mode / **Operational mode**	Change	Continuity
Change	Double-loop learning	Single-loop learning
Continuity	Accept the norms but not change the operations	Neither operations nor norms change

This research intends to examine whether the quality assessment scheme in China has pushed universities to change their ways of achieving high quality (operations) and brought new understandings of "good" higher education (norms) into these universities. Compared with behavioural change, it is more difficult to empirically examine the transformation of norms. On the one hand, Becher and Kogan (1992) think norms are represented through actions. The norms governing actions, which are defined as theory-in-use, could be inferred from the organisational actions as suggested by Argyris (1999). On the other hand, the espoused theory of action, i.e. the norms people give allegiance to, could be gained through inquiring the perspectives of organisational members. Whether they espouse the norms of "good" higher education defined by external quality assessment schemes will be explored. It is worth mentioning that the theory-in-use and the espoused theory of action might be incompatible, as indicated by Argyris (1999). Thus, the norms people espouse orally might be different from the ones inferred from their behaviours. Both sides of the norms will be considered in the empirical study of this research.

Empirical studies show that, whether or not an external quality assessment can

generate operational changes of institutions and/or bring a new understanding of "good" higher education, depends on the interaction between quality assessment schemes and the evaluated institutions. The forces of change in the interactive process will be analysed in the next section.

2.3.3 Forces of change

Two general different forces of change are noted as being external forces and internal forces within organisational change theories (Burnes, 1996). As discussed above, quality assessment is regarded as being an external force to cause university change. This means that change is a response to external circumstances, situational variables, and the environment faced by each organisation. In other words, change happens because the environment demands change for survival (Morgan, 1986). In the case of higher education, colleges and universities are regarded as being open systems, vulnerable to external environmental factors, such as accreditation and legislature, which are perceived to play a more direct role in higher education affairs. The resource dependency theory is often used to explain why organisations need to meet the demands of the external environment. This assumes that, in order to survive, organisations need a sufficient supply of resources, and since these resources often cannot be produced by the organisations themselves, they must interact with other organisations which control the required resources. The resource dependency theory concludes that an organisation will be more likely to follow the requirements of external forces when it depends on resources which come from them (Sporn, 1999).

As previously stated, there are certain kinds of links between the evaluation results and resource allocation among institutions. According to the resource dependency theory, the more rewards associated with good evaluation results, the more submissive responses from the evaluated institutions. This phenomenon has been recognised by Westerheijden (1990) in his studies on the impact of quality assessment. In reality, a direct impact of assessment on institutional income may be rare (Brennan

& Shah, 2000), and indirect forms of financial impact are through markets (students, employers, research funders), who may themselves be influenced by reputational gains and losses which can occur as a result of assessment (Brennan & Shah, 2000). For example, in the case of a state-run quality assessment, even if there is no financial reward from the state, when the evaluation results have strong implications for the university's academic standing and attractiveness to student applicants, the evaluated institutions may be also quite responsive to the external quality assessment.

Apart from the influence of the evaluation results on resource allocation among evaluated institutions and their reputations, the governing forces of the evaluation's owner also push the evaluated institutions to meet the requirements of an external quality assessment. Clark (1983) proposes a triangular model of state, market, and academic oligarchy coordinating higher education systems. A combination of different degrees of these three elements constitutes the coordinating forces of the higher education system in each country. The distance between the ownership of a quality assessment scheme and the current coordinating force of the higher education system is a factor which influences the responses of the HEIs involved. For example, in a case where the state is the dominating force in coordinating higher education, and the public budget is the main financial resource of the evaluated institution, if a quality evaluation scheme is dependent on the state, the institution would attach more importance to it. However, if its owner is far away from the state, the institution may give it less consideration. Thus, there is an external impetus from quality assessment schemes to university change, which is derived from the governing forces of the evaluation's owner and the influence of the evaluation results on the financial resources and reputations of institutions. In the case of state-run quality assessment, the power of both market and state in Clark's (1983) triangle are incorporated to intervene in the evaluated universities. The extent to which the evaluated universities will respond to external quality assessment is related to the characteristics of the quality assessment scheme, such as its owner and the consequences of its evaluation results; at the same time, it is also determined by the features of the evaluated

universities, such as how much their reputation and funding are vulnerable to external quality assessment, and how much they are governed by the state. That is to say, both the characteristics of a quality assessment scheme and the features of the evaluated universities (such as their existing financial resources, reputations, and the autonomy they enjoy) influence their responses to the external pressures from quality evaluation.

Furthermore, universities are not completely shaped by external pressures. The institutional status of universities must be noted when considering external forces causing university change. Olsen (2005) indicates that universities have an institutional status, which is "a relatively enduring collection of rules and organised practices, embedded in structures of meaning and resources" (Olsen, 2005, p. 5). They have long-standing mission; their internal values cannot be easily changed by the intrusion of external forces, and thus, they should be treated differently from business and industry enterprises, which are more directly affected by market demands. That is to say, even though researchers argue that external forces play a more direct role in higher education affairs, universities have their internal consistency and logic. They try to pursue their own maximum independence, being resilient to the preferences and expectations of external circumstances. In the process of adapting to the external environment, universities have "room to manoeuvre" (Kogan & Hanney, 2000; Reed, Meek, & Jones, 2002; Maassen & Stensaker, 2003; Stensaker, 2006). So, external determinism is not identified as being applicable within higher education (El-Khawas, 2000).

Studies on change have found that strategic planning which only focuses on external threats and challenges is mainly unsuccessful in higher education (Birnbaum, 2000; Chaffee, 1983; Keller, 1997); those which consider internal norms and values are more successful (Shin, 2010; Rowan, 2006). Thus, whether external circumstances can be translated and compared to internal norms is a very important factor; it influences the ways in which universities respond to external requirements (Kezar, 2001). At the same time, the initiatives of universities are also involved in the change

process. Sporn (1999) found that adaptation may be triggered by external demands, but they are defined internally as being either a crisis or an opportunity by the institutions. People in universities tend to interpret the external environment through internal mechanisms (Gioia & Thomas, 1996), and they may even re-construct the external requirements in the process (Kezar, 2001). In the case of external quality assessment causing university change, the initiatives of the evaluated institutions are also noted by empirical studies (Askling & Stensaker, 2002; Huisman & Currie, 2004). The requirements of external quality assessment systems have to be interpreted and given meaning by the organisational actors involved (Rebora & Turri, 2011; Newton, 2000, 2002), and in this process, universities "translate" external definitions of quality to fit their own needs (Stensaker, 2006).

Thus, facing external quality assessment, it is supposed that the evaluated institutions would not be completely subjected to the steering of the external forces. The compatibility between the requirements of the external quality assessment and the internal values and norms of the institution is a very important factor to determine whether or not universities will respond to the external requirements. When the external norms of what constitutes good higher education (which are embodied in the evaluation criteria of the quality assessment scheme) are compatible with the internal cultures of the evaluated institutions, they are more likely to meet these requirements. Furthermore, the evaluated institutions are able to define the role of external quality assessment schemes from their own perspectives. They make decisions as to whether or not they should respond to the external pressure based on a calculation of whether or not meeting its requirements would be beneficial to themselves. They may even re-construct the requirements of the external quality assessment scheme in their own way to maximise their own benefits.

In theory, external quality assessment can provide the impetus for university change. Both the governing forces of the evaluation's owner and the influence of the evaluation results on the financial resources and reputations of institutions push the

evaluated institutions to meet the demands of the external quality assessment. However, universities are not completely shaped by external pressures, so the internal environment of universities and their initiatives in creating change should also be noted.

2.4 Summary

This chapter has discussed quality assessment in higher education and its impact on university change by referring to both empirical and theoretical studies. Firstly, the context in which quality assessment emerges in higher education and the purposes it is intended to realise were described. The definitions of quality were examined from various perspectives, and the ways of operating a quality assessment in higher education were depicted. The main effects of quality assessment on the evaluated institutions were summarised, based on the impact studies of quality assessment. These discussions provided an important reference for the present study to understand the emergence of the QAUE in China, its operation, and its expected impact on the evaluated institutions.

In addition, the empirical studies found that the impact of quality assessment is determined by the design of quality assessment schemes and the characteristics of evaluated institutions. However, how they interact with each other and generate change was not analysed in depth or discussed at a theoretical level. So, in the second part of the chapter, a theoretical perspective was proposed to understand how a quality assessment affects the internal life of universities. The related theories about the working processes and structures of higher education, the operating mechanisms of quality assessment, and organisational change, were referred to. The ways in which quality assessment impinges on the internal life of the evaluated institutions were depicted, as well as the possible outcomes, which include the adjustment of operations and the alteration of norms within universities. The driving forces of change were also explored, which involve both the external impetus from a quality assessment and the

internal initiatives of the universities. However, how the external and internal forces interplay with each other and engender various outcomes has not been discussed yet, and this research will make an attempt to answer this question in the QAUE context.

The next chapter will move on to the Chinese context. The national context and organisational characteristics of HEIs will be described, and the design of the QAUE scheme will be outlined. Sufficient background information will be provided to analyse the interaction between the QAUE and the evaluated institutions in China.

CHAPTER THREE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sketches out the higher education system in China and its quality assessment schemes, which provide background information for the impact analysis of the QAUE. The chapter begins with a brief outline of the Chinese higher education system, its historical review and current state. The second part of the chapter focuses on higher education quality assessment schemes in China. The context in which they emerged is presented first; then their evolution and *status quo* are depicted. The *Quality Assessment of Undergraduate Education* (QAUE) scheme, the focus of this research, is discussed particularly in the third part. Its specific approaches to evaluation and its intended impact are revealed, and the previous impact studies on the QAUE scheme are reviewed.

3.2 Historical review and *status quo* of higher education in China

3.2.1 Historical review of higher education: before the 1980s

There was no institution in the Chinese tradition that could be called a university. Instead, the imperial examination system and the academies or *shuyuan* were key elements of ancient Chinese higher learning, which started from around 600 C.E. and 1000 C.E., respectively (Hayhoe, 1996, p. 10). Modern higher education in China was initiated a century ago, following the establishment of *Beiyang Gongxue* (Tianjin University) in 1895 and *Peking Imperial University* (Peking University) in 1898. Prior to 1949, higher education was slow to develop and small in scale; it basically followed the example of, and drew on the experience of, higher education in western countries especially in the UK and the USA (Yang, 2005). Up to the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, there were only 205 HEIs (including public, private and missionary institutions) and 117,000 registered students (China Education Yearbook Editors, 1981).

From 1952, the new Chinese government initiated the restructuring of the higher education system. All private and missionary HEIs were turned into public ones and a new higher education system, with highly centralised planning, was established. It was intended to serve the national economy, especially heavy industry. After the restructuring, there were a total of 182 HEIs, which were narrowly specialised according to manpower planning derived from the centrally planned economy. Except for 14 comprehensive universities, all the other 168 institutions were specialised colleges (Yang, 2000).[3] This adjustment was modelled on the former Soviet Union. "Not only was the system of institutions of higher learning, subjects, and specialities modelled on Soviet practice, but also the syllabus, teaching methods, text books, and even the institutional and discipline names" (Yang, 2000, p. 327). These institutions had developed for about a decade before the advent of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), which devastated the whole higher education system along with the loss of a generation of teachers and students. During those ten years, institutional administration was paralysed and classes suspended. Teaching and research was basically stopped (Chang, 1974).

3.2.2 Historical review of higher education: after the 1980s

Higher education was restored in 1977 after the Cultural Revolution. Within the stable political and economic environment that has existed since the 1980s, the Chinese higher education began its era of reforms and development. The large-scale and systemic reforms were guided by a series of government policies. For example, the *Decision on the Educational System Reform* was issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCCPC) in 1985. The *Guidelines for the Reform and Development of Education in China* was promulgated by the CCCPC and the State Council (the chief administrative authority of the PRC) together in 1993. The *Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China* was enacted in 1998. The reforms at

[3] There were 38 engineering institutes, 31 teachers colleges, 29 agricultural and forestry institutions, 29 medical and pharmacy institutions, 6 institutions of finance and economics, 4 institutions of politics and law, 8 foreign languages institutes, 15 institutions of art, 4 physical education institutions, 3 institutions for nationalities, and 1 meteorology institution (Yang, 2000).

this stage were modelled on western higher education systems, especially the American system. Reforms mainly involved the restructuring of the higher education system, the transformation of governance models, the adjustment of funding mechanisms, and the expansion of student enrolment.

Restructuring of higher education system

The higher education system as a result of the 1952 restructuring was completely public and highly specialised. The Chinese government re-adjusted it in the 1990s. First of all, the restriction on the development of private education was released from the 1990s, and thus a number of private HEIs (*minban*) have been established. However, governmental regulations, and the low prestige attached to them due to inferior teaching quality and high tuition fees, restrict their development (Wang & Liu, 2009, p. 162). So, there is still a great gap between the public and private universities. Secondly, as mentioned above, the Chinese higher education system resulting from the 1952 restructuring was dominated by overspecialised institutions. In this context, to develop comprehensive universities has become an important strategic goal. University mergers were launched on a large scale at the end of the 1990s (Wang & Liu, 2009, p. 203). Many comprehensive universities were established by merging mono-disciplinary universities/colleges and some specialised HEIs also became comprehensive through establishing new specialties (Yang, 2000; Mok, 2005).

Transformation of governance models

Chinese higher education was structured and operated under a rigid state-control model before the 1980s. The central government controlled almost all the substantive and procedural matters of universities. Universities had no autonomy at all. Influenced by the market-driven economic reform at the beginning of the 1980s, the Chinese government acknowledged that over-centralisation and stringent rules would kill the initiatives and enthusiasm of local educational institutions. Thus, it initiated the transfer of decision-making power from the central government to local governments and individual HEIs (CCPCC, 1985). Consequently, Chinese HEIs are governed and

funded by central and local governments, which is called two-tier governance (Yang, 2008; Wang & Liu, 2009, p. 76). Most of them are affiliated with local governments, including provincial governments and city governments. HEIs have also begun to enjoy a kind of autonomy and the governance model is shifting from a rigid state-control to a certain degree of state-supervising (Mok, 2002; Yang, 2000). Nonetheless, the state authority is still the dominant force in higher education coordination in China (Hu, 2003).

Adjustment of funding mechanisms

Along with the devolution of higher education from the central government to local governments and individual HEIs, there was a shift in financing HEIs from a completely state-funded system to a diversified one (Yang, 2008; Wang & Liu, 2009). The Chinese government has encouraged HEIs to obtain funding from diversified sources and universities have become less and less dependent on public grants. For example, the funding from the state was 88.5 billion Chinese Yuan, 42% of the total expenditure of higher education in 2005 (221.7 billion Chinese Yuan), compared with almost 100% before the 1980s (Wang & Liu, 2009, p. 111). Public funding is either from the central government or from local governments, depending upon the affiliation of HEIs. However, financial capacities of local governments vary from province to province, so there are considerable regional disparities in funding HEIs (Zhang & Peng, 2008; Zhang, 2008). The funding mechanism is formula-based, and its major allocation parameter is the number of students enrolled. Moreover, the state has established some incentive funding mechanisms for high-level institutions, as a supplement to the formula-based grants. For example, in order to further the enhancement of a group of elite HEIs, the Chinese government launched the 211 Project and the 985 Project with extra funding in the mid-1990s (Yang, 2008; Wang & Liu, 2009, pp. 20-25). The 211 Project was initiated in 1995 and intended to fund about 100 high-level HEIs and a number of key subjects to improve their quality of education, research and management (Wang & Liu, 2009, p. 20). The 985 Project began in 1998, and has sponsored 39 Chinese universities to build "world-class"

universities with advanced research outcomes and high international reputation (Wang & Liu, 2009, p. 24). Besides the state grants, tuition fees have become the main financial resources of HEIs, since the implementation of cost-sharing policy at the end of the 1990s. In addition, commercial loans and university-generated income (such as the income from university enterprises, commissioned training, research and consultancy, and donation) are important financial support for universities (Yang, 2008; Wang & Liu, 2009, pp. 108-109).

According to the new funding mechanisms, firstly, student numbers have become one of the most important factors for HEIs to obtain income, especially from state grants and tuition fees. The desire to get more revenue is likely to motivate HEIs to expand their student enrolment beyond their actual capacity (Wang & Liu, 2009, p. 121). Furthermore, the amount of state incentive grants for high-level and research-intensive institutions is quite large and attractive. This tends to stimulate HEIs to blindly imitate the elite institutions, paying more and more attention to research (Wang & Liu, 2009, p. 121; Zhang & Peng, 2008).

Expansion of student enrolment

The end of the 1990s witnessed a dramatic transition from elite to mass higher education in China, although the initial motivation for boosting enrolment was not directly related to education. Instead, in the context of the Asian financial crisis, an economist in the Asian Development Bank, Min Tang, suggested using student enrolment expansion together with a cost-sharing policy to expand domestic demand and stimulate economic growth (Zhang & Peng, 2008; Li & Lin, 2008). With this aim, the expanding enrolment policy was designed and implemented hastily, without necessary preparations, such as creation of new HEIs. Consequently, from 1998 to 2005, student enrolment in HEIs multiplied almost five times from 1.084 million to 5.045 million (MOE, 1998-2005). The gross enrolment ratio was 21.0% in 2005, which represented an enormous increase *vis a vis* the percentage of 9.8% in 1998, and only 1.2% in 1980 (China Education Yearbook Editors, 1981; MOE, 1998-2005).

However, during this period, the number of HEIs expanded only by about 75%, from 1,022 in 1998 to 1,792 in 2005 (Wang & Liu, 2009, p. 9; MOE, 1998-2005). As a result, the student population of most Chinese universities has been greatly enlarged (Pan, 2003; Wang & Zhao, 2009). From 1998 to 2005, the average number of students enrolled in universities and colleges increased almost threefold, from 4,418 to 13,514 in institutions providing degree education, and from 1,701 to 3,909 in institutions for diploma education (MOE, 1998-2005).

Lack of diversification of HEIs

The trend of higher education restructuring and expansion appears not to be accompanied by diversification of university mission and education provision (She & Liu, 2010). Almost all universities are desirous of imitating the top Chinese universities, such as Tsinghua University and Peking University and are trying to become research intensive and comprehensive universities (Mohrman, 2003). They focus on high-level research outcomes and advanced professors rather than quality of teaching or social services (Zhang & Peng, 2008). This trend has been strengthened by the methods of resource allocation in China. As mentioned before, driven by the incentive funding for high-level institutions from the state, lower-status HEIs also strive to pursue research productivity and deliver postgraduate education (Yang, 2005).

Moreover, there have been more and more similarities among the programmes provided by the Chinese HEIs (Zhang & Peng, 2008; She & Liu, 2010). In the context of a rapid expansion of student enrolment but without adequate funding, universities have preferred to establish either so-called "popular" programmes, which are welcomed by students or economical programmes, i.e. those which require little funding. For example, recently, the programmes in computer skills, law, economics, business and management have been extensively established (Wang & Zhao, 2009). Furthermore, the curriculum design and selection of teaching contents for a certain programme are also similar among institutions (Zhang & Peng, 2008). This cannot

satisfy the diverse social and economic requirements for the labour force. Thus, lack of programmes with distinctive characteristics has become a big problem of Chinese universities (Wang & Zhao, 2009). Clearly, if we look at prestige, Chinese higher education can be described as a pyramid. However, all institutions wish to climb up the pyramid, with similar educational programmes (She & Liu, 2010). Thus, the Chinese higher education system is regarded as lack of diversity.

3.2.3 *Status quo* of higher education in China

Over the thirty-year development, the structure of higher education has been gradually established in China, which is composed of regular and adult HEIs. The regular HEIs are the majority, which include four-year undergraduate programmes (*benke*) with bachelor's degrees and two- or three-year professional programmes (*zhuanke*) leading to diplomas. Some of the regular institutions with undergraduate programmes are also eligible to confer Master's and doctoral degrees. The adult sector includes two- and three-year diploma programmes of study. Students in the regular HEIs are normally full-time, while students in the adult sector are usually part-time.

As shown in Table 3.1 (on the next page), there were 2,263 accredited regular HEIs in China in 2008. Of these, 111 were governed and funded by the central government, 1,514 were affiliated to local governments, and the other 638 were private institutions. Among these 1,625 public institutions, 757 offered four-year undergraduate programmes; and the other colleges provided two- or three-year professional programmes or vocational education, leading to diplomas. Master's and doctoral degrees can be conferred by 479 of the 757 four-year institutions. The number of student enrolment was 6.077 million in 2008; about half of them were enrolled in undergraduate programmes and the other half were in professional programmes (MOE, 2008).

Table 3.1 Number of HEIs in China in 2008 (MOE, 2008)

<table>
<tr><td colspan="5">Regular HEIs (2263)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Owners</td><td colspan="3">Public HEIs (1625)</td><td rowspan="3">Private HEIs (638)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Affiliated to the central government (111)</td><td colspan="2">Affiliated to local governments (1514)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Types of higher education</td><td colspan="2">Degree education (757)</td><td colspan="2">Diploma education (868)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Postgraduate education (479)</td><td>Others (278)</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
</table>

In addition, the MOE puts these institutions into 12 categories according to their main subjects: comprehensive universities, natural sciences & technology institutions, teacher education institutions, agricultural institutions, forestry institutions, finance & economics institutions, medicine & pharmaceutical institutions, language & literature institutions, political science & law institutions, physical culture institutions, art institutions, and ethnic nationality institutions (MOE, 2008).

3.3 Higher education quality assessment in China

3.3.1 Emergence of higher education quality assessment in China

In common with many other countries, the emergence of higher education quality assessment in China was a result of several convergent forces. These forces include the "quality gap" (Barnett, 1992), the changing relationship between the state and HEIs, the requirements for providing accountability and stimulating trust, internationalisation and globalisation. They involve both the reforms and developments of the higher education system *per se* and the change of external environments.

A quality gap

As a result of the expansion of student enrolment, the total number of undergraduate admissions in China dramatically multiplied four-fold from 1998 to 2004 and is still increasing. This was mainly completed through the significant expansion of existing

public four-year institutions (Pan, 2003; Wang & Zhao, 2009). As mentioned previously, the expansion of enrolment was initiated without necessary preparation by universities, both in terms of "hardware" and "software". On the one hand, although funds for higher education increased significantly, they grew at a slower pace than the participation rate. Consequently, both the unit cost per higher education student and the teacher-student ratio have fallen steadily (MOE, 1998-2005; Wang & Liu, 2009). Universities have been required to do more with not sufficient resources. The infrastructure and teaching facilities are not able to satisfy the demands of students; teachers do not have sufficient time to commit to teaching because of the increased workload (Wang & Zhao, 2009). On the other hand, the administrative regulations and skills have not been updated to accommodate the expansion and diversification of the student body (Wang & Zhao, 2009). This had led to low-efficiency and even disorganisation of management in HEIs, which goes against the aims of educational quality assurance and improvement.

Moreover, in the context of global competition and the knowledge economy, the research capabilities of universities have been given more and more attention. This trend has been strengthened by the rewards for research-productive institutions from the state funding (Li & Cao, 2008). The emphasis on research has been extended from the institutional level to the individual (teacher) level. The newly established faculty assessment systems in Chinese universities adopted the international convention of "publishing or perishing" and used the number of papers published annually as the main indicator to decide the salaries and professional promotion of academics (Ma, 2008). Compared with research, teaching effectiveness is not emphasised enough. With the aim of conducting more research, professors then preferred to stay in laboratories or supervise graduate students rather than teaching undergraduate courses (Zhang, 2002; Yu, Gong, Zhang, & Qu, 2008). In summary, the expansion of student enrolment, the reduction of unit costs, the out-of-date management and administration, as well as the overemphasis on research contributed to a quality gap that was

becoming broader and harder to close. Quality assessment emerged then as a way to bridge the gap, or at least to diminish the size of the gap (Barnett, 1992).

Changing relationship between the state and higher education

As indicated previously, the Chinese government has transferred the decision-making power of higher education to local governments and individual institutions since the 1980s. A two-tier governance model has been formed. HEIs have enjoyed more autonomy than before (Mok, 2002; Yang, 2000). The state had shifted its role from education controller to that of the architect of the educational system and its quality assurer. Quality assessment thus emerged in exchange for autonomy, to monitor HEIs from a distance (Neave & Van Vught, 1994).

Requirements for providing accountability and stimulating trust

The graduate employment model in China has been changed since the mid-1990s. It used to be a tightly government-controlled job-assignment system (Yang, 2008), but students need to find jobs in the labour market by themselves now. They no long enjoy the privilege of being assigned decent jobs (Fladrich, 2006). Driven by the expansion of enrolment, competition in the labour market has grown and unemployment among graduates has risen (Wang & Zhao, 2009). The employment rate of graduates decreased steadily from 90% in 2001 to 73% in 2003 (Hu, 2009). In the meantime, the cost-sharing policy of charging tuition fees was initiated in China from 1997. Undergraduate students began to pay tuition fees, almost equal to 25% of unit costs, and this amount keeps increasing (Liu & Chen, 2003; Wang & Liu, 2009, p. 108). Under the circumstances, the value and quality of university education began to be questioned: was it worth paying such high tuition fees? Moreover, negative reports in mass media about universities and their students have become common in past years in China. The low-efficiency and even disorganisation of management of HEIs, academic corruption especially plagiarism, and students' behaviour of violating ethics often make the headlines in mass media. An investigation into university and college students' opinions about these reports shows that 61% students think that the current

reports in mass media have denigrated university students (Chen, 2006). These reports had inevitably led to the erosion of public trust in quality of higher education (Liu, 2006). A quality assessment system can thus be viewed as being a stimulus of trust, to assure society that its higher education system is high-quality and cost-effective (Trow, 1996).

Furthermore, calls for higher education quality assessment were also reinforced by the general requirement for accountability of public funding. Public sector reforms were launched at the end of the 1990s in China to provide high-quality services and retrench their expenses. The Hu-Wen New Deal was initiated from 2002 to build a political accountability system in China (Li, 2003). As a consequence, there were growing concerns about the quality of HEIs' "service" in relation to the enormous public costs. Especially, due to the boosting of enrolment, the percentage of higher education expenditure in relation to total educational expenditure has increased significantly (Pan, 2006). The inequality of education resource allocation between basic education and higher education evoked many complaints from primary and secondary schools (Liu, 2004). In this context, quality assessment is regarded as being an instrument by which higher education can be made accountable to society for the standards achieved and for the use of public funds, a part of which is seen as being "snatched" from basic education.

Internationalisation and globalisation

In the context of internationalisation, international flows of students and scholars are unprecedented in the history of China. Co-operative programmes with foreign institutions and other forms of communication have also flourished (Wang & Liu, 2009, pp. 26-31). Thus, it is necessary to enhance the transparency and comparability of educational quality for international communication and co-operation. Quality assessment is regarded as being a way to promote this transparency and comparability (Turnbull, Burton, & Mullins, 2008). At the same time, the emergence of quality assessment systems in China was also facilitated by policy borrowing in the context

of globalisation, as indicated by the Director of the HEEC, Fengtai Liu (HEEC, 2007).

In summary, higher education quality assessment systems emerged in China to bridge the quality gap, improving the performance of HEIs. In the context of the changing relationship between the state and HEIs, they are used to ensure that institutions will behave as the government wants them to behave. They also undertake the functions of providing accountability to the public, with the aim of strengthening the trust in them and their legitimacy. Their emergence was also pushed by the trend of globalisation and internationalisation. Under these circumstances, higher education quality assessment has emerged and evolved gradually in China. This will be discussed in the next section.

3.3.2 Evolution of higher education quality assessment schemes in China

Beginning with the enactment of the *Decision on the Educational System Reform* in 1985, external quality assessment systems emerged as a distinct arena in Chinese higher education. This *Decision* required the educational administrative agencies to evaluate quality of HEIs periodically (CCCPC, 1985). As a result, the former State Education Commission (now the Ministry of Education) initiated pilot quality assessment of higher engineering education in 1985, which had been implemented in 87 universities by the end of 1990. On the basis of the five-year experiments, the first official regulation for higher education quality assessment was enacted in 1990, entitled *Draft Regulation of Higher Education Institutions Assessment*. It prescribes the objectives and functions of quality assessment, the evaluation agencies, procedures and approaches (State Education Commission, 1990). Since then, quality assessment has been institutionalised. The *Guidelines for the Reform and Development of Education in China* was issued in 1993, and it reaffirmed "performance indicators of all kinds of education quality assessment should be

established; and quality assessment should become the routine work of educational administrative and supervisory organisations" (CCCPC & State Council, 1993, p. 7). In particular, the *Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China* specifies that "education quality of HEIs should be subject to the supervision and evaluation by the departments of educational administration" in its Article 44 (CCCPC, 1998). This legislated for higher education quality assessment in China.

Accompanying the institutional evolution, three forms of quality assessment, *quality accreditation, excellence assessment* and *random assessment*, were put into practice in China. They focused on different statuses of HEIs: *quality accreditation* was delivered for newly-built institutions; *excellence assessment* for the universities with high-level teaching quality and a relatively long tradition of undergraduate education; and *random assessment* for institutions located between the two categories. From 1994 to 2001, 221 HEIs were evaluated under these three programmes: 179 quality accreditations, 26 excellence assessments and 16 random assessments. The MOE combined the three quality assessment schemes together and produced a new project in 2002, the *Quality Assessment of Undergraduate Education* (QAUE). According to this project, all HEIs providing undergraduate education should be compulsorily evaluated within a period of five years on a rolling basis. The MOE established a new organisation, the *Higher Education Evaluation Centre* (HEEC), to conduct this evaluation (HEEC, 2010a). The first round of reviews was finished in mid-2008 and 589 HEIs were evaluated (HEEC, 2010b).

Besides the HEEC which undertakes the evaluation of undergraduate programmes, there is another governmental quality assessment agency that focuses on postgraduate education, namely, the *China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Centre* (CADGEDC). It is engaged in the accreditation of postgraduate degree-granting units, the approval of national key subjects, as well as the excellence evaluation of master's and doctoral dissertations. Furthermore, the CADGEDC initiated a subject evaluation programme in 2002. With universities' voluntary

participations, this programme reviews the quality of subjects with postgraduate education and publishes the evaluation results in the form of league tables (CADGEDC, 2009). In addition, the audit of vocational and professional education and private institutions is conducted by the provincial accreditation committees under the evaluation projects devised by the MOE. The HEEC reserves the right to inspect the review processes of local governments.

Non-governmental organisations have also been engaged in higher education quality assessment in China since the 1990s, such as the *Shanghai Agency for Education Evaluation* and the *Jiangsu Agency for Education Evaluation.* They are qualified to undertake higher education quality assessment and accreditation with the delegation from the governments or the institutions themselves. However, almost all of the evaluation work has now been taken by the governmental agencies. There are few opportunities left for these non-governmental accreditation bodies to be delegated to assess HEIs alone or to participate in any official evaluation schemes (Li, 2004).

To sum up, developments in China over a quarter of a century have resulted in an array of quality assessment schemes for higher education which are operated by governmental and non-governmental evaluation organisations. The next section will focus on one of the most important governmental quality assessment schemes: *the Quality Assessment of Undergraduate Education* (QAUE).

3.4 *Quality Assessment of Undergraduate Education* (QAUE)

3.4.1 Approaches of the QAUE to quality assessment

This section describes the specific approaches to operating the QAUE in China, i.e. who evaluates what and how. These involve its ownership and evaluators, evaluation procedures and methods, evaluation focuses and criteria, evaluation results and their links with resource allocation.

Ownership and evaluators

The QAUE programme was designed by the MOE and implemented by one of its departments, the *Higher Education Evaluation Centre* (HEEC). The evaluators were scholars in various subjects with high academic reputation or management experience. These scholars and managers were firstly nominated by their universities, and ultimately appointed by the MOE as QAUE evaluators. The HEEC trained them and organised a panel for each review assignment (HEEC, 2007).

Evaluation procedures and methods

The evaluation procedures were standardised, including self-evaluation, site visits and follow-up reforms. The HEEC identified the date that an institution was going to be evaluated and arranged the panel, which was composed of 9 to 13 evaluators. Then, the university started its self-evaluation, which lasted about 1-3 years. Self-evaluation reports were prepared using a fixed format provided by the HEEC, and submitted to the external evaluators. The report covered basic information about the university, such as a brief introduction to university faculties and departments, and curriculum descriptions. In addition, the students' learning outcomes, such as dissertations and examination papers were also required to be presented to the evaluators for a random inspection. The site visit of the expert committee lasted approximately one week (4-5 working days), involving a tour of the campus, access to university documents, in-class inspection, and interviews with university leaders, teachers, and students. Teaching programmes of each department were reviewed. The content of the self-evaluation report, together with the information assembled during the on-site visit, allowed the panel to produce a review report. This report usually consisted of a judgment on the overall teaching quality of the institution, based on a grade scale - *excellent, good, qualified* or *unqualified*, and recommendations for it. HEIs must execute reforms following these recommendations. They were required to present reforming projects to the MOE and to report the achievement after one-year reforms. The MOE kept the right to examine whether the reforms have been successfully implemented or not, which it did randomly. At the end, the MOE published the

evaluation results - excellent, good, qualified or unqualified – in mass media (HEEC, 2007).

Evaluation focuses and criteria

The evaluation criteria set out by the MOE comprised eight major indicators, sub-divided into 19 sub-indicators (Table 3.2). It covered the guiding principles on university operation, teaching staff, teaching conditions and the utilisation of teaching facilities, subjects and teaching reforms, teaching management, academic atmosphere, students' learning outcomes, and the special features of universities. As a supplement to these indicators, there was a set of quantitative qualification standards of university running in the QAUE scheme, focusing on the resource commitment to undergraduate education, such as student/teacher ratios, numbers of books per student.

Table 3.2 Evaluation criteria of the QAUE (translated from MOE, 2004)

Number	Indicators	Sub-indicators[4]	Main observation points	Weight
1	Guiding principles on university operation	Mission of universities	✧ Universities' mission and development purposes	1.0
		Rationale of university running	✧ Thoughts and concepts of education	0.5
			✧ Central role of teaching	0.5
2	Teaching staff	**Numbers and qualifications of teaching staff**	✧ Student-teacher ratios	0.3
			✧ Components of teaching staff and the developing trends	0.4
			✧ Percentage of full-time teaching staff with master's and doctoral degrees	0.3
		Principal lecturers	✧ Qualifications of principal lecturers	0.3
			✧ Courses taught by professors and associate professors	0.3
			✧ Teaching effectiveness	0.4

[4] The 11 sub-indicators marked as bold are key indicators.

3	Teaching conditions and the utilisation of teaching facilities	**Teaching facilities**	✧ School buildings	0.2
			✧ Laboratories and the arrangement of work-based learning	0.2
			✧ Libraries	0.2
			✧ Intranet	0.2
			✧ Stadium and sports facilities	0.2
		Teaching expenditure	✧ Percentage of the *four kinds of funding*[5] in tuition fees	0.6
			✧ Growing trends of the *four kinds funding* per student	0.4
4	Subjects and teaching	**Subject structure**	✧ Subject structure and layout	0.5
			✧ Students' training plans	0.5
		Curriculum design	✧ Teaching contents and curriculum reform	0.3
			✧ Text book production and selection	0.3
			✧ Reforms of teaching methods and aids	0.3
			✧ Bilingual teaching	0.1
		Practical training	✧ Amount of practical courses	0.4
			✧ Contents and structure of practical training	0.3
			✧ Comprehensive experiments and students' self-designed experiments	0.2
			✧ Laboratory accessibility for undergraduate students	0.1
5	Teaching management	Management team	✧ Components of management teams and their administrative skills	0.6
			✧ Outcomes of research and practices in terms of teaching management	0.4
		Internal quality assurance schemes	✧ Establishment and implementation of administrative regulations in terms of teaching	0.3
			✧ Quality standards for the main procedures of teaching	0.3
			✧ Teaching quality monitoring	0.4

[5] *Four kinds of funding* includes the fees of operating undergraduate teaching, travel expenses for teaching purposes, sports maintenance fees and teaching equipment maintenance fees.

6	Academic atmosphere	Professional ethics of teachers and their commitment to teaching	✧ Professional ethics of teachers and their commitment to teaching	1.0
		Students' commitment to learning	✧ Compliance of students with university regulations ✧ Strategies for constructing a learning culture and motivating students' commitment to learning, and their effects ✧ Extracurricular activities in science, technology and culture	0.3 0.3 0.4
7	Learning outcomes	**Knowledge and skills of students**	✧ Students' basic theories and skills ✧ Students' innovative spirits and practical abilities	0.7 0.3
		Quality of graduation projects and dissertations	✧ Nature, difficulty, and significance of students' research topics, and the training for students to complete projects ✧ Quality of students' theses and graduation projects	0.5 0.5
		Morality of students	✧ Students' ideological and moral quality, and students' cultural and psychological quality	1.0
		Physical education	✧ Physical education	1.0
		University reputation	✧ Student recruitment ✧ Social reputation	0.6 0.4
		Student employment	✧ Employment situation	1.0
8	Special features	Special features mean the unique characteristics which are gradually formed through the long-standing university operation, exclusive to a certain institution and superior to other institutions. Special features should contribute significantly to the process of educating students and the improvement of teaching quality. Special features should be stable and have strong social influence. Special features may involve a variety of aspects: the strategies and rationale of university running, advanced teaching management regulations and operational mechanisms, student training modes, and the characteristics of students, curricula, teaching methods and solutions to some key problems in teaching reforms, and the like.		

Evaluation results and their links with resource allocation

A total of 589 HEIs were evaluated in the first round of assessment. The numbers of *excellent, good, qualified* and *unqualified* institutions were respectively 424, 144, 21, and 0 (Table 3.3) (HEEC, 2010b). This means that 96.4% of the HEIs assessed were *excellent* or *good*, while none were considered *unqualified*. Whereas funding decisions are not public knowledge in China, the former Minister of Education, Zhou Ji said that the link between the assessment results of the QAUE and funding decisions were to be established (Zhou, 2004). It is recognised that the evaluation results not only impacted on universities' public funds but also had implications for universities' quota for student recruitment (which is planned by the government) and the authorisation of master's and doctoral programmes, which are quite significant for the reputation and development of HEIs (HEEC, 2007; Wang & Liu, 2009, p. 268).

Table 3.3 Evaluation results of the QAUE from 2003 to 2008

Results / Year	*Excellent*	*Good*	*Qualified*	*Unqualified*	Evaluated institutions
2003	20 (47.6%)	19 (45.2%)	3 (7.1%)	0	42
2004	30 (55.6%)	19 (35.2%)	5 (9.3%)	0	54
2005	43 (57.3%)	28 (37.3%)	4 (5.3%)	0	75
2006	100 (75.2%)	24 (18.0%)	9 (6.8%)	0	133
2007	160 (80.8%)	38 (19.2%)	0	0	198
2008	71 (81.6%)	16 (18.4%)	0	0	87
Sum total	**424 (72.0%)**	**144 (24.4%)**	**21 (3.6%)**	**0**	**589**

3.4.2 Intended impact of the QAUE

In this section, the intended impact of the QAUE on the evaluated institutions is explored from three perspectives. Firstly, the functions of the QAUE are inferred from the context in which it emerged in China. Secondly, the statement of policy objectives in the QAUE discourse *per se* is an important reference. Thirdly, according to the aspects of being evaluated by the QAUE and the evaluation criteria it defined, the intended impact will be depicted specifically.

Firstly, as mentioned previously, quality assessment schemes emerged in China with the aim of improving the performances of HEIs, providing accountability for public funding and the standards achieved, and ensuring that institutions will behave as the government wants them to behave. These schemes were supposed to undertake all the three functions of higher education accountability schemes summarised by Trow (1996): improving quality, enhancing legitimacy and working as a regulatory device.

Secondly, the specific objectives of the QAUE are articulated in the *Project of Quality Assessment of Undergraduate Education,* as follows.

> "On the basis of the *Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China*, this quality assessment policy is initiated *to stimulate educational reforms and improvement and enhance educational administration; the assessment and educational improvement should be combined, whilst improvement should be stressed*[6]. The quality assessment scheme is conducted as a way to further strengthen the macro-level governance and guidance of the state over teaching in HEIs, urge the educational administration departments of various levels to support teaching in HEIs, and prompt universities to implement the state's educational policies actively. The quality assessment scheme intends to push universities, following the rules of education, to further specify their guiding principles on university operation, improve their teaching facilities, ameliorate their university infrastructure, enhance their teaching management, stimulate teaching reforms, and improve their education quality and efficiency" (translated from MOE, 2004, p. 10).

The policy discourse suggests that the QAUE intended to push the evaluated institutions to improve education quality by means of specifying their guiding principles on university operation, improving teaching facilities and university

[6] Italic type, as shown in the original document, indicates emphasis.

infrastructure, strengthening teaching management and facilitating teaching reforms. From the perspective of the state, it intended to reinforce the governance over higher education and push the evaluated institutions to do what the state wants them to do.

Thirdly, the intended impact of quality assessment cannot be mapped without considering the things being assessed by the scheme and the evaluation criteria it defined. The evaluation focuses and criteria of the QAUE are illustrated below, which refer to the explanations made by the vice-director of the committee of evaluators, Professor Jincai, Li (Li, 2006).

1. Guiding principles on university operation

1.1 Mission of universities: This indicator examines whether the mission that universities have defined are unambiguous and reasonable. The mission mainly involves status (elite or not), orientation (teaching intensive or research intensive), function (comprehensive or specialised), the knowledge and competence they expect students to acquire, and the social community that they intend to serve. According to the evaluation criterion of this indicator, universities should have specific mission statement. The mission they have identified is supposed to be clear-cut and can meet the social and economic requirements. It is also expected to be realistic, closely conforming to their tradition and existing conditions rather than blindly imitating others.

1.2 Rationale of university operation: This indicator focuses on the rationale of university running. Firstly, it examines whether or not the educational thoughts and concepts adopted by university leaders are reasonable and can meet the requirements of students and external environments. It deems that the thoughts and concepts of education should be adapted to the diversified body of students and the changing social and economic requirements. In particular, the labour market expects universities to develop students' creative spirits and practical abilities in the context of the knowledge economy. Secondly, this indicator is concerned about the importance

attached to the teaching task of universities. It examines the guiding principles and development strategies of the evaluated institutions to see whether or not teaching has been regarded as being the most important task of universities; it also examine whether or not teaching has been given priority in terms of internal funding allocation.

2. Teaching staff

2.1 Numbers and qualifications of teaching staff: This indicator examines whether or not the number of teaching staff in universities is sufficient by reviewing the student-teacher ratios. It also reviews their professional titles and academic qualifications to see whether they are qualified or not.

2.2 Principal lecturers: This indicator focuses on the allocation of senior academic staff for undergraduate courses. It measures the qualifications of the principal lecturers of undergraduate courses and their teaching performances. It examines the proportions of undergraduate courses taught by senior academics (professors and associate professors).

3. Teaching conditions and the utilisation of teaching facilities

3.1 Teaching facilities: This indicator examines whether or not the essential teaching facilities, such as school buildings, laboratories, libraries, computing facilities, stadium and sports facilities, are available in universities, and whether or not they have been fully used, especially for undergraduate education, by measuring their utilisation ratios.

3.2 Teaching expenditure: This indicator focuses on the funding of undergraduate education. The evaluation criterion specifies the standards of teaching expenditure: 20% of the tuition fees is used for the *four kinds of funding,* and the funding should keep growing.

4. Subjects and teaching reforms

4.1 Subject structure: Firstly, this indicator reviews the holistic structure and layout of undergraduate programmes established in universities. It examines whether or not these programmes are compatible with the mission of universities, the social and economic requirements, educational principles, and the existing conditions of universities. In particular, it expects to see that universities have their "brand programmes", i.e. the programmes with advantages that are distinct from others. Secondly, it also reviews students' training plans to see whether or not they have been designed to fulfil the expected purposes of educating students that the university has defined itself. It measures whether or not these training plans are underpinned by advanced educational thinking and concepts and are following the current trend of teaching reforms in China (i.e. developing students' general competences, creative spirits and practical abilities); and whether or not these plans have been effectively implemented.

4.2 Curriculum design: This indicator focuses on teaching contents and methods. Firstly, it reviews the curriculum design and reforms to see whether or not they have been designed to realise the learning outcomes of students that the university has defined. Secondly, it reviews the selection and production of text books and expects to see that universities have established systematic text book review and selection mechanisms, and have selected high-quality and newly-published text books. The top-status universities are also expected to write and publish their own text books. Thirdly, it examines the reforms of teaching methods and teaching aids. The evaluation criterion prefers student-centred teaching approaches and inquiry-based learning. It encourages students to learn through group discussion, and completing research assignments by either team or independent work, in order to develop their creative spirits and practical abilities. It also prefers teachers to use advanced educational technology and teaching aids, especially the multi-media assisted instruction. Fourthly, it reviews the bilingual courses. According to the evaluation criterion, there should be an appropriate amount of high quality bilingual courses,

with the aim of developing the international communication skills of students.

4.3 Practical training: This indicator focuses on the practical training provided by universities to develop students' creative and practical abilities, including the practical training courses and the academic courses with practical elements. It examines whether or not the contents of these courses have been properly designed, and the learning time allocated for them is sufficient. It also measures the percentage of advanced practical courses (such as comprehensive experiments and experiments designed by the students themselves) in the whole curriculum system. The laboratory accessibility for undergraduate students is also reviewed.

5. Teaching management

5.1 Management team: This indicator focuses on components of the management team and their administrative skills. The management team involves the leaders and administrative staff who are engaged in teaching affairs at both institutional and faculty/department levels. This indicator reviews their qualifications and experience, and their administrative approaches and efficiency. It also reviews their research outcomes in terms of higher education management and administration.

5.2 Internal quality assurance schemes: This indicator examines whether or not universities have established extensive administrative rules and regulations in terms of teaching and learning and have implemented them strictly. According to the evaluation criteria, university management should be rigorous and consider the needs of individuals. It also examines whether universities have set up comprehensive quality standards for the major procedures of teaching and whether these quality standards match their existing academic competences. Moreover, it is concerned about whether universities have established effective internal quality monitoring systems to collect quality information and have used this information to give feedback and make adjustments. Quality monitoring of students' graduation projects and dissertations is emphasised in particular.

6. Academic atmosphere

6.1 Professional ethics of teachers and their commitment to teaching: This indicator examines the professional ethics of teachers for both teaching and doing research. It is especially against academic corruption such as plagiarism. It also reviews teachers' commitment to teaching and examines whether they have dealt with their various duties (teaching, research and other affairs) properly.

6.2 Students' commitment to learning: This indicator assesses students' commitment to study. It reviews students' compliance with school regulations, and particularly fights against their cheating behaviour in examinations. It examines universities' strategies for constructing a good learning culture and motivating students' commitment to learning, as well as the outcomes of these strategies. It also examines whether there are rich extracurricular activities in science, technology and culture in universities to broaden students' horizons, enrich their knowledge and improve their abilities.

7. Learning outcomes

7.1 Knowledge and skills of students: This indicator assesses the basic theories and skills that students have mastered as well as their innovative spirit and practical abilities.

7.2 Quality of graduation projects and dissertations: This indicator assesses the quality of graduation projects and dissertations, including the essence, difficulty and significance of research topics. It also reviews the training that universities have provided for students to complete their projects. It also examines the quality of these theses and projects *per se*.

7.3 Morality of students: This indicator examines students' ideological and moral quality as well as their cultural and psychological quality.

7.4 Physical education: This indicator assesses students' physical abilities, and the physical training provided by universities.

7.5 University reputation: This indicator assesses the reputation of universities. It refers to the quality of the students that they have recruited, which is measured by their scores obtained in the national higher education entrance examination. It assesses the social reputation of universities as well.

7.6 Student employment: This indicator assesses the employment ratios of graduates and examines the strategies that universities have adopted to facilitate student employment.

8. Special features

This indicator reviews the special features of universities, which mean the unique features formed on the ground of the long-standing development of universities. The features should be exclusive to a certain institution and superior to other institutions. They could contribute to the process of educating students and the improvement of teaching quality significantly. They should be stable and can be acknowledged by the society. They maybe in a variety of aspects, such as the strategies for university running, advanced quality management mechanisms, student training modes, curriculum design, and teaching methods.

Based on the elements being evaluated by the QAUE and the evaluation criteria it defined, the intended impact of the quality assessment scheme on the evaluated institutions can be specifically depicted. Firstly, as indicated in the policy discourse, it intended to push universities to increase resource commitment to undergraduate education, which included improving their infrastructure, teaching facilities and teaching staff, and increasing the teaching expenditure. It defined the standards for infrastructure and teaching facilities (indicator 3.1), teacher/student ratios and teaching staff's qualifications (indicator 2.1), and teaching expenditure (indicator 3.2).

Supposing that the evaluated institutions were going to match their performances to the criteria defined by the QAUE, their resource commitment to undergraduate education would grow. This aims to bridge the quality gap caused by the expanding student enrolment and the diminishing unit costs.

Secondly, as described in the policy discourse, the QAUE intended to push universities to enhance their management and administration in order to adapt to the growth and diversification of their student bodies. According to the evaluation criteria, the university management should be stringent and consider the needs of individuals (indicator 5.1), and universities should have established internal quality monitoring and assurance mechanisms (indicator 5.2). This seems to be a response to the external criticisms on the low-efficiency and even disorganisation of university administration. More systematic administration is expected to help to improve educational quality.

Thirdly, the QAUE was concerned about both the processes and outcomes of teaching and learning with the aim of responding to more and more criticisms on the decline of educational quality. According to the evaluation criteria, firstly, it was necessary for universities to specify their purposes with respect to the knowledge and competence that they expected students to acquire (indicator 1.1); and universities should design training plans and training modes to match the purposes that they had defined (indicator 4.1). Secondly, the QAUE encouraged universities to adjust teaching contents through curriculum development and reforms and text book production and selection. It also expected universities to reform teaching methods (from teacher-centred to student-centred) and increase the use of teaching aids (indicator 4.2). Thirdly, the QAUE examined the commitment of teachers and students to teaching and learning (indicators 6.1 and 6.2). It also assessed the learning outcomes of students, such as students' basic theories and skills (indicator 7.1), creative and practical abilities (indicator 7.1), moral and physical qualities (indicators 7.3 and 7.4). The QAUE was particularly concerned about the development of students' creative and practical abilities, when assessing the purposes of educating students that

universities had defined (the knowledge and competences they expected to deliver to students), the educational concepts (indicators 1.1 and 1.2), the design of training plans and modes (indicator 4.1), and the use of teaching methods (indicator 4.2). At the same time, in order to facilitate the development of students' practical abilities, the QAUE encouraged universities to improve their practical training courses, which were examined as a separate indicator (4.3). By and large, as indicated in the policy discourse, the QAUE scheme intended to push universities to reform their teaching and learning and improve teaching quality. The intended impact of the QAUE on the issue of teaching and learning mainly involved teaching contents, teaching methods and practical training.

Fourthly, in the context of the lack of diversity of HEIs in China, the QAUE intended to push universities to rethink their mission and development purposes. According to the evaluation criteria, universities should have realistic mission rather than blindly imitating the top-level institutions; they should have specifically defined the purposes of training students (i.e. the knowledge, skills and values that they intended to deliver to students); these purposes should conform to their existing conditions and can meet the social and economic requirements (indicator 1.1); they should design the training modes particularly to realise these purposes rather than simply copying other institutions (indicator 4.2). The principle of "three kinds of conformity" was used by the QAUE scheme to guide the evaluators. It meant "(1) the mission that a university has defined and its student training purposes should conform to the social requirements, the comprehensive development of students, and the existing conditions of the university; (2) the actual operations in the university should conform to the purposes it has defined; (3) the students' achievements should conform to the purposes it has defined" (translated from MOE, 2004, p. 10). Furthermore, the QAUE expected to see that universities had their brand programmes with advantages and special features. There is another indicator particularly designed to review the special features of universities (indicator 8).

Besides the four objectives declared in the policy discourse, the analysis of the evaluation focuses and criteria shows that the QAUE scheme also intended to achieve a better balance between teaching and research[7] in universities. The balance between teaching and research involves a variety of aspects, from the resource allocation at the institutional level to the commitment of individual teachers. According to the evaluation criteria, universities should regard teaching as their fundamental task (indicator 1.2). They should give undergraduate education priority in terms of funding and staff allocation (indicators 3.2 and 2.2), such as accessing advanced teaching facilities (indicators 3.1 and 4.3). Teachers should coordinate appropriately their various duties - teaching, research and other affairs, and guarantee their commitment to undergraduate teaching (indicator 6.1). This was probably a response to the problem that research had overwhelmed teaching visibly in Chinese universities, as discussed previously. At the same time, the emphasis on teaching could also be understood as an inherent character of the quality assessment of teaching, which the QAUE scheme belongs to. It is worth mentioning that the balance between teaching and research does not mean these two duties are completely equal in all universities. Instead, HEIs with different orientations, research intensive, teaching intensive, or both teaching and research intensive, should have their own preferences. Based on this understanding, the QAUE pushed universities to pursue a better balance between teaching and research, which was supposed to fit the self-defined purposes of universities.

In addition to the objective of stimulating university changes, the QAUE scheme was also used by the state to examine the achievement of governmental goals and planning. This was particularly necessary in the context of power devolution from the central government to local governments and individual institutions. As stated in the policy discourse, the QAUE was used to "urge the educational administration departments of various levels to support teaching in HEIs" (MOE, 2004, p. 10). For example, in the

[7] Teaching means undergraduate education and research includes graduate education, in this context.

terms of resource commitment, the central government intended to push local governments to increase financial support for universities through the quality assessment scheme. Moreover, the state also regarded the QAUE scheme as an instrument to "prompt universities to implement the state's educational policies actively" (MOE, 2004, p. 10). For example, the requirement that professors and associate professors have to teach at least one undergraduate course, and the requirement for the amount of bilingual curricula were prescribed in previous policies issued by the MOE (MOE, 2001).

Furthermore, one of the functions of quality assessment: providing accountability for the society and enhancing trust in higher education was also supposed to be undertaken by the QAUE scheme. The evaluation criteria of the QAUE reflected the social and economic requirements for higher education, such as developing students' general competences, creative and practical abilities. At the same time, the QAUE was especially concerned about the factors related to public trust in higher education, such as the decline of educational quality and the inefficiency of university management as already mentioned. In addition, academic corruption of teachers (indicator 6.1), cheating behaviour of students in examinations (indicator 6.2), employment ratios and social reputation (indicators 7.6 and 7.5), about which society has become increasingly concerned, were emphasised in the evaluation criteria.

In summary, the purposes of the QAUE scheme are suggested, which are inferred from the context in which it emerged, the objectives defined in its policy discourse, and the design of its evaluation criteria. Broadly speaking, it intended

- to facilitate quality improvement of the evaluated institutions;
- to examine the achievement of governmental goals and planning in order to ensure that institutions (and the local governments to which they are affiliated) will behave as the central government wants them to behave;
- to provide accountability for society and to stimulate trust in higher education.

To be specific, the intended impact of the QAUE on the change of the evaluated institutions are summarised in five dimensions. It aimed to push universities

- to increase resource commitment to undergraduate education;
- to re-identify themselves with rational mission and development purposes, and to develop special features;
- to enhance quality management;
- to reform teaching and learning activities;
- to achieve a better balance between teaching and research.

Clearly, most of the intended outcomes of the QAUE are similar to what quality assessment schemes have generated in other countries, such as resource commitment, university identification, teaching and learning, and quality management (sub-chapter 2.2.4). Some of them originate from the specific problems that need to be solved in the Chinese context, such as to develop special features, and to achieve a better balance between teaching and research. Before using empirical studies to examine the realisation of these intended effects, the previous impact studies of the QAUE are reviewed.

3.4.3 Study of the QAUE in China

The study of higher education quality assessment in China is still at the initial stage, and is dominated by the introduction of quality assessment and assurance practices in western countries. As for the QAUE scheme, much of the literature discussing it appears to lack supporting evidence from field investigation, like the research in other fields of higher education studies in China (Fan & Gao, 2010). Advocacy based on researchers' observation is frequently a substitute for in-depth analysis. Moreover, a great many recommendations have been made for improving the QAUE scheme. Unfortunately, these often originate from international experience but are not rooted in the problems of the QAUE *per se*. Consequently, these suggestions frequently ignore the context of Chinese higher education, and thus, lack feasibility. This type of

research has not been considered here (for example, Chen, 2008; Dong, 2008; Shi, 2007; Zhao & Liu, 2008; Xie, 2008).

After working for one full cycle, some impact studies on the QAUE scheme have been conducted, based on field investigations (for example, Gao, Zhang, Chen, Lan, & Zhang, 2006; Zhang & Xue, 2009), and a general picture has been obtained. Among these studies, three representative questionnaire surveys, which were conducted by the policy implementer - HEEC and independent researchers are reviewed here. They focused on the perceptions of university leaders (Li et al., 2006), teachers (Zhang & Zhang, 2008), and students (Liu, 2009, the author of this thesis) respectively. They explored the impact of the QAUE on the evaluated institutions and the problems it has produced. Similar conclusions were drawn from these three surveys, as follows.

The QAUE has significantly facilitated the improvement of teaching facilities, teaching management and university planning, while the outcomes regarding teaching and learning have been limited. To some extent, the QAUE has encouraged teachers' and students' commitment, but its effect on the classroom activities has been insignificant, especially in terms of innovation in teaching methods. Its impact on universities with different statuses has also been varied. By and large, the effects have been more and more significant moving from the top institutions to the less elite ones. In relation to the huge investment made by both government and the evaluated institutions in the QAUE scheme, it is not considered to have been cost-effective. Moreover, people criticise the fact that the right of the universities to participate in the process of formulating the assessment project were disregarded. Consequently, the external compulsory evaluation was inconsistent with the routine work of institutions and has become a huge bureaucratic burden on academics. Using the same set of performance indicators to evaluate all universities and colleges is also thought to be less than fair and will lead to the homogenisation of HEIs. In addition, it is admitted that the self-evaluation reports and the other documents prepared by the universities

for the inspection of evaluators were partially false; and visible rehearsals occurred in institutions during the visits of external evaluators. Thus, the evaluation results were somewhat distorted. As an information publisher, the QAUE is perceived to be unconvincing, and less helpful than university rankings for students to decide on their places of study (Li et al., 2006; Zhang & Zhang, 2008; Liu, 2009). Through questionnaire surveys, these impact studies only described what effects have been generated in the evaluated institutions, but they did not explore how these changes happened or why some of the intended changes have not been produced.

Based on these survey findings, Liu (the author of this theis) and Rosa (2008) evaluated the QAUE scheme by asking whether or not the QAUE scheme has achieved its policy objectives. It was concluded that the QAUE has successfully helped the state to examine the achievement of governmental policies and requirements, but it has not effectively improved the performance of the evaluated institutions or provided accountability for society. The main reasons for its failures were explored, focusing on the weaknesses of the design of the QAUE scheme. It was argued that compliance dominates the policy objectives, while the improvement function of the quality assessment was not adequately emphasised; the evaluation agency (HEEC) is one of the MOE departments, without independence from the state; performance indicators were used as the dominant way of measuring the quality of universities, while peer review was not properly used; the composition of the external evaluators was insufficiently diverse, lacking the participation of experts in pedagogy and the representatives of employers or students; there was a direct link between the evaluation results and resource allocation; the evaluation criteria were basically standardised, lacking in variation among the different types of institutions. The connection between the shortcomings of the QAUE and its low efficiency in terms of *improvement* and *accountability* were illustrated.

Although this connection is helpful for explaining the consequences of implementing the QAUE scheme in China, it is still inadequate. On the one hand, the discussion on

the efficiency of quality *improvement* was generic and vague. As already mentioned, the impact of the QAUE on the various dimensions of quality *improvement* is not the same. This research did not discuss the reasons why the QAUE has pushed the evaluated institutions to make improvements in one respect, but not in another. On the other hand, when answering why the QAUE can or cannot change the performance of universities, only the characteristics of the quality assessment scheme were examined. This perspective was derived from the understanding that university change is a result of external pressure which, in this case, is the external quality assessment scheme. However, as indicated in sub-section 2.3.3, external determinism is not applicable within higher education. The level of success of a quality assessment scheme is largely determined by the interaction between the quality assessment scheme and the evaluated institutions. This present research intends to fill in the gap. It will use an interactive perspective to examine the reasons why some of the intended effects have been successfully realised by the QAUE, while others have not. Through interviews and document analysis in case studies, the reasons for change and continuity are expected to be found out.

3.5 Summary

In this chapter, firstly, I reviewed the historical evolution of higher education in China, which can be divided into two phases: before the beginning of the 1980s and thereafter. In both periods reforms and restructuring of the higher education system were carried out. In the first phase, reform was modelled on the former Soviet Union and in the second, the western higher education system especially that of the USA was followed. The current state of the higher education system in China as a result of these reforms and restructuring was then described.

Secondly, the context in which higher education quality assessment emerged in China, and its evolution, both polices and practices were described. Currently, there is an array of quality assessment schemes conducted by state and non-governmental

evaluation organisations. One of these quality assessment schemes, the QAUE, is the focus of the last part of the chapter. The specific approaches to evaluation have been presented. This is followed by a discussion of the intended impact of the QAUE on the evaluated institutions, which involve five dimensions of quality provision: resource commitment to undergraduate education, university identification, quality management, teaching and learning activities, and the balance between teaching and research. In addition, the previous studies on the impact of the QAUE were also reviewed.

The present research uses empirical study to explore whether the intended effects of the QAUE have emerged in the evaluated institutions and the reasons for change or not. This chapter provides background information for the discussion, both the characteristics of HEIs in China and the design of the QAUE scheme. The next chapter will focus on the specific methods of conducting the empirical study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODS

4.1 Introduction

A case study is the research method of this thesis, and three universities and colleges were selected as cases. The data for these three cases was collected through document analysis and semi-structured interviews. This chapter describes how these cases were selected, and the ways in which the data was collected and analysed. Some ethical issues are also addressed.

This research intends to analyse the impact of the *Quality Assessment of Undergraduate Education* (QAUE) on university change in China. It examines the changes generated by the QAUE in the evaluated institutions, and how they have happened; and what intended changes have not emerged, and why. Based on the examination, the ways in which quality assessment, as an external force, interacts with the evaluated HEIs and causes them to change are explored. The units of analysis were the 589 HEIs which were evaluated in the first round of the QAUE between 2003 and 2008. A case study was adopted in order to deeply explore the changes in the evaluated institutions. Many scholars have advocated the use of a case study design to investigate organisational change (Kondakci & Van den Broeck, 2009). A case study, which can open up a rich variety of data sources, is considered to be an effective strategy for depicting social phenomena within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 1994; Creswell, 1998). Yin (2002) suggested using case study when "a 'how' and 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigators has little or no control (p.9)". As indicated before, the impact of external quality assessment is related to the national and institutional context of the evaluated universities and colleges; it is hard to control the other influencing factors and to map the causal relationship between quality assessment and university change (sub-section 2.2.4). Thus, a case study is expected to offer insights in a way which

other approaches cannot, for studying the impact of the QAUE on the evaluated universities (Newton, 2000, 2002).

The process of case studies include selecting cases, designing data collection protocol, conducting individual case study, writing individual case report, and drawing cross case conclusions, as show in Figure 4.1 (Yin, 2002).

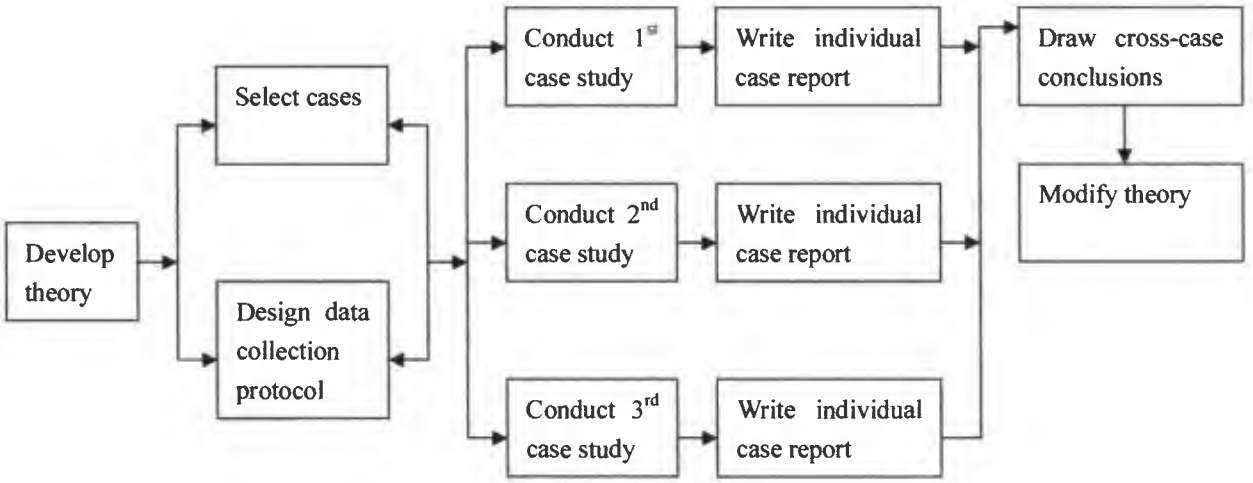

Figure 4.1 Case study method (adapted from Yin, 2002, p.50)

4.2 Selection of cases

Multiple-case studies are used in this research. According to the findings from the previous empirical studies and theoretical propositions, the impact of external quality assessment is a result of the interaction between the quality assessment scheme and the evaluated universities (sub-section 2.2.4). The characteristics of the evaluated institutions, such as their reputations, financial resources, the autonomy they enjoy and their internal norms and values, are believed to have influence on the ways in which they respond to external quality assessment, and the final outcomes of quality assessment (sub-section 2.3.3). Thus, it is necessary to select HEIs with contrasting characteristics as cases for comparison (Yin, 2002). Multiple-case studies are used instead of single-case study. As discussed in sub-section 3.2.2, the Chinese

universities have noticeable similarity in terms of their mission statements and educational programmes. Their financial resources, reputation, and institutional autonomy are different, which are mainly related to their statuses. The elite universities usually have more financial resources and enjoy more autonomy than the less elite ones. In addition, there are considerable regional disparities in the funding of HEIs because of the different financial capacities of their sponsors (i.e. the local governments). Thus, this research used status as the main criterion to select cases, while also providing regional variety.

Three HEIs with different statuses were selected to study, namely, Beijing Normal University (BNU) - a top university funded by the 985 Project[8], affiliated to the MOE; Northwest Normal University (NWNU) - a middle-status university, affiliated to the Gansu Province; and Linyi Normal College (LYNC) - a local institution at the bottom of the "pyramid" which has recently been accredited for initiating its undergraduate programmes, affiliated to Linyi City in Shandong Province. The traditional way, their affiliation, was used to identify the status of the universities. In China, basically, the status of HEIs becomes lower and lower when they are affiliated to the central government - MOE (BNU), the provincial governments (NWNU), and the city governments (LYNC). It is worth mentioning that the QAUE evaluation results of all the three selected cases are *excellent*. As explained in sub-section 3.4.1, the results of the quality assessment lack discrimination, regarding up to 72.0% of the evaluated institutions as being *excellent*, 24.4% as being *good*, only 3.6% as being *qualified*, and none of them *unqualified*. Clearly, the proportion of excellent and good scores is over-high, which cannot reflect the hierarchy of Chinese HEIs (Wang & Liu, 2009, p. 268). Thus, the QAUE evaluation results were disregarded when selecting these cases. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the regional disparity of HEIs especially the east-west inequality was considered (sub-section 3.2.2) during the case selection:

[8] The 985 Project began in 1998, and has sponsored 39 Chinese universities to build "world-class" universities with advanced research outcomes and a high international reputation (sub-section 3.2.2).

BNU and LYNC are located in the east, and NWNU is situated in the west, as shown in the map (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2 Location of selected cases

In order to understand and compare the changes generated by the QAUE scheme in universities with different statuses, all of these three cases were selected within the same category of institutions, i.e. normal institutions. As mentioned in sub-section 3.2.3, there are 12 categories of HEIs. The normal institutions, specialising in teacher education, belong to one of the most long-established and largest categories of Chinese HEIs.[9] With the aim of providing pre-service teacher training, the

[9] In 2000, there were 599 regular universities and colleges in China, which were composed of 73 comprehensive universities, 183 natural sciences & technology institutions, 107 normal institutions, 37 agricultural institutions, 6 forestry institutions, 36 finance & economics institutions, 82 medicine & pharmaceutical institutions, 11 language & literature institutions, 10 political science & law institutions, 13 physical culture institutions, 29 art institutions, and 12 ethnic nationality institutions (MOE, 1998-2005).

undergraduate programmes in teacher education universities are basically parallel to the subject teachers needed in basic education institutions. These are fairly fixed and comprehensive, covering Humanities and Social Science (such as Chinese, foreign languages, history, politics, and education), Science (such as mathematics, chemistry, physics, computer skills, geography, and biology), Physical and Art education. Notwithstanding, teacher education institutions have also been involved in the trend of becoming comprehensive since the end of the 1990s (sub-section 3.2.2). Non-teacher training programmes began to be established in teacher education institutions, such as programmes of law, management and engineering. Many normal institutions even changed their names as a sign of transforming themselves into comprehensive universities[10] (Liu, 2005). As a result of this trend, most normal universities and colleges in China are essentially comprehensive (Zhong, 2008).

The reasons for choosing normal institutions as cases to study in this research are summarised as follows. Firstly, normal institutions share the advantages of traditional comprehensive universities. The undergraduate programmes in normal universities and colleges cover Science and Technology as well as Humanities and Social Science, which allows the change which happened in both groups to be examined (The reasons for doing this will be explained later). The development of undergraduate programmes in normal institutions is fairly even. In this regard, the observed changes in an institution will be less likely to be biased by watching different faculties/departments. The programmes established in normal institutions are also considerably stable, which makes it easier to perceive the changes caused by the QAUE, although these cannot completely be isolated from the effects of other factors. Secondly, compared with traditional comprehensive universities, normal institutions face more challenges of university orientation. They are struggling between being teacher training oriented or becoming comprehensive by establishing non-teacher training programmes (Li, 2005; Yu & Hua, 2010). As discussed in Chapter Three,

[10] For example, in Shandong province, Liaocheng Normal College changed to become Liaocheng University in 2002, and Yantai Normal College changed to become Ludong University in 2006.

university identification is one of the expected effects of the QAUE on the evaluated institutions, which seems to be more easily examined in normal universities than other comprehensive universities. Thus, normal institutions were chosen as cases to study in this research. Except for the afore-mentioned characteristics, there is not much difference between normal universities and the institutions in other categories. They are under the same governance model and funding system, have similar internal structures and management mechanisms, and face the same challenge of expanding enrolments and the problem of lack of diversity (detailed information about normal universities and the teacher education they provide is shown in Appendix I). Thus, it is expected that the impact of the QAUE on the Chinese universities can be examined through observing what happened in normal universities and colleges.

In summary, a multiple-case analysis was adopted, including three HEIs with different statuses and geographic distributions but the same type- teacher education institutions, as shown in Figure 4.3 (on the next page). BNU is a top-status university located in Beijing (east); it was evaluated in April, 2008 and judged as being "excellent". NWNU is a middle-status university in a west province, Gansu; it was site-visited by the QAUE evaluators in December, 2003 and also got an "excellent" evaluation result. LYNC is a low-status college located in an east province, Shandong; it was evaluated in June, 2008 and its evaluation result is "excellent" as well. There was a five-year gap between the evaluations of NWNU and those of BNU and LYNC. It would have been easier to isolate the other influencing factors on universities and to compare the impact of the QAUE on them, if all the selected universities had undergone the evaluation at about the same time. However, the practicalities of obtaining access to institutions meant that it was not possible for me to obtain cases which had been evaluated within the same period of time. Efforts have been made to isolate other influencing factors during the data collection, which will be explained later.

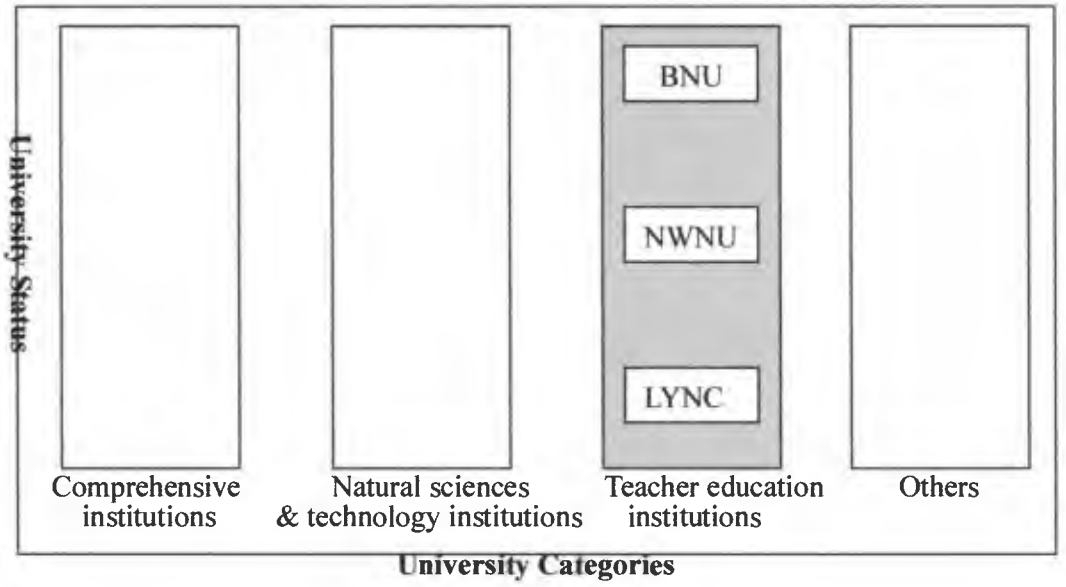

Figure 4.3 Selection of cases

4.3 Data collection

4.3.1 Sources of evidence

The general picture of the changes in HEIs as a result of the QAUE has been depicted by some questionnaire surveys (sub-section 3.4.3). They have provided a basic idea about the impact of the QAUE, including the dimension of changes (what has changed and what has not) and a rough description of the extent (how much). Thus, in this research, qualitative methods in the form of document analysis and semi-structured interviews were adopted. Qualitative methods are powerful when studying organisational phenomena (Patton, 2002). They can tell us more about "how" and "why": how the quality assessment scheme has generated changes in HEIs, and why it can cause some kinds of changes but not others.

Firstly, two main documents are submitted to the MOE concerning quality assessment: self-evaluation reports and reports on the follow-up reforms (sub-section 3.4.1). The changes which took place at the stage of preparing for the visit of the external evaluators can be found in self-evaluation reports. The follow-up reform reports focus on the changes made on the recommendation of the external evaluators after their

review. Both reports are referred to in this research. It is worth mentioning that, initially, the review report from the external evaluators was also chosen to be one of the data sources, because their suggestions relate to the follow-up reforms. However, the evaluated institutions regarded the review reports as confidential information, so they were inaccessible. Fortunately, their suggestions can be read indirectly in the follow-up reform reports. Secondly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the internal members to explore their perception of the changes in the evaluated universities as a result of the quality assessment. Based on their perspectives, the ways in which these changes were created, the factors which facilitated and inhibited these changes, and the reasons why the intended changes emerged or not were also explored in depth. The changes occurred in both the self-evaluation and the follow-up reforming stages were asked for. The experiences and perception of organisational members are particularly important for capturing organisational change (Kondakci & Van den Broeck, 2009). Some changes which were not revealed on official documents were identified. At the same time, the danger that leaders and teachers may be biased concerning their own role, and in reporting the impact of the external quality assessment scheme in which they have been involved, is reduced by a document analysis. In addition, students' perception that has been examined before was also considered through literature review (Liu, 2009), which will be explained later.

As mentioned before, it is impossible to control all the relevant factors to be able to map causal relationships when studying the impact of quality assessment (Stensaker, 2003; Harvey & Newton, 2004; Rosa et al., 2006). QAUE is only one of the external and internal policies the Chinese HEIs need to handle and react to. Thus, when collecting and analysing the data from the informants and the related documents in this research, the direct impact of the QAUE on the evaluated institutions was particularly emphasised. This is expected to help to isolate other influencing factors on change. Furthermore, as already indicated, quality assessment has both long-term and short-term effects on the evaluated institutions (Brennan & Shah, 2000). It is very hard to examine the long-term impact of quality assessment because of the increased

difficulties of isolating other influencing factors. This research was conducted after the first round of the QAUE evaluation, and it focused on the short-term effects of the QAUE only. However, this became a challenge for the investigation at NWNU, where there was a six-year gap between the time of the QAUE evaluation and the case study interviews. In order to deal with this problem, the informants were selected from those who had personally experienced the preparation for the QAUE and the site-visit of the evaluators, and they were asked to recall what happened during the self-evaluation and one-year follow-up reforms in their institutions.

4.3.2 Sampling

The intended effects of the QAUE on the evaluated universities involve five dimensions: resource commitment, university identification, teaching and learning activities, quality management, and the balance between teaching and research (sub-section 3.4.2). These changes could occur at three structural levels of HEIs, namely, institutions, operating units (faculties and departments), and individuals (Brennan & Shah, 2000). Thus, the stakeholders involved in the change process included leaders at both institutional and faculty/department levels, teachers, students and administrative staff. Initially, they were all intended to be used as informants in the semi-structured interviews. As mentioned in sub-section 3.4.3, the students' perception of the impact of the QAUE scheme on the evaluated HEIs was surveyed by means of questionnaires and interviews in my MRes dissertation, which was conducted in eight universities and colleges (different from the three cases in this research) (Liu, 2008). Its findings were reviewed to analyse students' perspectives of the changes which related to them. As for the administrative staff, two members of the administrative staff in two different faculties were interviewed in my first study in BNU. They seemed not to know much about the changes caused by the QAUE scheme, although they were involved in the management of undergraduate courses, as well as the quality assessment process. They seemed only to concentrate on some detailed affairs in the process of preparing for the visit of the evaluators, such as file

collection and organisation, but lacked a holistic understanding of the impact of the quality assessment scheme on universities. Therefore, administrative staff were excluded from the choice of informants.

Thus, the interviewees in each institution were the Dean of the Academic Affairs Office (at the institutional level), the Vice-Deans of two faculties, who were responsible for teaching affairs, and three teachers of undergraduate courses in each faculty. All of them have experienced the preparation for the QAUE and the site-visit of the external evaluators. Taking into account the difference of university changes caused by subject culture, as discussed by Csizmadia, Enders and Westerheijden (2008)[11] and Trowler (1998), two faculties, which specialised in Humanities and Social Science, and Science and Technology, were selected. So, the plan was to interview nine leaders and 18 teachers in total. It is worth mentioning that most of the leaders also teach undergraduate courses.

The interviewees were identified by a snowball technique of purposive sampling. Since the QAUE is somehow a sensitive topic in Chinese universities, it was difficult for me, to approach the leaders and teachers who I need to interview. Even if they agreed to be interviewed, their answers might not be candid. The snowball technique (networking sampling) made it easier to connect with informants, but had the danger of bias (Lee, 1993). Thus, purposive sampling was also used to make the sample as representative as possible. After interviewing the Vice-Deans of the selected faculties, the profiles of the teaching staff in these faculties were obtained from them. With the help of contacts, three teachers in each faculty were identified as respondents. When selecting these respondents, their gender (male, female), qualifications (doctor, master, bachelor), professional titles (professor, associate professor, lecturer, assistant

[11] Csizmadia et al. (2008) think the subject culture in HEIs should be seen as being important factors in the context of organisational change. For example, in so-called hard and convergent sciences with their common aims, relatively clear standard operating procedures, and team work orientation, it is easier to implement concerted action for quality management than in soft and divergent fields.

lecturer), and the length of their teaching experience were considered, making the sample as proportionate to the general population as possible. It is worth mentioning that when the case study was conducted in NWNU, four teachers were introduced as informants in each faculty. That is to say, two more teachers were interviewed in NWNU. Finally, nine leaders and 20 teachers were interviewed in total. The profiles of these interviewees are presented in Appendix II. Each interviewee was coded with a number for easier data retrieval. In summary, the research methods involved in this research include document analysis and semi-structured interviews with leaders and teachers, as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Research methods and sources of evidence

Research methods	**Sources of evidence**	**Sample**
Document analysis	Self-evaluation reports and follow-up reform reports	
Semi-structured interviews	Leaders of universities and faculties/departments	3*3=9
	Teachers	6*2+8*1=20

4.3.3 Development of variables and interview schedule

This research intends to explore the actual impact of the QAUE on university change in China. As already mentioned, the intended effects of the QAUE include five dimensions: resource commitment, university identification, quality management, teaching and learning activities, and the balance between teaching and research (sub-section 3.4.2). The variables to measure the impact of the QAUE can be identified and the interview questions can be designed according to these intended changes.

- Firstly, the QAUE intended to push universities to increase their resource commitment to undergraduate education by improving the infrastructure and teaching facilities (V1), teaching staff (V2), and increasing teaching expenditure (V3). So, three variables were adopted to measure the changes in terms of

resource commitment. Because the informants did not know the specific amount of teaching expenditure (V3), this information could only be obtained from the evaluation reports. All the interest groups involved in this present research have experienced changes in the other two variables: infrastructure and teaching facilities (V1) and teaching staff (V2), either as planners (leaders) or participants (teachers) in the changes. So, their perspectives, plus the information from the evaluation reports, were used to test these two variables.

- Secondly, the QAUE intended to push universities to re-identify themselves with more realistic mission and development purposes (V4), and to develop more special features (V5). Thus, two variables were used to measure the changes in terms of university identification. Since teachers are not significantly involved in university planning in China, the data could only be obtained from the leaders' perspectives and the statements in the evaluation reports.
- Thirdly, the QAUE expected to enhance quality management in the evaluated institutions by adjusting the administrative regulations and rules (V6) and establishing internal quality monitoring mechanisms (V7). So, two variables were employed to measure the changes in terms of quality management. In addition to the evaluation reports, the perspectives of both the managers (leaders) and those being managed (teachers) were the sources of evidence.
- Fourthly, the key objective of the QAUE was to improve the teaching and learning activities in the evaluated universities by transforming the teaching contents (V8) and reforming the teaching methods (V9). Moreover, this encouraged universities to develop practical training courses to improve students' creative and practical abilities (V10). So, three variables were adopted to measure the changes in teaching and learning activities. Besides the information from the evaluation reports, the perspectives of both leaders and teachers were used to examine these variables, because most of the leaders in the sample are also teachers, as already mentioned.
- Fifthly, the QAUE intended to prompt universities to achieve a better balance between teaching and research, through efforts made at institutional and

faculty/department levels (V11), and through the commitment of individual academics (V12). Thus, these two variables were examined by asking the perspectives of the involved interest groups (that is, leaders and teachers) and consulting the information shown in the evaluation reports.

As shown in Appendix III, the interview questions were designed to examine whether or not the intended changes of these 12 variables have been made in the evaluated institutions; if so, the approaches to creating the change (how), the extent of the change (how much); and if not, the factors which inhibited the occurrence (why not); and whether or not the evaluated institutions agree with the requirement of the QAUE for change in each dimensions (whether they accept the norms of "good" higher education defined by the QAUE). In addition, one open question was added to see if there have been some other changes (V13) in order to take in any missing items and to explore any unintended effects of the QAUE. Furthermore, the occasion of these changes (V14), before or after the site-visit of the evaluators, and their sustainability were examined (V15), based on the perspectives of leaders and teachers. In order to observe the interaction between the QAUE scheme and the evaluated institutions, how the evaluated institutions and their members responded to the QAUE was also examined (V16). The interviews explored the leaders' and teachers' perspectives of the reactions from the various structural levels of the evaluated institutions - institutions, faculties/departments, and individuals, either as actors or bystanders. In addition, another two questions were designed to ask the informants about their general ideas about the QAUE and their complementary comments on it. In total, 16 variables were used in this research to measure the impact of the QAUE on university change. Each variable was examined by one question, with several sub-questions. Table 4.2 (on the next page) describes the variables and the questions to test them. An interview schedule was designed with 16 questions to ask the leaders and teachers (Appendix III). The two questions about university identification (Questions 4 and 5) were unrelated to teachers, and thus, these were excluded when interviewing them. As a result, slightly different interview guides were developed for these two groups.

Table 4.2 Variables measured

		Variables		Leaders (interview)	Teachers (interview)	Evaluation reports (Document analysis)
Dimensions of changes and their ways	Resource commitment	1	University infrastructure and teaching facilities	√(Q2)	√(Q2)	√
		2	Teaching staff	√(Q3)	√(Q3)	√
		3	Teaching expenditure			√
	University identification	4	University mission and development purposes	√(Q4)		√
		5	Development of special features	√(Q5)		√
	Quality management	6	Administrative regulations and approaches	√(Q6)	√(Q6)	√
		7	Internal quality monitoring system	√(Q7)	√(Q7)	√
	Teaching and learning	8	Teaching contents	√(Q8)	√(Q8)	√
		9	Teaching methods	√(Q9)	√(Q9)	√
		10	Practical training	√(Q10)	√(Q10)	√
	Teaching-research balance	11	Coordination at the institutional and faculty/department level	√(Q11)	√(Q11)	√
		12	Coordination at the individual level	√(Q12)	√(Q12)	√
	Others	13	Other changes	√(Q13)	√(Q13)	√
Timing and continuity of changes		14	Occasion of changes	√(Q14)	√(Q14)	
		15	Sustainability of changes	√(Q14)	√(Q14)	
Responses to the QAUE		16	Responses and resistance to the QAUE	√(Q15)	√(Q15)	
Others		General ideas about the QAUE		√(Q1)	√(Q1)	
		Complementary comments		√(Q16)	√(Q16)	

4.3.4 Interviews

The work of gathering the data began at the beginning of June, 2009, and lasted for about four months. At the time of data collection, all the three cases had completed their follow-up reforms. Having identified the informants and designed the interview schedule, face-to-face interviews were conducted. After a basic introduction of the researcher and the research purposes, the informants were assured of anonymity, and advised that their names would not be published and the data would not be used except for an academic thesis. At the same time, they were advised that the interviews would be audio-recorded, and having obtained their consent, the conversations began to be recorded. It is worth mentioning that two of the 29 interviewees, both teachers in science subjects, did not agree to be recorded, so hand-written notes were made instead. The communication was in Chinese. The interviews with the leaders lasted for about one and a half hours, and those with the teachers lasted for about one hour. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed for analysis.

4.4 Data analysis

The collected data was analysed manually. NVivo (qualitative data analysis software) was not used because it does not deal with the Chinese language satisfactorily (Vallance & Lee, 2005)[12]. The data was analysed case by case. The process of data analysis in each case can be divided into three stages, namely, coding data, generating categories, and developing propositions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). These three stages are also defined as open-coding, axial coding and selective coding respectively by Stauss and Corbin (1998). Firstly, the transcripts from all of the interviews were open-coded after being read a number of times. Code words were written in the

[12] Vallance and Lee (2005) indicate that there are several practical disadvantages when using NVivo to analyse Chinese. Chinese is not as declarative as English. There are many ways of speaking about a topic in a circumlocutory manner in Chinese - as perceived from a Western perspective. This suggests that text searches to find particular expressions are even more prone than in English to neglect to find all the times the participants has talked about the topic. Moreover, NVivo sometimes inaccurately or incompletely displays a Chinese character. This problem tends to occur when the character is complex or the paragraph is a long one.

right-hand margins of the sheets. At this stage, all of the transcripts were treated as being potential data and no attempt was made to omit or select particular passages for special attention. The codes of every transcript were numbered for easy retrieval. The code numbers were shown on the paper when referring to the statement of the interviewee. For example, a code number was expressed in the form of IA16. As already mentioned, each interviewee was identified with a number: I indicates BNU, II means NWNU, III means LYNC; A means the first interviewee, B means the second, and so on. So, IA indicates the first interviewee from BNU (as shown in Appendix II), and 16 means the 16^{th} code of the transcript from this interviewee. IA16 means an idea refers to the 16^{th} code of the first interviewee from BNU.

Secondly, based on the open coded data, axial coding was done to look for more analytical concepts (Stauss & Corbin, 1998). The emerging themes were identified, including shared themes and some specific ones in each transcript. Then, all the coded data was sorted into these themes, which were easily accessible, both for reading and exploring. The codes were displayed in forms. Then, the documents, including self-evaluation reports and the reform reports were read through, and the data concerning the identified themes were selected, coded, and added into the coded forms, under each theme. The newly-emerged themes were supplemented. Coding and sorting the data helped to analyse all the data relevant to one theme together (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Thirdly, having looked through all the coded forms, checking the connections between codes and themes, coding notes were formulated. Some of these were attempts at summarising, some were associations or connections that came to mind, and others were preliminary interpretations. At this stage, the data was interrogated and systematically explored to generate meaning. All the pieces of data from various sources were compared for similarities and differences. Based on these, some initial conclusions could be made about the changes generated by the QAUE, such as whether a certain dimension of change had been generated by the QAUE scheme, the

extent of the change, the way of generating the change, the time it occurred, and its sustainment, and the reasons why some intended changes had not been generated. The initial conclusions were refined and tightened up and the properties of each category were summarised. The categories covered both intended (variables 1-12) and unintended changes (variable 13, such as the improvement of graduation projects, which the interviewees regarded as being a very important effect of the QAUE). Having combined the properties of all the categories, a description of the impact of the QAUE was formed for each case. Based on the description of the three cases, cross case conclusions were drawn at the end.

4.5 Ethical issues

This research follows the BERA Guidelines. Firstly, the self-evaluation reports and the reform projects were published and could be used freely. The participants of the semi-structured interviews were duly instructed about the intention, purposes and nature of the study. The interviews were conducted with their voluntary consent. In particular, participants were informed about the use of audio recording in advance. They were also advised of their right to withdraw from the research at any time. Secondly, the research respected the participants' right of confidentiality and anonymity. Their names would not be published and the data would not be used for anything other than this research. No incentives were used to avoid the creation of potential bias in participants' responses.

4.6 Summary

This chapter has interpreted the method adopted by the present research, namely, case studies. Three universities and colleges specialising in teacher education with different statuses were selected as cases: BNU, NWNU and LYNC. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to collect data from the cases. A total of nine university and faculty leaders and 20 teachers from various subject fields were interviewed. Self-evaluation reports and reports on the follow-up reforms were

analysed. The ways in which the data was collected and analysed were explained. The following three chapters will present the results of the data analysis, case by case.

CHAPTER FIVE: IMPACT OF THE QAUE ON BNU

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the details of the first case of my empirical work, Beijing Normal University. This case study was conducted in 2009. The first section provides a brief description of the University's profile, and the ways in which the University and its members responded to the QAUE. The succeeding section focuses on interpreting the impact of the QAUE on BNU. The outcomes of the five dimensions of the intended impact are mapped out. They include the resource commitment to undergraduate education, university identification, quality management, teaching and learning, and the balance between teaching and research.

5.2 A brief description of BNU

Beijing Normal University (BNU) was founded in 1902 under the name of the *Teacher Education Division of Peking Imperial University*, which was the first university-level teacher education institution in China. At present, BNU is one of the six leading normal universities affiliated to the Ministry of Education. This university has been sponsored by the 211 Project, and the 985 Project with the aim of becoming a world-class university. The University is located in Beijing, the capital city of China (BNU, 2010).

There are 23 faculties, three departments and 17 research centres in BNU. These departments cover various subjects, such as Humanities (e.g. Chinese language and literacy, philosophy, art, history, foreign language and literacy), Social Science (e.g. education, psychology, economics and management), science (e.g. mathematics, chemistry, physics, geography, biology), and Physical and Art education. Within these subjects, there are 55 undergraduate degree programmes (of them, 19 are teacher education programmes), 157 master's degree conferral units, and 95 doctoral degree

conferral units. In 2008, 22,692 students were enrolled in BNU, including 8,529 undergraduate students, 8,999 postgraduate students, 2,015 international students, and 3,149 other students (preparatory students, adult students, and the like); and more than 3,000 staff worked in BNU, including 2,198 teaching staff (BNU, 2010).

BNU was site-visited by the QAUE evaluators in April, 2008, and its undergraduate education quality was judged as being "excellent". Prior to the site visit, the self-assessment was conducted by BNU from 2005. The whole preparation process spanned 2005 to 2008. Follow-up reforms were implemented in one year after the site-visit following the suggestions from the external evaluators (BNU, 2008a).

5.3 Responses of BNU to the QAUE

BNU has made all-out efforts to respond to the QAUE. The self-evaluation report and the perspective of the respondents suggest that BNU has mobilised all of the university staff and students to prepare for the external quality assessment. The Communist Party Committee of the University highlighted teaching quality as being the most important task in the academic year of 2006-2007. During this period, the University has held many mobilisation meetings, both at the institutional and the faculty and departmental levels. All of the staff and students were required to attend these meetings. A wide range of documents concerning the QAUE were selected and compiled and provided to staff and students. Through these strategies, BNU intended to make its staff and students understand the significance of the QAUE and the specific procedures of evaluation. After the mobilisation process, staff and students were expected to be significantly motivated to work at preparing for the QAUE examination (BNU, 2008a, pp. 104-105). Both the University and every faculty/department have established ad hoc offices to address the issues of quality assessment. Most of their staff were temporary, transferred from other organisations, such as the Academic Affairs Office. The teaching staff in BNU have undertaken most of the preparation work. They have prepared a great amount of teaching documents

for the external evaluators to review. Furthermore, BNU has conducted mock evaluations before the site-visit of the QAUE evaluators. During the site-visit, BNU has made many a great deal of effort to please evaluators with the aim of getting a better evaluation result. As a teacher described, "the University has even tried every way to cater for the specific taste of certain evaluators" (IF1). On the whole, the interview respondents think that too much importance was attached to the QAUE. As one of the leaders put it, "the University has responded to the quality assessment as if is had been called to war" (IB3); this is somehow regarded as "overreacting" by the internal members (IB3, IF1).

5.4 Impact of the QAUE on BNU

5.4.1 Resource commitment

University infrastructure, teaching facilities and expenditure

According to the self-evaluation report and the perspective of the respondents, university infrastructure and teaching facilities were improved significantly in BNU during the period of preparing for the QAUE. For example, BNU invested 50.09 million RMB in the improvement of the laboratories and experimental equipment from 2005 to 2007. BNU built a new library, a gymnasium and student accommodation halls in 2006. The number of books stored in the libraries has grown steadily as shown in Table 5.1 (on the next page) (BNU, 2008a, pp. 35-36). In addition, BNU has renewed the classroom facilities, increasing multi-media classrooms, audio-visual classrooms, digital classrooms for language learning and the digital recording classrooms for micro-teaching (BNU, 2008a, p. 31). BNU has bought a great deal of new courseware as well, and in this process, teachers' requests have been considered (IF2). Furthermore, the internet connection on campus has been improved. In 2005, BNU started to use the Blackboard e-Education Platform for virtual teaching and learning. The intranet also makes internal contact and administration much easier (BNU, 2008a, p. 38). After the site-visit of the evaluators, BNU kept improving its infrastructure, such as the construction of its new campus

(BNU, 2008a, pp. 107-108; BNU, 2008b, pp. 6-7).

Table 5.1 Number of books stored in BNU laboratories

Year	Total number of books	Number of books per student
2005	3,219,968	101.9
2006	3,380,485	100.0
2007	3,572,194	103.3

The self-evaluation report shows that BNU has given priority to undergraduate education in terms of funding allocation. It has increased the financial support for curriculum building and reform, practical training, and the like. BNU has also ensured the continuous growth of its teaching expenditure. As indicated in Table 5.2, *the four kinds of funding for teaching* (for undergraduate students) have risen steadily. The increase of the unit funding and its percentage in the tuition fees from 2006 to 2007 was particularly notable (BNU, 2008a, p. 40).

Table 5.2 Four kinds of funding for teaching in BNU (The unit is RMB)

Year	Total number of *the four kinds of funding for teaching*	Number of *the four kinds of funding for teaching* per undergraduate student	Percentage of *the four kinds of funding for teaching* in the tuition fee income
2005	13.78 million	1,620	32.2%
2006	14.22 million	1,677	32.7%
2007	15.86 million	1,864	35.6%

When it comes to the sources of the increased funding for the improvement of physical conditions and teaching expenditure, the respondents reported that BNU is an institution affiliated to the MOE. Its funding includes the state grants from the central government (including the basic appropriation and the programme grants), tuition fees and the revenues generated by itself. The programme grants based on the research achievements are the main incomes for BNU. The central government did not give the extra budget to BNU in particular for the quality improvement of teaching facilities and expenditure, like what those local governments did (IB5, IC9). So, the University had to raise money from other sources by itself.

University leaders noted that BNU always emphasises the financial support for undergraduate education (IA4, IB5). As one of them said, "possessing adequate teaching expenditure to satisfy the needs of educating students is the prerequisite for BNU to be a top-status higher education institution" (IA4). The improvement of infrastructure and teaching facilities is a response to the internal demands of university development (IA5, IB5 and IC7). Nevertheless, they admitted that the QAUE has indeed pushed the University to increase the teaching expenditure further in order to reach its quantitative standards. Like other evaluated universities, BNU has adjusted its priorities of investment to meet the specific requirements of the QAUE (IA5).

Teaching staff

The self-evaluation report shows that the number of the teaching staff in BNU has increased steadily as indicated in Table 5.3 (BNU, 2008a, p. 21). The student-teacher ratio reached the requirement of the QAUE for excellence, i.e. 16.0. The respondents affirmed that there is always a gradual growth of the teaching staff in BNU, and staff enrolment has not expanded because of the quality assessment (IA6, ID3).

Table 5.3 Number of teaching staff in BNU

Academic year	Number of teaching staff	Student-teacher ratio
2004-2005	1,771	16.2
2005-2006	1,915	16.5
2006-2007	2,082	16.2
2007-2008	2,198	15.7

In addition to the increase in teaching staff, BNU has also adjusted its priorities in recruiting academic staff. Firstly, the self-evaluation report notes that the University has striven to attract talented senior academics with advanced research achievements. The respondents think this is not new, without much association with the QAUE. A University leader said "as a top-status institution, it is a long-term aim for BNU to attract the high-level academics, to enhance its research competitiveness; of course,

the endeavour has been strengthened by the motivation to get a better evaluation result" (IA6). But whether or not this aim can be successfully realised is not only determined by the University's ambition but also depends on many extrinsic factors, such as its reputation, the resources available for it, its academic atmosphere, and location. In this regard, external impulses (such as the QAUE) cannot help (IA6).

Secondly, in terms of recruiting new staff, BNU is concerned about the academic qualifications and educational backgrounds of the applicants, besides their academic achievements (IA6, IB5, IC11, and BNU, 2008a, pp. 23-24). The appointed academic staff must have PhD degrees. Moreover, in order to reduce "intellectual inbreeding", BNU initiated the *333 scheme,* which divides the quota of staff recruitment into three sections: one-third of them are BNU's own graduates, one-third of them are from other top institutions in China, and the last one-third come from prestigious overseas universities. University leaders think the rise of the minimal requirements for the academic qualifications of staff appears to be an inevitable consequence in the context of the "degree inflation" in China, but is was not caused by the quality assessment scheme (IA6, IB5 and IC11). The initiation of the *333 scheme*, prioritising the applicants outside BNU, was indeed caused by the QAUE, which prefers the diverse educational backgrounds of teaching staff. In addition, BNU has enhanced the in-service training for their teaching staff to improve their teaching skills, especially for the junior staff (BNU, 2008a, pp. 26-27).

5.4.2 University identification

University mission and development purposes

As mentioned previously, BNU initiated the history of university-level teacher education in China, and it is always regarded as being a leading university specialising in teacher education in China. Basically, BNU is not much involved with the issue of identifying its hierarchical status, where it stands in relation to its counterparts. As for the functional mission, the crucial change occurred in June 2001,

when BNU declared its initiative of becoming a comprehensive, research intensive university with an international reputation. With this development purpose, it started to transform from a specialised teacher training university to a comprehensive university excelling in teacher education, educational science and pure theoretical subjects (BNU, 2008a, p. 7). This change was groundbreaking and it has been imitated by almost all of the normal institutions in China.

In this context, the QAUE has not caused BNU to re-define its mission and development purposes, but to clarify them further. The respondents feel that the QAUE is able to cause universities to change in this respect. "Because the quality assessment was conducted at the institutional level rather than at the subject level, it has the potential to push universities to make their mission and development purposes clearer" (IB2). This was also regarded as being necessary. University leaders reported:

> In BNU, the direction in which the university should develop, and what kind of graduates it should produce [the knowledge, skills and value that students are expected to get from the programmes] were always quite ambiguous. [...] Now, the QAUE requested you [the evaluated university] to hand in an explicit report. This has pushed the University to reflect on itself systematically, [...] and to gradually clarify its mission, development purposes and special features, etc. (IB2)

> The University has run for more than a century. However, it has never thought about these key questions, such as "what should I do?" and "what am I doing?" With the pressure of the QAUE, we [BNU people] have reviewed the University's evolution, and reflected on the advantages and disadvantages of the University, its special features, and so on. (IC5)

The process of clarifying the University's mission and development purposes mainly occurred before the site-visit of the external evaluators. As a faculty leader noted,

> The clarification of the mission and development purposes were

> accomplished, which was based on the discussion on the meeting of University leaders, the colloquium with subject experts, and the consultation with people outside the University, etc. [...] In particular, the earlier statement was criticised fiercely by the mock evaluators. According to their suggestions, we revised it again and made a clear statement finally in the self-evaluation report. (IB3)

As articulated in the self-evaluation report, BNU is:

> A comprehensive, research-led university with the specialisation in teacher education, educational science and the pure theoretical subjects of both arts and science, [...] with the purposes of preparing students to become highly qualified professionals with both humanistic and scientific literacy, extensive professional knowledge and skills, broad international horizon, and the practical and creative spirits. (BNU, 2008a, pp. 8-9)

The QAUE evaluators basically agreed with this statement and did not challenge it or offer any suggestions to amend it (IB3).

The QAUE had impact on the mission and development purposes of BNU, both on the institution as a whole and on its basic units (faculties and departments). Faculty leaders indicated:

> Every faculty/department has its own self-evaluation report, which need to state its mission, development purposes, [...] and especially the programme goals [the expected learning outcomes of students]. This has pushed the faculties and departments to reflect, [...] and to clarify their purposes. The impact was profound. (IC3)

> For example, in the Faculty of Education, we always said that we aimed to produce students with outstanding abilities. That was really ambiguous. What are the specific criteria of students with outstanding abilities? After

the discussions during the period of preparing for the QAUE, we made the goals more specific and explicit. (IB31)

The development of special features

The self-evaluation report shows that BNU has summarised its three special features (BNU, 2008a, pp. 12-20):

- Firstly, it has a distinguished university culture, which is expressed by the university motto: *Learn, so as to instruct others; Act, to serve as example to all.*
- Secondly, BNU excels in teacher training and education research. It has been regarded as being the "birthplace" of excellent teachers and innovative thoughts about education.
- Thirdly, BNU is also superior in the comprehensive subjects and advanced research abilities. It trains students based on the mutual support of research and teaching, and the integration of arts and sciences (BNU, 2008a, pp. 12-20).

The QAUE has not only pushed BNU to find its own special features and advantages, but it also enhanced its aspiration of further developing these special features and creating new ones (BNU 2008, p. 106). For example, after the external quality assessment, BNU reorganised the Faculty of Education in June 2008. By doing this, it has concentrated its resources on teacher training and research on education, with the aim of reinforcing its excellence in this respect (IB13; BNU, 2008b, p. 3).

5.4.3 Quality management

The administrative regulations and approaches

Based on the self-evaluation report and the perspective of the respondents, the administrative regulations in BNU were already well-established before the coming of the external quality assessment. The QAUE has pushed the University to make further adjustment. Firstly, the amended administrative regulations have made

disciplines[13] more specific and stricter than before. For example, BNU designed the *Regulations for the Recognition and Disposal of Teachers' Malpractices.* The Regulations prescribe that teachers who are late for classes or leave early are recognised as being guilty of malpractices; if so, the involved teacher will get a notice of reprimand and his/her professional promotion will be deferred for one year (BNU, 2008a, pp .78).

Some respondents agree with the necessity and positive effects of these strict regulations. They think that "the requirements for punctuality are necessary and fair; teachers should understand and follow these regulations" (IH8); moreover, "the strict regulations can give teachers some extrinsic pressure and push them to be more disciplined" (IG1). On the other hand, some teachers feel that these regulations are too rigid and inflexible. A respondent said:

> These regulations are not completely reasonable; they lack the consideration of individual needs. For example, many teachers live far away from the campus. When there is a traffic jam, who can assure always arriving at classrooms on time? (IG1)

> Sometimes a teacher finishes the teaching content before schedule; especially on the class before lunch time, students also feel hungry and could not concentrate on the lecture. In this case, why not dismiss the class a little bit earlier? Now, [according to the new regulations], we can not leave early for even one minute. This is too rigid and not necessary, especially in universities [not schools]. (ID7)

Based on these regulations, the management of BNU has become stricter but the individual needs have been ignored. In addition, some teachers also complained about the process of amending these regulations, which were completed by the University

[13] Discipline means the system of rules, punishments and behavioural strategies appropriate to the regulation of teachers and students and the maintenance of order in universities.

leaders and did not consult with teachers: "who knows where their ideas come from" (IG14)?

Secondly, the specific procedures and standards for completing every section of teaching work have been set up according to the requirements of the QAUE. A university leader reported:

> Previously, teaching depended on habits and experience and it was discretionary. Since the coming of the QAUE, it has become standardised, including the format of teaching documents, the procedures of collecting, filing and storing these documents for reference, and so on. (IB18)

All teaching documents need to be handed in, such as the lecture syllabus, handouts, references, the student examination papers, the criteria of student performance assessment and student attendance records, which used to be kept by teachers themselves. Nowadays, these documents are required to be presented in standardised formats, and they are collected and stored in the archives of every faculty/department (BNU, 2008a, pp. 75-76; IB18, IC16 and IE7). For example, in terms of student assessment, both the design of the examination papers and the mark schemes become standardised. As the respondents described,

> Now, the faculties request teachers to devise very specific criteria for the student performance assessment. Before the quality assessment [QAUE], there were no explicit assessment criteria, and thus it was at teachers' discretion to score students' performance. With the [explicit] assessment criteria, it becomes easier to ascertain why the student gets this score but not that one; it is fairer. (IF12)

> If there are two teachers lecturing the same curriculum, they need to cross-check the students' examination papers for each other and it is fairer. (IG1)

> Teachers must follow the standardised format of marking examination papers, such as adding the sub-score of every question on its top left corner. (II6)

There is also a control over the proportion of the students scored as being "excellent" and "passed", i.e. students of "excellence" should not exceed a certain percentage (IB1, IC19).

Most of the respondents agree with the requirement of the QAUE for handing in and filing teaching documents. They think that this requirement has somewhat stimulated teachers to polish their teaching documents (IB14). As teachers said,

> In fact, in top-status institutions [such as BNU], teachers were used to preparing most of the teaching documents. Nevertheless, the QAUE has indeed pushed teachers to be more careful, for example, making their syllabuses and handouts more detailed. (ID5)

> You need to present them to others rather than for yourself to read. This pushes you to make them better. (IE10)

With the specific and explicit assessment criteria and the procedure of cross-checking examination papers, the student assessment has become fairer (IF1, IG1). In this regard, the requirement of the QAUE is beneficial to quality assurance.

The improvement of the archiving system is highly appreciated as well. A faculty leader commented:

> The establishment of archives is one of the most notable effects of the quality assessment [QAUE]. The inadequacy of archives was really a big shortcoming of our university management [the management of Chinese universities], [...] especially compared with the foreign universities. In BNU, both the institution and every faculty/department have built their own archives; with the space available, not only can the historical

documents be stored and referred to, the future documents will also be filed in the archives. So, I am sure the benefits will be long-term. (IC19)

However, the requirements of the QAUE for standardised forms of teaching documents do not get much agreement from teachers. Only one of the respondents think "it is not bad" (IE4), while most of them feel the standardised requirement is not necessary (ID13, IF12, IG13, IH8 and II6). A teacher said "as long as we [teachers] mark examination papers correctly and fairly, it does not matter whether we use the ways of deducting or adding sub-scores" (IH8). They think that these requirements are more suitable for school teachers rather than university teachers, since school teaching tends to be more standardised. A respondent commented: "the QAUE has made the higher education *schoolised* [resemble schools]" (ID13).

When it comes to the sustainability of the changed administrative regulations and approaches, on the one hand, the respondents reported that these new policies still exist on paper after the QAUE evaluators left. As a University leader said, "we [BNU] have not done something just to manipulate the quality assessment and stopped doing it when the evaluators left" (IA); teachers also confirmed that "at least nobody has told us that you do not need to follow these regulations any more" (IE8). On the other hand, the respondents conceded that the implementation of these policies is not as strict as before and its influence has been lessened. Some regulations are regarded as being infeasible. For example, a faculty leader said "who is able to watch over all of the classes to see if a teacher comes late or leaves early?" (IB22). By and large, the respondents are not very optimistic about the long-term effects: "they [the changed administrative regulations] have continued until now, but who knows what will happen later on?" (IG13). One of them even thinks "this is just a [political] movement, lasting for that moment only" (IH21). Basically, the respondents believe that only if teachers accept the belief behind these new administrative regulations and approaches, they would follow them voluntarily. For example, as for the requirements of marking the examination papers, some teachers think this is not necessary (IH8), as mentioned

previously. So, after the visit of the external evaluators, "because nobody comes to check the test papers [that I have marked] every day, I still mark the papers in the way that I like" (IH8). By contrast, one of the respondents agrees with the standardised requirement for the procedures of teaching. In this case, she thinks the QAUE has changed her habits and thus the new requirements become her conduct norms and will last for ever (IE8).

The internal quality monitoring system

The self-evaluation report and the perspective of respondents show that BNU already had an extensive and well-established framework for internal quality monitoring before the coming of the QAUE. There are student course evaluations each term, and their results are published by the Academic Affairs Office regularly. The Teaching Supervision Committee of the University conduct regular classroom observations, and the problems they find are reported to the Academic Affairs Office to deal with (BNU, 2008a, pp. 76-78).

Since the QAUE, firstly, "the frequency of the classroom observations operated by the Teaching Supervision Committee has risen, and it seems to be more institutionalised" (IB21). Secondly, the faculties/departments have also established their own teaching supervision committees to make classroom observations within the faculties and departments since 2005 (BNU, 2008a, p. 77). However, faculty leaders do not think these committees function properly in practice, and they feel there is more rhetoric than action (IB20). Thirdly, concerning student course evaluation, the evaluation instruments have been changed from paper versions to online versions and this is regarded as being a result of the improvement of school internet (ID14). The respondents also think "the QAUE has nothing to do with the ongoing revision of the evaluation indicators" (IE12). A notable change caused by the QAUE is that the University started to make more use of the internal quality evaluation results. For example, as mentioned before, there are stricter punitive measures for teachers' malpractices found by the Teaching Supervision Committee of the University. The

link between the results of student course evaluations and the professional promotion of teachers becomes closer. If a teacher fails in a course evaluation[14], his/her professional promotion will be deferred for one year. By and large, the approaches to the internal quality monitoring in BNU have not changed much because of the external evaluation - the QAUE.

5.4.4 Teaching and learning

Teaching contents

According to the perspective of respondents, as a top-status higher education institution, BNU always attached great importance to undergraduate education, and it especially encourages innovation in teaching contents and methods. For example, the University adopts incentive schemes, by which, teachers submit their project proposals and the approved projects are granted with appropriate funds. Since the QAUE, these incentive schemes have been reinforced. From 2005 to 2007, the University invested 7.3 million RMB in reforming curricula and teaching methods. In particular, it encourages teachers to conduct curriculum reform under the project of *Excellent Curricula,* which selects the excellent curricula and provides them with extra financial support. BNU also stimulates teachers to write text books and to conduct research on teaching. It has added the weight of text book publication and outcomes of research on teaching in teacher performance assessment, which is linked to their salaries and professional promotion (BNU, 2008a, pp. 56-62).

The incentive schemes have indeed encouraged some teachers to do research on teaching, conduct curriculum reform and write text books (II10). For example, a respondent, who was involved in a curriculum reform project, said:

> In fact, we also did the work [curriculum reform] before the QAUE, but without financial support. The University pays more attention to this work now. [...] The funding is not very generous, but it is better than nothing.

[14] The total score is 5.0. If a teacher gets a score less than 3.0, it means he/she fails.

> More importantly, with the project approved, I feel that my work has been appreciated. On the ground of this project, I can do more to develop the curriculum in future. However, the opportunities [of being funded] are limited, not available for every teacher. (IF22)

The leader of the Faculty of Chemistry also noted that a team of teachers in this faculty have been writing and publishing a series of text books for all of the chemistry curricula provided by teacher education programmes (IC15). However, as indicated by the respondents, only a small group of teachers can benefit from these incentive schemes. Thus, most teachers did not perceive visible change of curriculum designs and teaching contents caused by the QAUE (ID5, IE4, IG5, IH4 and II6).

Except for the growth of incentive schemes, BNU has enhanced the control over teaching contents and text book selection since the coming of the QAUE (BNU, 2008a, p. 62). Teaching contents have become more standardised. For example, if more than one teacher teaches the same curricula (for different groups of students), they have to use the same syllabus and examination papers, and the classes also should be scheduled at the same time (ID8). In addition, teachers need to report to the department the text books that they have selected for students. A respondent noted "there was this kind of regulations on paper before the QAUE as well, but they were not very explicit and had not been implemented as strictly as now" (ID5). Despite the increasing control over text books, teachers do not feel that their freedom to select teaching contents has been reduced (IB16, ID6 and II6). Teachers have the final say in their classrooms about what to teach.

Teaching methods

The self-evaluation report and the perspective of respondents indicate that BNU always advises teachers to adopt student-centred approaches instead of teacher-centred teaching practices. It encourages students to use inquiry-based learning, for example, through completing research assignments, either by team or

individual work, rather than only listening to teachers (BNU, 2008a, pp. 62-63). As a result of the QAUE, the University has raised the explicit requirements for teachers to use diverse teaching methods (IB15, ID5), but there are no specific strategies for carrying out this transformation. The respondents, both leaders and teachers, did not perceive visible change of daily teaching approaches caused by these requirements (IA25, IE4, IH5 and II6).

Furthermore, BNU has encouraged teachers to use advanced educational technology and teaching aids, such as multi-media assisted instruction and the Blackboard e-learning platform. BNU has organised teacher training for using educational technology, and the campaign of designing and using courseware (BNU, 2008a, pp. 63-64). Compared with the improvement of teaching methods *per se,* the efforts in promoting the use of teaching aids seem to have been more fruitful. The advancement of teaching facilities made the process easier. However, it is still debatable whether the multimedia assisted instruction is beneficial to teaching and learning activities. Some respondents think that it makes the teaching/learning process more convenient (IE2, Education). By contrast, some of them feel that sometimes the use of modern teaching aids goes against the aim of improving educational quality, especially for science subjects. A teacher said "now teachers play PowerPoint very quickly, which does not leave enough time for students to comprehend the contents. [...] In this regard, it seems not to be as good as the traditional way, writing on blackboards" (IH17, Chemistry).

Practical training

According to the self-evaluation report and the perspective of respondents, BNU started to pay more attention to practical training of undergraduate students to respond to the requirement of the QAUE in this respect (BNU, 2008a, pp. 65-69). For example, the experimental courses have increased notably, especially in science subjects, such as the Department of Chemistry in the sample (IC9). This has largely benefitted from the improvement of teaching facilities, such as the laboratories and experimental

equipment (IC8, IG10). Furthermore, some respondents also reported: "from the perspective of teaching conceptions, the practical training has been gradually accepted by the institutions, [...] and regarded as a key component of undergraduate education, since the quality assessment [QAUE]" (IB15).

At the same time, University leaders also conceded that there are still many difficulties in providing practical training for students in BNU. For example, "the inadequacy of funding is an important factor which has impeded the development of practical training courses, [...] [because] practical training needs much more teaching expenditure than the traditional classroom teaching" (IA11). It is especially difficult to conduct practical training outside universities, because the university-enterprise collaboration is not adequate.

> Unlike western countries, there is insufficient support from the society for student practical training in China. For example, student internship is not welcomed by many enterprises. [...] It is very difficult for universities to build networks with schools and other organisations to arrange placement learning. (IA11)

Graduation projects

According to the self-evaluation report and the perspective of respondents, the quality management of graduation projects was well-established in BNU before the QAUE. Thus, only slight adjustment has been made as a result of the external quality assessment. For example,

> It was not compulsory for undergraduate students to complete research proposals in BNU before the quality assessment [QAUE]. Now, according to the requirements [of the QAUE], students have to hand in research proposals in a fixed format. Supervisors need to give detailed comments on the proposals, [...] and "one word: approved" is not allowed. Both research proposals and comments need to be reviewed by the examiners at the institutional level. (IF7)

5.4.5 Teaching-research balance

Coordination at the institutional level

The self-evaluation report and the perspective of respondents show that BNU has put more emphasis on teaching in order to achieve a better balance between teaching and research as the QAUE required. From the perspective of ideology,

> The QAUE has made the University recognise that its main task is to educate students. 'Teaching is the fundamental mission of the University.' [...] This kind of statement has to be shown in the self-evaluation report. You have to profess this, whether or not it has been truly accepted and accomplished in your university, at least to manipulate the quality assessment. (IC3)

> During the period of preparing for the external quality assessment, University leaders always disseminated the ideas that teaching is very important and should be paid more attention; they encouraged teachers to make more commitment to teaching. (II3)

From the perspective of practice, firstly, BNU has given priority to undergraduate education in terms of funding allocation, as discussed previously (sub-section 5.4.1).

Secondly, the University has adjusted its staff policy. In order to strike a balance between teaching and research, BNU sets the posts with specific assignments (teaching only, research only, or both teaching and research) when appointing academic staff. The majority of academic staff are on the mixed posts with the assignments of both teaching and research. In the sample of this research, there is only one teacher respondent in the post specialising in teaching only, while all the other respondents, five teachers and three leaders, work on the mixed positions. Apart from this strategy that was used before, following the demands of the QAUE, BNU has requested that all of the undergraduate courses must be taught by teachers with the

qualification of *principal lecturer*. In the meanwhile, all professors and associate professors have to teach at least 32 hours of undergraduate courses every academic year. These have become explicit regulations, and have been implemented by the faculties and departments strictly. As a result, the proportions of undergraduate courses taught by professors and associate professors in BNU have risen, from 70.7% at the first term of the academic year 2006-2007 to 91.8% at the second term of 2007-2008 (BNU, 2008a, p. 25). Both the faculties, investigated in this present research, have the tradition of requiring senior academic staff to teach undergraduate students. Before the emergence of these regulations, most professors and associate professors taught undergraduate courses as well, although without the specific requirement for working time (IB8, IC24). Nevertheless, these new regulations still have significant impact on their staff assignment. As faculty leaders reported, because of the pressure of the QAUE, "our faculty [Faculty of Chemistry] has dismissed those lecturers without the titles of professor or associate professor from the posts" (IC24); "the old and famous professors in our faculty [Faculty of Education] also need to teach undergraduate courses [who usually did not do this before], at least at that term [the term when the external evaluators visited]" (IB8).

These new regulations seem to be very strict and fairly effective to push the senior academic staff to teach undergraduate students. However, the respondents conceded that it is very difficult to implement these regulations in the long term, because they are not completely compatible with other rules of the state. For example, professors have to teach undergraduate courses as requested; in the meanwhile, lecturers and associate professors also need to teach a certain amount of undergraduate courses to be qualified for professional promotion according to the current state rules. However, sometimes there are not so many courses for all of them to teach (ID18, IE14, IG10 and IH15). In this case, the faculties/departments have adopted a variety of strategies to handle the problem. For example, the Faculty of Education "arranges junior academics to teach adult students, such as correspondence courses and evening courses. They are also counted as their workloads" (IB9). Besides this strategy, the

Faculty of Chemistry "has also opened new elective courses and experimental courses, and so, in recent years, students have done much more experiments than before" (IG10). Moreover, many methods are used to manipulate the regulation which requires senior academic staff to teach compulsorily. For example, a respondent indicated that "many courses were lectured by professors in name only, but were taught by lecturers in reality, under the cover of team work" (IE14).

Thirdly, BNU has also changed its incentive schemes. It has adjusted the ways in which teachers' professional promotion and financial rewards are determined, by adding the weight attached to teaching performance. Both teaching workloads and effectiveness are taken into account. As mentioned before, when a teacher fails in student course evaluations, his/her professional promotion will be deferred no matter how excellent his/her research achievement is demonstrated to be. However, university leaders conceded that these existing devices cannot really measure teachers' commitment to teaching. "The teaching hours are not equal with the time that he/she has devoted to teaching, as we cannot see teachers' commitment to the preparations for the lectures" (IA24). At the same time, the respondents, both leaders and teachers, do not think student course evaluations can reflect the real teaching quality. In this case, the results of course evaluations are not used as an absolute criterion to judge teachers' teaching effectiveness in BNU (IA20). They admitted that it is very difficult for universities to find effective criteria by which teachers' commitment to teaching is measured. Hence, it is almost impossible to design fair and reasonable incentive schemes in this respect (IA24). "In contrast, it is much easier to measure research productivity in a quantitative way (IA24)". As a result, ironically, the publications about teaching (i.e. the outcomes of research on teaching) have often been used as an indicator to evaluate teachers' teaching performance (IG7).

In addition, as mentioned before (sub-section 5.4.1), the management of undergraduate courses has also become stricter. As a teacher described,

> Compared with postgraduate courses, you get more trouble when you

> swap the classes of undergraduate courses for emergency, [...] and you will be punished more if you are regarded as being guilty of malpractice in undergraduate classes [than in postgraduate classes]. (ID17)

However, in reality, only quite badly-performing teachers have been punished, very few cases in BNU (IC23, IE23). For example, out of the whole institution, only two teachers' professional promotions were deferred in 2006, because they were guilty of malpractice or failed in student course evaluations (BNU, 2008a, p. 78).

Coordination at the individual level

The teacher respondents indicated that teaching has been emphasised by the University in various ways. "Teachers have been somewhat convinced that teaching is the key task of the University, since the University and faculty leaders kept disseminating this idea" (II13). Furthermore, "due to the 'hard' demand for teaching workloads in professional promotion, teachers are more motivated to lecture undergraduate courses now [that before]" (IF14).

Nevertheless, all of the teacher respondents think that doing research still engages most of their time and energies (ID18, IE14, IG6, IH13 and II4), except for the one specialising in teaching only. According to the existing teacher performance assessment schemes, research is crucial to their academic career development, while the influence of teaching is quite limited. Some respondents hold, "publication is more important" (IH13); "without publication, you will be marginalised, and can not survive in Chinese universities" (IG6); "according to the existing assessment system of teacher performance, you are 'safe', as long as your teaching is not really poor; however, if you [teachers] do not have satisfactory research achievement, you will be in big trouble" (ID17). Teachers' professional promotion will not be impeded, as long as their teaching effectiveness is tolerable, and this is not difficult for the majority of teachers in BNU. However, the pressure from researching is much stronger. In this case, most teachers tend to devote themselves to researching.

5.5 Summary

BNU and its members have made all-out efforts to respond to the QAUE. The outcomes can be summarised as follows. Firstly, the teaching facilities and expenditure have improved significantly in BNU. The QAUE has not caused visible expansion in the number of teaching staff but the priorities of staff recruitment have been adjusted: people with diverse educational backgrounds were preferred. Secondly, BNU has clarified its mission and development purposes and its aspiration to develop special features has been raised. Thirdly, BNU has reinforced its quality management through setting up explicit regulations concerning strict disciplines for teachers and students and standards for completing teaching work. However, these new regulations have not been implemented properly after the QAUE. Fourthly, the impact of the QAUE on teaching and learning activities was limited, except for the increasing use of multimedia assisted instruction and the improvement of practical training. Fifthly, BNU has made efforts to achieve a better balance between teaching and research, through adjusting resource allocation and the incentive and mandatory schemes regarding teaching. However, these strategies have not produced profound effect, and doing research still engages most of the time and energies of individual academics.

In summary, this chapter detailed the outcomes that the QAUE has generated in BNU. The reasons why the intended impact of the QAUE has or has not occurred were explained in the BNU context. In the next chapter, I am going to discuss the second case, NWNU.

CHAPTER SIX: IMPACT OF THE QAUE ON NWNU

6.1 Introduction

This chapter details the findings from the second case, Northwest Normal University (NWNU). The chapter begins with a brief description of the University, with the aim of outlining the background on which this case study is based. The succeeding section presents the ways in which the University and its members responded to the QAUE. It is preceded by a focus on the impact of the QAUE on NWNU. Five dimensions of impact are addressed. They include resource commitment to undergraduate education, university identification, quality management, teaching and learning, and the balance between teaching and research.

6.2 A brief description of NWNU

Northwest Normal University (NWNU) is a leading university in Gansu Province. It grew out of the *National Peking Normal University* (Beijing Normal University) at the time when it moved to the Northwestern part of China, because of the Second World War during which Japan invaded Beijing (from 1937 to 1945). It was under the control of Gansu Province until 2009 when the MOE started to govern and sponsor the NWNU alongside with the local government (NWNU, 2010).

There are 18 faculties with 49 departments, and 101 research centres in NWNU, covering a variety of subjects from humanities and social science to science and engineering. Within these subjects, NWNU has established 59 undergraduate programmes, 92 master's degree as well as 26 doctoral degree conferral units. In 2009, some 34,900 students were enrolled in NWNU, including 14,550 undergraduate students, 3,595 full-time doctoral and master's students, 3,595 part-time master's students, and 15,350 adult students. 2,491 staff worked in NWNU in 2009, including 1,215 teaching staff (NWNU, 2010).

NWNU was in the first group of HEIs evaluated. The QAUE evaluators visited it in December, 2003, and judged its quality of undergraduate education to be "excellent". The self-assessment started from the end of 2002, and the whole process lasted for about one year. The year of 2004 was for its follow-up reforms (NWNU, 2003).

6.3 Responses of NWNU to the QAUE

The report on the follow-up reforms and the perspective of the respondents show that NWNU has made thorough efforts to respond to the QAUE. As the report states,

> NWNU has regarded the QAUE as a significant opportunity of improving itself, and as an important matter with the survival and long-term prosperity of the University, its reputation, and the vital interests of teachers and students. (NWNU, 2004, p. 1)

In this case, NWNU has adopted many measures to smooth the work of preparing for the quality assessment (NWNU, 2004, p. 1; IIB36). The University mobilised its staff and students in many ways, such as holding meetings and distributing publicity materials. Through these measures, the University tried to make its members aware of the significance of the quality assessment for the University as well as for themselves, and to impel them to cooperate with the University for the preparation work (IIC34). Consequently, "the quality assessment has been highly emphasised by every member of NWNU, from the University leaders to individual teachers and students" (IID30). The University has also established a temporary office which was responsible for the preparation work for the external quality assessment (IIA). Furthermore, NWNU has conducted mock evaluations several times before the site-visit of the QAUE evaluators (IIB30, IIC24).

The University has attached tremendous importance to the QUAE and thus it has tried every means to maximise its evaluation result. During the period of preparing for the evaluation, people were not allowed to make any mistakes. "Whoever screws up takes

the consequences. [...] For example, when the evaluators observe classes, if a teacher's performance is not satisfactory, he/she will be punished" (IIK1). This has caused huge mental pressures for teachers (IIJ24). During the site-visit time, NWNU has made every effort to please the evaluators (IIH1, III26 and IIK17), with the aim of getting a better evaluation result; corruption was even involved in the process (IIB32). Moreover, the University has also falsified many teaching documents, which look more satisfactory, as the respondents conceded (IIB1, IIC33, IID1, IIF1, IIH1, III26 and IIK1).

6.4 Impact of the QAUE on NWNU

6.4.1 Resource commitment

University infrastructure, teaching facilities and expenditure

According to the self-evaluation report and the perspective of the respondents, the infrastructure and teaching facilities in NWNU have been improved significantly because of the impulse of the QAUE. The University is located in western China, where the economic development lags behind the eastern areas. Public funding for the University is always insufficient. Especially, since the student enrolment expanded from the end of the 1990s, the gap between the existing teaching facilities and the increasing demands of students has become larger and larger (NWNU, 2003, p. 13; IIA7 and IIH1). In this context, the QAUE emerged, and it has pushed the University to improve its infrastructure and teaching facilities. The University has improved its laboratories and experimental equipment, constructed new buildings for teaching, increased multi-media classrooms and digital recording classrooms for micro-teaching, and purchased many books for libraries; in addition, it has built a new gymnasium and renewed its sports facilities (NWNU, 2003, pp. 15-18; IIB6, IIC4, IID5, IIE3, IIF2, IIH2, IIJ2 and IIK2). The improvement of university infrastructure and teaching facilities was perceived as being the most considerable impact of the QAUE on NWNU by some respondents (IIC4, IID5, IIF2, IIH2 and IIJ2). However, the self-evaluation report shows that the laboratory accessibility for undergraduate

students (one of the sub-indicators of the QAUE) is not very satisfactory, although the University has endeavoured to improve it (NWNU, 2003, p. 36). It means the improvement of laboratories and experimental equipment has not contributed to undergraduate education as much as expected. This was attributed to the low-efficient laboratory management, which has not been adjusted properly within a short time (NWNU, 2003, p. 40).

The self-evaluation report indicates the *four kinds of funding for teaching* in NWNU have risen steadily. The increased funding for teaching facilities and expenditure, on the one hand, was from the grants of the local government - Gansu Province. On the other hand, the University took advantage of the *China Western Development*[15] and raised funding from various sources, such as the national debt fund and the Japanese bank loans (NWNU, 2003, p. 14). Although the University had made every effort to raise money (IIA26), the external evaluators still thought the teaching expenditure was not enough to meet the needs of university development and thus suggested that the local government should invest more in NWNU (NWNU, 2004, p. 3). Thus, it became the main duty of the University to increase teaching expenditure and improve university infrastructure, during the follow-up reform period (NWNU, 2004, pp. 12-13).

University leaders admitted that the QAUE has strongly urged the local government to invest in higher education (IIA8, IIB6 and IIC6). Without the quality assessment, the university infrastructure could never have been improved within such a short time (IIA8, III5 and IIJ4). However, they also indicated the limited consequences of the QAUE and the problems it has caused. Due to the low financial capacities of the western provinces, "no matter how much they [the local governments in the west] are concerned about [higher] education and they give priority to it, they still could not

[15] China Western Development is a policy adopted by the Chinese government to boost its less developed western regions. The main strategies include the development of infrastructure, enticement of foreign investment, efforts on ecological protection, promotion of education, and talent retention.

provide as much funding as the eastern provinces do" (IIA7). Thus, despite a significant improvement of infrastructure in NWNU, there is still a big gap between NWNU and those universities in the east (IIA1, IIF2 and IIH2).

The utilisation rate of these suddenly-increased teaching facilities, such as experimental equipment and library books, was also criticised by the respondents. One of them said "they [the leaders of NWNU] suddenly buy into a great amount of the same types of apparatuses, which cannot be fully used by students, and will become out-dated soon. It is such a waste" (IIK2). The gradual renewal of teaching facilities seems to be more advisable than the sudden improvement, and the continuous investment seems to be more suitable for universities than the lump sum appropriation driven by the external force (IIE6). And it appears to be easier to improve the teaching facilities *per se* than its management within a short time. In particular, the QAUE itself is regarded as being a very costly way of stimulating local governments to invest in higher education (IIA35, IIB6).

In addition, some respondents stressed that the standardised requirements of the QAUE for teaching facilities, without considering the big disparity between the east and the west, have imposed a big economic burden on the institutions in western China. For example, "the construction of gymnasium was a big challenge for us. The requirement is stern, clearly beyond the ability of our institution [NWNU], but we were compelled to meet it" (III25).

Teaching staff

The self-evaluation report and the perspective of respondents show that, due to the backward economic development and adverse natural environment of western China, brain drain remains serious in universities there. For example, from 1995 to 2000, NWNU lost 173 academic staff with high academic qualifications (master's and above) (NWNU, 2003, p. 7). In this context, "it is difficult for the University to keep its own talents, to say nothing of attracting academics from other places" (IIB9). Thus,

on the one hand, NWNU has designed the strategies for attracting talented academics with preferential treatment, but they turn out not to be very effective (IIB9, IIC5). The NWNU's preferential treatment could not compete with the offers of those eastern universities. For example, the leader of the Faculty of Philosophy and Law indicated that this faculty is always understaffed (IIB9). At the same time, the University has also endeavoured to recruit senior academics to work as part-time staff here, as a way of sharing human resources with eastern universities. On the other hand, NWNU has paid more attention to keeping the existing staff and making them more qualified through staff development schemes. For example, it has encouraged the academics to take part-time postgraduate degree education. It has also provided in-service training for junior staff to improve their teaching skills (NWNU, 2003, p. 8; IIC5, IID6 and IIE4).

In order to meet the QAUE's requirements for student-teacher ratios and the qualifications of teaching staff, NWNU appointed a great amount of new teachers with high academic qualifications before the site-visit of evaluators (IID2). It also created many opportunities for the existing staff to take part-time postgraduate education with the aim of upgrading their academic qualifications (IIC6). Nevertheless, the external evaluators still thought that the academic qualifications of junior staff in NWNU were fairly low and suggested that the University adopt efficient measures to improve this situation. Thus, this became one of the most important duties for the University to perform during the period of the follow-up reforms (NWNU, 2004, pp. 11-12). After six years, when I started my research in NWNU, the qualifications of academic staff had risen notably. The number of teaching staff grew, from 1,070 in 2003 to 1,215 in 2009. The number of staff with PhD degrees more than doubled, from 125 to 260, and those with master's degrees increased from 372 to 577 (NWNU, 2010).

The respondents believe that even if there was no QAUE, the improvement in teaching staff would have occurred anyway (IIE4, IIH3, III4, IIIJ3 and IIK3). Student

enrolment expansion requires the growth in the number of teaching staff; the rise of the minimal requirement of academic qualifications for new staff, from master's to PhD degree in NWNU, seems to be a consequence of the "degree inflation" in China (IID4, IIE6, IIH3, III3 and IIK3). In addition, attracting talented senior staff is mainly a response to the fierce competition among HEIs, but not only to the requirement of the QAUE (III4); meanwhile, the difficulties of universities in the west to do this could not be solved by any forms of external pressures (IIB9). The respondents stressed that the improvement of teaching staff needs long-term efforts (IIE4, IIH3 and IIJ3). However, the QAUE has pushed the University to accomplish the change within a short time, in a very hasty way. As a result, manipulation had to be involved in the process. For example, a teacher reported that NWNU opened part-time postgraduate courses itself and awarded degrees to its staff without adequate academic training, which was "just a way of manipulating the examination of the QAUE, but not helpful for the real improvement of their academic competences at all" (IIE4).

6.4.2 University identification

University mission and development purposes

According to the self-evaluation report, NWNU aims to:

> [...] become a comprehensive university, being excellent at teacher education, with the advantages of education, art and the pure theoretical subjects of both arts and science. [...] The University aims to perform both teaching and research roles simultaneously, [...] and aims to become a top-ranking institution in the western China and a high-status one in the whole China. (NWNU, 2003, p. 4)

Obviously, in terms of hierarchical status, NWNU intends to be a top-ranking university in the western region as well as a high-level one in China. As for the functional mission, it aims to become a comprehensive university and excel at teacher education. It has an equal commitment to teaching and research.

The respondents stressed that it has become more and more necessary for university leaders to think about the mission and development purposes of universities and to identify them independently since the 1990s, in the context that "universities have enjoyed more autonomy rather than only following the state's orders to train students at the time of the planned economy" (IIA5). Considering the difficulty of recruiting students in the near future due to the expansion of the higher education system and the demographic decline in China, "only those universities with explicit purposes, their own excellences and special features could survive and prosper in the fierce market competition" (IIB4). However, before the coming of the QAUE, "the mission and development purposes of the University [NWNU] were quite vague and in dispute" (IIB3). In this context, the external quality assessment has provided an opportunity for the University leaders to think it over (IIA3, IIB4 and IIE5).

The respondents reported that the process of identifying the University mission and development purposes involved the reflection of University leaders and discussions between them. The external evaluators also offered some advice. For example, they suggested that the University should pay more attention to its advantage in teacher education and hence it could play a more outstanding role in western China (IIA4, IIB4). Before that, NWNU was on the way of transforming from a teacher training institution to a comprehensive university, as other teaching training institutions are doing in China. Based on the internal discussions and external suggestions, the mission and development purposes were gradually adjusted and finalised, as articulated above. Furthermore, the faculties and departments were also required to reconsider "what kind of students they are going to produce [the expected learning outcomes of students from the undergraduate programmes]" (IIC3).

Pushed by the QAUE, the mission and development purposes of NWNU have become more explicit and legitimate. However, the guidance of the mission statement, which is shown on front-line reports, on the university operation in practice is doubtful. For example, despite professing that it will give priority to teacher education (IIC2, IID2),

NWNU's step of developing non-teacher training programmes has never slowed down. For example, a new faculty (Faculty of Tourism) has been recently established. This phenomenon was explained by the respondents: NWNU intends to expand student enrolment (IIB12, IID10 and IIE7), since it could get more funding from the government and more revenues from tuition fees with larger enrolment; furthermore, non-teacher training programmes usually charge more than teacher education programmes. In this case, it is not surprising that NWNU is keen to establish non-teacher training programmes.

The development of special features

The self-evaluation report reveals that NWNU has summarised its three special features, as follows.

- Firstly, NWNU has created the teacher education mode for the minorities, which has promoted the development of basic education in western China;
- Secondly, NWNU has implemented a series of curriculum reform projects, which has contributed to the continuous improvement of undergraduate education quality;
- Thirdly, NWNU has formed a vibrant university culture, which is helpful for improving the general competence of students (NWNU, 2003, p. 37).

Among them, only the first one was regarded as being a special feature of NWNU by the external evaluators (NWNU, 2004, p. 3). University leaders also feel that, NWNU plays an irreplaceable role in teacher education in western China and especially for minorities, which is definitely one of its special features (IIA1, IIA4), but the other two are not quite entitled to special features.

University leaders admitted that Chinese universities have the desire to create their special features and hence to improve their own competitiveness. With the external impulse of the QAUE, their motivation to do so has became stronger. Unfortunately, in reality most of them are still similar and very few institutions have their own

special features (IIC30). "Usually, the top-status universities have more independent thinking and creative ideas, [...] while the other institutions are used to imitate them" (IIA5). There seems to be a cleavage between the ambitions of most universities to develop special features and their institutional capacities for its attainment.

6.4.3 Quality management

The administrative regulations and approaches

Based on the self-evaluation report and the perception of the respondents, in order to meet the requirements of the QAUE, NWNU has amended its administrative regulations, making them more explicit and stricter (NWNU, 2003, p. 27). For example, the University re-designed the *Regulations for the Recognition and Disposal of Teachers' Malpractices* and made the disciplines stricter (NWNU, 2003, p. 11). It prescribes that teachers who are late for classes or leave early, or use mobile phones in class are recognised as being guilty of malpractices. If so, a penalty will be imposed on the involved teachers, by deferring their professional promotion for three years, and docking their wages of three months (IIB13). These regulations have been implemented strictly. During the period of preparing for the QAUE, seven teachers were judged as being guilty of malpractices and had been punished (NWNU, 2003, p. 12). As a result of these strict regulations, "basically, there are no phenomena of coming late for classes nowadays in NWNU" (IIC19); "teachers' punctuality has been enhanced" (IIF1, IIJ1). The respondents reported that the University continues implementing these regulations, after the QAUE finished (IIC19, IIH15). However, they have only imposed constraints on those badly-performing staff, who are just a very small part in NWNU, and do not have much impact on the majority of teachers (IIA15, IIB20 and IID19).

With regard to the necessity of these strict disciplines, University leaders admit that most teachers are self-disciplined out of their intrinsic professional ethics rather than constrained by the extrinsic regulations (IIB20). However, "the changing social environment, the marketisation of higher education, and the student enrolment

expansion have made university administration more and more complicated. In this context, it is not enough to depend only on teachers' self-discipline" (IIB20). So, the establishment of regulations is necessary.

Basically, most teachers agree with the idea above (III9, IIK10), but they do not think the existing regulations are appropriate. They noted that these regulations were established in a top-down way, without considering the real situation on the bottom (IIF14). They emphasised that teachers have their own professional ethics, and they are always self-disciplined, because they are supposed to be the models for students. Thus, the over-strict regulations seem to be unnecessary. As the respondents said, "when I request my students not to use mobile phones in class, I am also requesting myself to do the same" (IIH14); and "nobody comes late or leaves early on purpose" (IIF13). They also indicated that the existing regulations are stern, since they do not give full consideration to the individual needs (IIF13). Some respondents stressed that "it is unavoidable for teachers to be late or absent sometimes because of emergencies" (IIF13, IIH14 and IIJ7). More importantly, teachers do not think these regulations are useful for assuring teaching quality: "being late for one or two minutes does not mean that the teaching quality of this class will decline" (IIJ7); "these regulations have made teachers very stressed" (IIG8, IIJ24); in contrast, "the real high-quality education is produced in a relaxed academic environment rather than under constraint" (IIH16, IIG8). Most of the teacher respondents admitted that their enthusiasm for teaching and job satisfaction has diminished because of these over-strict regulations (IIE4, IIF14, IIG8, IIH16 and IIJ7). "Now, many teachers are not willing to teach undergraduate courses. If you do not teach, you will never be caught of being late or something, and will not get punished" (IIJ7). Furthermore, some teachers feel, as intellectuals, their dignity has been offended by these over-strict regulations rooted in distrust (IIG8, IIH16).

Besides the stricter administrative regulations in terms of disciplines, the University also amended *The NWNU Norms of Teaching Administration* in 2003, in order to meet

the requirements of the QAUE. The Norms specify the procedures and standards for completing teaching work, which mainly involve teaching documents and archives management (NWNU, 2003, p. 27). For example, there are standardised formats for student examination papers and other teaching documents (III8); and all teaching documents should be collected and archived for storage and reference (IID20, IIF11 and III8). The respondents think what the University did before was not satisfactory (IID20, III3), and the QAUE has provided the normative procedures of teaching for NWNU to follow (IIF11, IIJ8). Now, the staff get used to the new standardised requirements for the formats of teaching documents and the procedures of collecting and storing them (III3). Although the respondents mentioned that the adjustment process during the period of preparing for the quality assessment increased their workloads (IID20), they believe that the University has indeed benefited from the standardised procedures (IIE1, IIF12 and III3), especially the archive system, which "makes it very convenient for us to refer to the old teaching documents" (IID20). These new procedures and standards for completing teaching work have been well sustained in NWNU (IID39, IIF11 and III3).

The internal quality monitoring system

The self-evaluation report and the perspective of respondents show that NWNU already established its own internal quality monitoring and feedback system before the emergence of the QAUE. There are classroom observations, operated by the Teaching Supervision Committee of the University and the committee of every faculty/department, and student course evaluations of each term. In addition, every class has a secret student investigator, who is responsible for reporting the inappropriate behaviour of teachers to the Academic Affairs Office. The Academic Affairs Office passes the problems, found by the teaching supervision committees and student investigators, to the faculties/departments that the teachers work in, and these faculties/departments are responsible for handling these problems (NWNU, 2003, pp. 27-28). The results of student course evaluations are not published information in NWNU; the faculties/departments only give feedback to those teachers, who got

unsatisfactory results, in private (IIH19).

The approaches to the internal quality monitoring in NWNU have not changed essentially as a result of the QAUE. However, internal quality monitoring, as a performance indicator of the QAUE, has got more concerns from the University and more emphasis has been put on it. As indicated by a respondent, "although there is no essential change, the awareness that the internal quality monitoring system is important and we need to do it better has been raised" (IID22). Thus, NWNU has made efforts to improve the system (IIB27, IIF19 and IIH22). Firstly, the University has established the individual responsibility system, which means the heads of the University and every faculty/department are designated to take the responsibility of assuring teaching quality (NWNU, 2003, pp. 25-26; IID31). This system has been sustained and embedded into the university management (IID31).

Secondly, the frequency of classroom observations conducted by the teaching supervision committees has risen. As described by the leader of the Faculty of Philosophy and Law:

> Nowadays, the faculty pays more attention to classroom observations. After listening to a class, a discussion meeting is held, which both the evaluators and the lecture attend. Through discussions, the suggestions about teaching contents and methods are offered to the teacher when it is necessary, to help him/her to make improvement. (IIB26)

On the one hand, some respondents feel the classroom observations and the follow-up reviews are very helpful for the improvement of teachers' teaching competencies, especially for junior academics, which can help them to become qualified university teachers sooner (IIG1, IIH15). Based on peer review, the suggestions from the internal evaluators "could focus on the essential problems of teaching contents and so are more convincing. [...] These are more useful, compared with those trivial suggestions proposed by laymen, such as the QAUE evaluators" (IIB26). On the other hand, some

respondents complained about the control over teaching contents through the classroom scrutiny and the surveillance of secret student investigators:

> When preparing for the examination of the external evaluators, the University strongly stressed that teachers are not allowed to talk the things unrelated to the curriculum syllabus in class. (III10)

> In order to avoid crossing the line, teachers tend to follow the syllabus closely. (IIJ5)

> This has largely constrained teachers' freedom [spontaneous behaviour], especially for those in social science subjects. As a result, the thoughtful academics do not dare to express their individual opinions on some sensitive social problems, especially in front of the secret student 'spies'. Hence, students have no chance to hear the ideas which are different from what the government says and to develop critical thinking. [...] The lack of critical thinking is clearly a big shortcoming of Chinese education, both in basic and in higher education. It is such a pity! [...] Because of these ridiculous restraints, universities would no longer be the front of disseminating creative and independent thoughts (III11).

Thirdly, with regard to the student course evaluation in NWNU, the evaluation instruments have changed recently from paper versions to online versions, and also from voluntary to compulsory participation, which means students have to evaluate courses that they have taken at the end of every term, otherwise they are not allowed to register for the new courses in the next term. The respondents do not think these adjustments are related to the QAUE, but should be mainly regarded as a result of the information technology advancement (IIB25). A visible change caused by the QAUE is the increased use of internal quality evaluation results. Now the course evaluation results are directly linked to the awards for excellent teaching. It has also become a crucial factor of determining the academic career progression of teachers. To be

eligible for professional promotion, teachers must have good or excellent course evaluation results. As long as a teacher fails in student course evaluations, his/her professional promotion will be deferred, no matter how excellent his/her research achievement is (NWNU, 2003, p. 28).

6.4.4 Teaching and Learning

Teaching contents

The self-evaluation report and the report on the follow-up reforms show that NWNU has initiated teaching reforms since 2001, which involved both teaching contents and teaching methods. The University also allocated appropriate funds for the research on teaching (NWNU, 2003, pp. 18, 27-28). Pushed by the QAUE, the University has increased the awards for excellent teaching effectiveness, and added the financial support for curriculum reform (NWNU, 2004, p. 9). University leaders think these incentive schemes have contributed to the improvement of teaching quality, but to a limited extent (IIB19, IIC18). As a faculty leader explained, "with the financial support [from the projects of curriculum reform], teachers can possess more resources. With these resources, they could enrich teaching contents, reform teaching methods, improve teaching instruments, and the like" (IIB19). "However, the assurance and improvement of teaching quality could not depend only on a few projects of curriculum reform. It needs extensive efforts" (IIB13).

Besides these incentive schemes, the faculties/departments of NWNU have amended the syllabus of every curriculum (IIC3), in order to respond to the external quality assessment. However, the respondents feel this amendment is just a symbolic action, with the aim of manipulating the external quality assessment; it did not generate essential effects on the class teaching (IIF7). A respondent said:

> The curriculum syllabuses have not been really followed by teachers. For example, although there is only one curriculum syllabus for one course, the teachers who teach the same course have their own understanding of

> the knowledge [...] and ways of delivering it, [...] [and hence] the teaching contents vary from person to person. (IIH6)

Furthermore, NWNU has designed the new regulations to strengthen the management of the text book selection (NWNU, 2003, p. 21): "teachers report the text books that they suggest to the dean of the department; if the dean approves, the suggested text books will be passed to the teaching committee of the faculty for authorisation" (IIB14). The new regulation prefers teachers to use the classic text books recommended by the MOE (IIB13, IIC9, IID12 and IIJ5). "If not, the teachers must provide convincing reasons, and the text books that they suggest need to go through strict censorship" (IIB14). Despite these regulations, teachers did not feel that their freedom to decide what to teach has been diminished (IIC10, IID15 and IIH6). Nevertheless, they do not agree with the requirement for standardising text books and especially oppose the requirement that all universities in the whole country use the same text books (IIE8, IIH6).

By and large, the QAUE has not provoked visible change of teaching contents in NWNU. In the context that the MOE controls the basic courses of every undergraduate programme in China, the respondents do not think there is much room left for universities to change teaching contents of compulsory courses. Thus, change mainly occurred in elective courses in NWNU (IIG7, IIJ5). Even the change of elective courses is not related to the QAUE much, in their opinions (IIA14, IIB13, IIE8, IIF8, IIG4, IIH8 and IIK5). In addition to the natural advancement of subject knowledge, they think the changing needs of social and economic development is the main driving force behind the adjustment of course contents in NWNU (IIC12, IID18, IIF9, IIG7, IIH8, III6 and IIJ9). For example, the curriculum reform of basic education has given rise to the new requirements for school teachers. Accordingly, the curriculum contents of teacher training programmes have been adjusted in NWNU (IID18, IIF31 and IIH8). Furthermore, the respondents noted that the QAUE evaluators are not peers at the subject level; without sufficient professional knowledge,

these evaluators did not offer any suggestions on improving teaching contents (IIG4). In this case, its impact on this dimension is limited.

Teaching methods

According to the self-evaluation report and the perspective of respondents, NWNU always encourages the adoption of more student-centred teaching approaches and inquiry-based teaching and learning. In order to respond to the requirements of the QAUE for advanced teaching methods and teaching aids, NWNU has provided teachers with pedagogical training, such as inquiry-based teaching and multi-media assisted instruction; at the same time, it has launched the awards for using multi-media assisted instruction (NWNU, 2003, p. 21). The improvement of teaching facilities, the training as well as the incentive schemes have indeed promoted the use of educational technology in NWNU. For example, a faculty leader noted that "through the training, teachers have been convinced of the advantages of courseware. After that, teachers would like to use courseware even if without any incentive measures" (IIB15).

As for multi-media assisted teaching, most of the respondents think that it is helpful, making the teaching and learning process more convenient for teachers and more visual for students (IIB15, IID5, IIE3 and IIH2). Nevertheless, they think using teaching aids does not mean the reform or improvement of teaching methods (IIH11). Some of them even feel that the use of multi-media assisted instruction sometimes goes against the aim of improving teaching quality (IIH11, IIK7). One of the respondents said:

> The multi-media assisted teaching has made things worse. Now, some lazy and irresponsible teachers do not even prepare lessons. They just scan the text book, show it on PowerPoint slices and read it to students in class. (IIK7)

Despite the increased use of teaching aids, the respondents do not think teaching

methods *per se* have changed in NWNU caused by the QAUE (IIC16, IID14, IIE9, IIG4, IIH7, III7, IIJ5 and IIK5). They feel that the quality assessment "has not affected the key activities occurring between teachers and students" (IIA12). They tried to explain this phenomenon. Some respondents indicated that an absolute definition of "good teaching" does not exist since it depends on what kind of teaching conceptions one holds. (IIA12, IIF21). "When reviewing one class, the two QAUE evaluators gave completely different suggestions. [...] One of them said interactive teaching approach was appropriate for this class, but the other one thought it was not necessary" (III7). Moreover, the QAUE evaluators are not peers at the subject level; thus, they often reviewed the classes where they were not specialists, and hence their suggestions are "quite weak and superficial, not professional" (IIB35, IIG4).

> For example, the experts in science came to review a law class in my faculty [Faculty of Philosophy and Law]. In this case, they can only correct the trivial problems of teaching techniques, such as the teachers' blackboard-writing and voices, etc., [...] but can not point out the essential problems of the class. This is kind of meaningless. (IIB35)

The respondents also emphasised that it needs long-term efforts in every way to change teaching methods, which can not be suddenly accomplished due to an impulse of the QAUE (IIC16). It seems to be very hard to change teaching methods through external forces, in a top-down way (IIA12). Some respondents suggested "sending teachers to elite universities and learning from them" (IIG12). In this way, teachers can experience the advanced teaching methods at first hand, by adopting the role of students. They believe this will be very helpful for teachers to improve their teaching approaches (IID13, IIG12).

Practical training

According to the self-evaluation report and the perspective of respondents, NWNU has paid more attention to practical training. It has increased the practice-oriented curriculum component (NWNU, 2003, pp. 22-23). For example, the University has

built new laboratories and increased experimental courses, and extended the time of student internship (IIB17, IIC14). The respondents feel that this change is a response not only to the requirement of the QAUE but also to the needs of labour market for students' practical abilities (IIB17, IIC14). The advancement of teaching facilities caused by the QAUE, such as the laboratories and experimental equipment, has made the improvement of practical training in NWNU possible.

The development of practical training has contributed to the improvement of students' practical abilities as well as the adjustment of teaching conceptions in the university, with more emphasis on practical training. As a faculty leader said,

> Previously, the lectures of social science subjects, such as law, were mainly descriptive, which means teachers described the concepts and knowledge system and imparted the subject knowledge to students. [...] Nowadays, with the laboratories, students have more chances to get engaged in the classes. For example, we have moot court now, and students can do mock trials. These practical training courses are helpful for improving students' practical abilities, [...] and they have also brought the transformation of teachers' teaching conceptions and their teaching approaches, [since] it is easier to carry out inquiry-based learning now [than before]. (IIB6)

Graduation projects

NWNU has made a great deal of effort to improve the quality of students' dissertations and graduation projects, since the QAUE (NWNU, 2004, p. 11; IIB21, IIC20).

> Basically, the requirements of the dissertations of undergraduate students are the same with those for master's students now. They need to hand in research proposals and pass viva voce examinations [at the departmental level]. [...] The dissertations marked as being "excellent" even need to pass the second time of viva voce at the faculty level. [...] The procedures

are more complete than before. (IIB21)

Through these, "students need to get through the hard training for research ethics. Plagiarism is forbidden. [...] They can practice every procedure of completing dissertations. This is helpful for improving their general competences" (IIB22).

After the QAUE finished, the requirements for students' dissertations and graduation projects still exist rhetorically. However, their practical influence has been lessened. A faculty leader indicated that students could not commit to their dissertations as much as expected; the enhancement of quality management does not mean quality improvement (IIC20). He reported:

> Students write their dissertations in the final year, when they are busy with job hunting [which is more significant for their future]. In fact, they can not get down to their dissertations, so the quality is not very satisfactory. [...] Of course, if without these management [quality assurance] mechanisms, the situation might be even worse. (IIC20)

6.4.5 Teaching-research balance

Coordination at the institutional level

According to the self-evaluation report and the perspective of respondents, NWNU always emphasises undergraduate education. As a result of the QAUE, teaching has got more attention from the University. On the "front-stage" documents, NWNU professed that it has achieved a right balance between teaching and other affairs. As described in the self-evaluation report, "in NWNU, the leaders are responsible for assuring teaching quality; research is beneficial to teaching; administration serves teaching; funding and logistics accommodate teaching" (NWNU, 2003, p. 37).

The specific approaches that NWNU has used to get a better balance between teaching and research can be summarised as follows. Firstly, NWNU has increased financial support for undergraduate education.

> Usually, the University tends to concentrate its limited funding on the advanced experimental equipment in order to produce more research outcomes. [...] However, the QAUE has pushed it [NWNU] to invest in teaching facilities for undergraduate education, i.e. the basic experimental equipment. (IIA21)

> A certain percentage of tuition fees must be used for undergraduate education. [...] This has been guaranteed through the public financial audit. (IIA28)

However, University leaders conceded that the priority given to teaching in terms of resource allocation probably could not last long. "In the long term, the investment in research is more imperative" (IIA21).

Secondly, in order to reconcile the tension between teaching and research, NWNU always sets the posts with specific assignments (teaching only, research only, or both teaching and research). Teachers can opt for the posts according to their own interests and expertise (IID26). In order to meet the requirements of the QAUE, the University has requested professors and associate professors to teach a certain number of undergraduate courses (IID26). Most of the respondents agree with this request. They think professors have high research achievements, and so they can provide the latest knowledge for students and share their research experience with them, and this will be beneficial to the quality improvement of undergraduate education (IIA23, IID26, IIF23, IIG17 and IIH26). However, the self-evaluation report and the respondents conceded that this regulation has not been satisfactorily implemented in NWNU (NWNU, 2003, p. 36). People did not perceive visible change caused by this regulation. The respondents said "in principle, professors have to teach undergraduate courses, [...] but in reality [laughing], who knows" (IIE14)? "Most of the undergraduate courses are still taught by lecturers and associate professors" (IIH26).

Thirdly, NWNU has adjusted its incentive schemes in order to stimulate teachers to devote themselves to teaching. For example, the University has increased the awards for excellent teaching effectiveness and the funding for research projects on teaching, such as curriculum reform, as mentioned before. Now, the weight attached to these awards and projects has been added, equal to research outcomes, in promotion considerations. However, the respondents indicated the actual effects of these adjustments were limited. Firstly, despite the increased funding for research on teaching, teachers still prefer to carry out those non-teaching-related research projects. A faculty leader explained this phenomenon:

> Those projects [non-teaching-related research projects] are more attractive for teachers, because they can produce more publications, [...] and they have stronger influence within certain academic fields, [...] and hence are more helpful for teachers to get peer esteem. [...] More importantly, they [the non-teaching-related research projects] could be connected with other studies that teachers are doing or would like to do in future. With these connections, more research outcomes might come out. In contrast, the research on teaching is kind of isolated, and less likely to form the "group effects". (IIB24)

Furthermore, it is very difficult to measure the teaching effectiveness in a quantitative way (IIA20, IIC21). "There are no absolute standards of 'good teaching'; the only quantitative way available now is the student course evaluation; it is clearly not reliable" (IIH25). In this case, although teaching and research were equally valued in teachers' performance assessment and professional promotion rhetorically, both the rewards and penalties in terms of teaching have limited effects in practice. For example, NWNU has stressed that a teacher's professional promotion will be deferred if he/she fails in student course evaluations. However, a faculty leader confirmed that "this sanction has never happened, at least in my faculty [Faculty of Philosophy and Law]" (IIB28). The respondents indicated that "compared with research outcomes, teaching effectiveness is not a crucial factor of securing professional promotion of

academics; the requirement in this respect is rather flexible" (IIA20). The incentive schemes concerning teaching are largely based on the class hours that a teacher has worked rather than his/her teaching effectiveness (IIF22, IIK14). Comparatively, it is much easier to assess and compare research performance between staff. As a result, ironically, these incentive schemes have encouraged teachers to carry out research on teaching rather than teaching activities *per se* (IIH25).

Fourthly, a faculty leader noted that the strict administrative regulations, as described before, are helpful for assuring teachers' commitment to teaching. He stressed "if the University can sustain implementing those regulations, teachers would keep committing to teaching" (IIC21). However, this idea has not been confirmed by teachers. They do not think the strict regulations have profound effects on teachers' devotion to teaching. Instead, most of them feel that their enthusiasm for teaching and job satisfaction have diminished because of these over-strict administrative regulations (IIE4, IIF14, IIG8, IIH16 and IIJ7).

Coordination at the individual level

According to the perspective of teachers, they have perceived increased concerns about teaching in NWNU caused by the QAUE, through the stricter management and more financial incentives (IIH24, IIJ15). However, the impact of these strategies on their behaviour is very slight (IIG17, IIH24 and IIK24). Doing research still engages most of their time and energies (IIF22, III16 and IIJ15). On the one hand, research achievements dominate professional progression of academics. The respondents said:

> No matter how excellent your teaching effectiveness is, you could never get promotion, without publications and research funding. (IIH24)

> When the University [NWNU] assesses teachers' performance, it can only measure the class hours that a teacher has worked rather than his/her teaching effectiveness. [...] In contrast, it is very easy to assess research outcomes; and if you [teachers] can not meet the quantitative requirement,

you will be punished. (IIF22)

To a large extent, teachers' commitment is steered by the indicators of staff performance assessment. The assessment system, which is dominated by research achievements, is a strong extrinsic force that drives teachers to carry out research (IIF22). Moreover, the respondents indicated that, in the academic world, people without research achievements could not get peer esteem, and thus they have intrinsic motivation to commit to research as well (IIH24).

On the whole, despite these strategies, the respondents, both leaders and teachers, do not think the situation of overemphasising research could be changed radically. On the one hand, the actual effects of these strategies on the daily practice of academics are limited, as explained above. This means even if universities would like to give priority to teaching, it is difficult to make it come true. On the other hand, in the context that the government assesses universities according to their research achievements, it seems to be impossible for universities to downplay the importance of research (IIA20, IIB23 and III17). A University leader explained:

> This imbalance [between teaching and research] will never disappear. The QAUE can not solve the problem. [...] Actually, this is related to the system used by the state to evaluate HEIs; that is totally based on the number of publications and their impact factors. [...] Consequently, university leaders have no choices; they have to make all-out effort to maximise the research productivity of their institutions. (IIB23)

In this context, "although leaders of both the University [NWNU] and the faculties/departments always profess that teaching is the fundamental task of the University rhetorically, [...] in reality, research still plays a dominant role in the performance assessment of teachers." (IIH24). Thus, it is not surprising that "teaching had only been emphasised for about one year during the period of preparing for the QAUE; after that, the concerns on it gradually diminished" (IIK14).

6.5 Summary

NWNU has made thorough efforts to meet the requirements of the QAUE. The main effects of the QAUE include the following dimensions. Firstly, NWNU has improved its teaching facilities and increased teaching expenditure considerably. The number of teaching staff, especially those with high academic qualifications, has grown notably. Secondly, NWNU has clarified its mission and development purposes on the official documents, but their actual effects on the university operation are quite slight. There has not been visible improvement in developing special features, although the University had the aspiration to do this. Thirdly, NWNU has strengthened its quality management, by establishing strict disciplines and the standards for completing teaching work. The influence of the strict disciplines on the majority of teachers is quite slight, while the standardised requirements for teaching documents and teaching procedures are implemented properly. NWNU has also adjusted its internal quality monitoring system. Fourthly, the impact of the QAUE on teaching and learning activities were negligible in NWNU, except for the increasing use of multimedia-assisted instruction and the improvement of practical training. NWNU has also enhanced the quality management of students' graduation projects, but this was not sustained after the QAUE finished. Fifthly, NWNU has increased resource allocation for teaching and adjusted the incentive schemes and sanctions with more emphasis on the teaching performance of academics. However, these strategies have not generated a better balance between teaching and research in NWNU as expected.

In summary, this chapter elaborated the outcomes that the QAUE has generated in NWNU and explored the reasons why the intended impact of the QAUE has or has not occurred in the NWNU context. The next chapter addresses the third case, LYNC.

CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPACT OF THE QAUE ON LYNC

7.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the last case study which I carried out in Linyi Normal College (LYNC) in 2009. Firstly, a short introduction to the College is presented, which proceeds with the ways in which the College and its members responded to the QAUE. The succeeding section examines the impact of the QAUE on LYNC in detail. Five dimensions of impact are covered as in the previous two chapters. They include resource commitment to undergraduate education, university identification, quality management, teaching and learning, and the teaching-research balance.

7.2 A brief description of LYNC

Linyi Normal College (LYNC) is a local higher education institution in Linyi City, Shandong Province. Its origin lies in *Binhai Jianguo College,* which was founded in 1941. Various name changes over the decades culminated in the granting of college status at the end of the 1990s. Now it is a normal institution governed by Shandong Province and funded by Linyi City. This college used to provide diploma education, and the provision of undergraduate education did not start until 1998 (LYNC, 2010).

There are 14 faculties with 58 undergraduate programmes in LYNC, covering various subjects including humanities, social science, science and engineering. LYNC was an institution of 26,740 full-time students in 2008, including 19,994 undergraduate students, 6,723 diploma education students, 6 adult students and 17 international students. 1,575 teaching staff worked in LYNC in 2008 (LYNC, 2010).

The QAUE evaluators were scheduled to visit LYNC in 2005. On the request of the College, the timing for the site-visit was postponed to June 2008. Hence, the self-evaluation took up to four years (from the middle of 2004 to 2008). The teaching

quality in LYNC was judged to be "excellent" by the external evaluators. The one year from mid-2008 to mid-2009 was for its follow-up reforms (LYNC, 2008).

7.3 Responses of LYNC to the QAUE

The self-evaluation report and the perspective of the respondents show that LYNC has paid considerable attention to the QAUE. LYNC proposed to postpone the quality assessment from the expected date of 2005 to 2008. So, it took about four years, from July 2004 to June 2008, to prepare for the examination of the QAUE. It has made a great deal effort to meet the requirements of the QAUE.

> The College has tried its best to understand the requirements of the QAUE, [...] through inviting the evaluators to interpret the performance indicators, [...] researching the policy discourse, [...] and learning from the other institutions that have been evaluated, etc. (LYNC, 2008, p. 123)

> Following the requirements of the QAUE, the College [LYNC] went forward step and step. [...] For the aspects in which it had reached the standards set by the QAUE, it made efforts to improve them further; [...] and for those aspects in which it had not reached the QAUE's requirements yet, it tried its best to meet them. (IIIG22)

During this period, all staff and students in LYNC were mobilised to participate in the preparation work (IIIE24). Twice mock evaluations were done before the site-visit of the QAUE evaluators as well (LYNC, 2008, p. 125).

The respondents reported that, during the period of preparing for the QAUE, it was regarded as the most important task of the College to pass the quality assessment with the maximum evaluation result. Everything should give way to this task. For example, the respondents said "the development of the College [LYNC] needs reforms, [...] [but] preparing for the external evaluation requires a fairly stable environment"

(IIIB32). For example, the College already realised that it was necessary to adjust the structure of undergraduate degree programmes but it has not done this until the quality evaluation finished (IIIA9). Furthermore, "the College has made more efforts to improve the visible work [which can get notice from the external evaluators easily] than the invisible work even if that might be more important for the long-term development of the College" (IIID4).

In addition, with the aim of maximising the evaluation result, LYNC has also done many tasks unrelated to the improvement of its educational quality. For example, it has made many false documents to satisfy the QAUE evaluators (IIIE24, IIIF31 and IIIH24). LYNC has also tried to please the evaluators that the MOE delegated (IIIE22), by means of giving an elegant reception to the external evaluators, such as providing high-class accommodations, organising a variety of social events and presenting expensive gifts (IIIG27). A teacher complained about this phenomenon: "we have tried our best to welcome them. I am sure even if the President of China came to the College [LYNC], we would be able to entertain him in the same way" (IIIG27).

7.4 Impact of the QAUE on LYNC

7.4.1 Resource commitment

University infrastructure, teaching facilities and expenditure

The self-evaluation report and the perspective of the respondents show that the university infrastructure and teaching facilities have been improved significantly in LYNC. The College was equipped with basic facilities when it was accredited to establish undergraduate programmes at the end of the 1990s. However, because of the student enrolment expansion recently, the unit cost has declined notably. "A great deal of equipment has become out-dated, but was still being used. [...] The College did not have enough money to replace it. [...] At this time, the QAUE came" (IIIA8). In order to meet the requirements of QAUE, LYNC has built a new campus, which was equipped with adequate multi-media facilities and courseware. The internet has been

improved as well (LYNC, 2008, pp. 26-33; IIIA3, IIIB4, IIIE2, IIIF2, IIIG2, and IIIH2). The number of books stored in libraries has risen steadily as shown in Table 7.1 (LYNC, 2008, p. 30). When buying new books, the requests of teachers have been taken into consideration (IIIF2). The College has also invested a great deal of money in the improvement of laboratories and experimental equipment. At the same time, it has adjusted the management of laboratories and ensured an adequate utilisation rate of experimental equipment (LYNC, 2008, p. 28; IIIF11).

Table 7.1 Number of books stored in LYNC laboratories

Academic year	Total number of books (thousands)	Number of books per student
2004-2005	2337.0	109.01
2005-2006	2717.0	102.81
2006-2007	3141.7	105.73

The self-evaluation report and the responses of the College leaders indicate that LYNC has increased its teaching expenditure. As shown in Table 7.2 (on the next page), *the four kinds of funding for teaching* (for undergraduate students) have grown gradually, after a dramatic increase (13.28%) from 2004 to 2005. In addition, "the investment in teaching facilities boosted significantly, [...] from about 20 million RMB in 2000 to 170 million RMB in 2008" (IIIB6). In the process of preparing for the QAUE, the local government (Linyi City) provided a great amount of grants to LYNC (IIIA3, IIIC1). A cost-sharing model was created in LYNC, which means the local government provided funding for the university infrastructure, and the College paid the costs for the other facilities, such as buying books and recruiting teaching staff. With sufficient financial resources, basically, the College can do whatever is necessary (IIIA3).

The respondents reported that "the change of teaching facilities in LYNC is ground-breaking" (IIID2). They think the impact of the QAUE is very direct: "the College improved its infrastructure and teaching facilities according to the

quantitative standards of 'excellence' that the QAUE set up" (IIIB4). "Without the quality assessment, the improvement of teaching facilities could never have been so fast" (IIIC7, IIIE4, IIIF4, IIIG4 and IIIH4).

Table 7.2 Four kinds of funding for teaching in LYNC (The unit is RMB)

Year	Number of *the four kinds of funding for teaching* per student	Percentage of *the four kinds of funding for teaching* in the tuition fee income	Annual growth ratio
2005	1205.41	30.01%	13.28%
2006	1216.64	30.03%	0.93%
2007	1239.96	30.07%	1.92%

Despite the significant improvement of teaching facilities in LYNC, the respondents think there is still much room for further development. For example, a teacher noted that the quality of these new teaching facilities is not satisfactory, and she thinks more supplementary funding is probably necessary for the maintenance of equipment (IIIF2). In addition, the utilisation rates of teaching facilities can be improved further. The respondents indicated that people need some time to get used to the advanced experimental equipment, and thus have not made full use of it. They hope that these apparatuses could be used more frequently, especially those sophisticated ones which are very costly (IIIG2).

Teaching staff

The self-evaluation report shows that the number of teaching staff in LYNC has increased significantly, which is described in Table 7.3 (on the next page). The student-teacher ratio reached the requirement of the QAUE for excellence (16:1) at the academic year of 2007-2008, the time of the site-visit of external evaluators (LYNC, 2008, p. 17). There was a big gap between the requirement of the QAUE and the existing staff numbers in LYNC. As a College leader said, "before the quality assessment, as with other local HEIs, the student-teacher ratio in the College was very large, about 28:1, far away from the standard set by the QAUE, 16:1" (IIIA7). So,

LYNC has made a great deal of effort to recruit new staff (IIIA3, IIIA7, IIIB5, IIIC6, IIID3, IIIF3 and IIIH3). Benefitting from the financial support of the local government through the cost-sharing model, "the College did not encounter financial difficulties. This made the staff recruitment fairly easy" (IIIA3). Nevertheless, it is still quite difficult for LYNC to meet the quantitative requirement for student-teacher ratios, which is somewhat beyond its abilities. In this case, a certain manipulation was also involved in the process. For example, "many so-called part-time staff [who barely work here] have been recruited to reach the number required" (IIIC34, IIIE21).

Table 7.3 Number of teaching staff in LYNC

Academic year	Number of teaching staff	Student-teacher ratio
2004-2005	1237	17.33
2005-2006	1530	17.27
2006-2007	1752	16.96
2007-2008	1768	15.57

The respondents think the impact of the QAUE on the growth of teaching staff in the evaluated HEIs is significant, especially in those newly-established institutions, such as LYNC. "Since the student enrolment expansion starting from 1998, the shortage of teachers has become a critical factor rendering the decline of higher education quality. [...] The change [the growth of teaching staff] driven by the QAUE is radical" (IIID3). However, some respondents do not agree with the dramatic expansion of teaching staff. A faculty leader said "taking the demographic factor into account, the student enrolment will definitely shrink later on. [...] We suddenly recruited so many teachers. How should we deal with them at that time" (IIIB5)? At the same time, there is a cycle of professional development of teachers. It needs some time for the new teachers to improve their teaching competence to an acceptable level. Thus, the respondents stressed that a gradual growth of teaching staff is better than a sudden increase in a short term (IIIA3, IIIB5 and IIIG3).

Besides the enormous increase in teaching staff, LYNC has also responded to the

requirement of the QAUE for high academic qualifications and diverse educational backgrounds of teaching staff. When recruiting new staff, the academic qualification is regarded as one of the most important criteria. LYNC prefers to appoint the applicants with PhD or at least master's degrees (IIIA7, IIIC6, IIID3, IIIE3, IIIF3, IIIG3 and IIIH3). The College has also encouraged the existing staff to take part-time postgraduate education and improve their own qualifications (IIIC6, IIIH3). Furthermore, it has endeavoured not to recruit the graduates from LYNC itself but from other universities, especially from those elite institutions, in order to avoid "intellectual inbreeding" (IIIA7).

Moreover, LYNC has also been committed to bringing in talented academics. However, this ambition has not been successfully realised because of the low reputation of the College and its unattractive geographic location (IIIE3). Instead, LYNC has paid a great deal of money for recruiting senior academics from elite universities to work as part-time staff here. This strategy appears to work effectively. Now, "students can learn from famous academics but do not need to leave the LYNC campus" (IIIA7); and "students really appreciate the courses taught by these talented scholars" (IIIG9).

7.4.2 University identification

University mission and development purposes

The self-evaluation report reveals that LYNC aims to "become a high-quality, professional, local university, to serve the needs of regional basic education, economic and social development" (LYNC, 2008, p. 6). As a teaching intensive institution, it has the purpose of preparing students to "become highly qualified professionals with solid theoretical knowledge, creative spirits and practical abilities, to meet the needs of regional economic and social development" (LYNC, 2008, p. 7).

Based on the self-evaluation report and the perspective of the respondents, LYNC has

been exploring its mission, development purposes and special features since it was established (IIIA5). By and large, it strives to transform itself from a teacher training institution to a comprehensive university. The College also aims to upgrade from diploma education to bachelor degree education (LYNC, 2008, p. 12). The QAUE has pushed LYNC to clarify its mission and development purposes further. In order to present a clear statement to the external evaluators, many discussions were held between College leaders; the opinions of the other staff, both administrative and teaching, have been asked for. External experts were also consulted. The mission statement was formed gradually and articulated in the self-evaluation report, as shown above. It is dominated by the ideas of the College leaders, combining the suggestions from both the College staff and the mock evaluators outside the College. At the same time, the faculties and departments have also adjusted the objectives of the academic programmes in terms of the expected skill profiles of graduates (IIIC3). Now, the vague purpose of becoming a high-level higher education institution was abandoned. The mission and development purposes of LYNC have become more specific and explicit. They conform to the tradition and existing conditions of the institution more closely and were perceived as more reasonable identification (IIID5).

Nevertheless, College leaders do not think the mission and purposes of LYNC defined in the self-evaluation report are specific enough to direct the College's development. They admitted that it is very hard to do this for most universities in China nowadays (IIIA5, IIIB3 and IIIC2). With regard to the hierarchical status,

> [...] it is easy for the top and the lowest level institutions to define their standings, but it is very hard for those universities in the middle to identify where they are in relation to other institutions. Most institutions are the latter. (IIIA5)

About the functional mission,

> [...] defining a university as teaching intensive or research intensive is still kind of ambiguous. They could not elucidate an institution's development

direction and strategies. So, more specific mission would be necessary. (IIIC2)

Concerning the development purposes,

> Most of the evaluated institutions said they were going to prepare students to meet the needs of regional economic and social development. The external evaluators could not find fault with this kind of statement. However, there is nothing special; which higher education institution is not serving the local economic and social development? This can not be regarded as a specific development purpose at all. (IIIA5)

The development of special features

The self-evaluation report shows that LYNC has summarised its two special features.

- Firstly, it produces high-level professionals to meet the needs of regional economic and social development;
- Secondly, it has tried its best to provide high-quality study resources for students (LYNC, 2008, pp. 106, 114).

The respondents do not think either of them could be entitled to a special feature of a higher education institution. They reported that LYNC indeed has a special feature but it does not show in the self-evaluation report. That is, LYNC "bases itself on the Linyi City and serves the regional economic and social development; in the meanwhile, it follows the trend of internationalisation of higher education" (IIIA5). It aims to equip students with an international horizon and the most advanced knowledge in the world. So, it has "imported" curricula from abroad directly, using the same text books with the foreign universities and teaching in English (IIIA14, IIIB13, IIIF10 and IIIH8).

Unfortunately, this strategy has not been appreciated by either mock evaluators or the QAUE evaluators: "they do not think being internationalised is the business of a local college" (IIIA6). That is probably why this does not show in the self-evaluation report

of LYNC. Nevertheless, the College insisted on implementing this strategy. College leaders believe this is a right way to go (IIIA5, IIIA6). However, teachers do not think so. They feel this reform is too radical, without any experiments; and the English curricula imported from abroad are too difficult for the students in LYNC to comprehend, and this is somewhat beyond their abilities (IIIF21, IIIH8). In their opinions, "these so-called special features look very charming. They have been created just for the sake of their [College leaders'] own political achievements" (IIIF21).

By and large, the QAUE has stimulated the aspiration of LYNC to develop its special features (LYNC, 2008, p. 125). As for the implementation, "it depends on the creativity of the College itself" (IIIB32). For LYNC and most Chinese universities, there is still a long way to go before they can deliver a real special feature (IIIA5, IIIB3).

7.4.3 Quality management

The administrative regulations and approaches

The self-evaluation report and the perspective of the respondents show that the amendment of administrative regulations is one of the most significant effects of the QAUE on LYNC (LYNC, 2008, p. 126; IIIA17, IIIB16, IIIC17, IIID14 and IIIE5). During the period of preparing for the visit of the external evaluators, LYNC has revised all of its administrative regulations and rules. The respondents admitted that the previous regulations were imperfect and could not satisfy the demands of college management (IIIB16). Consequently, 77 administrative regulations were established, covering almost every aspect of teaching in LYNC (LYNC, 2008, p. 77). Following these regulations, it is strongly believed that the administration of both the College and its faculties/departments has become more efficient (LYNC, 2008, p. 126; IIIB16).

Firstly, these new regulations have imposed strict disciplines on teachers and students. For example, LYNC designed the *Regulations for the Recognition and Disposal of Teachers' Malpractices* (LYNC, 2008, p. 64; IIIA19 and IIIE15). They prescribe the behaviour that is regarded as being guilty of malpractices and the corresponding punitive measures. These regulations have been implemented strictly. During the last three years of preparing for the QAUE, 18 teachers were judged as being guilty of malpractices and had been punished (LYNC, 2008, p. 64). In the opinions of the respondents, these regulations have imposed constraints on teachers, and have made them somehow more disciplined and committed to teaching (IIIE5, IIIE15). Of course, "the effects vary from person to person; these regulations have not brought any change to those people who always behave properly" (IIID16).

On the one hand, College leaders think that these regulations regarding disciplines are necessary. One of them said:

> You [a teacher] are forgivable when your teaching effectiveness is not high enough, because it depends on personal competence, and needs some time to improve. [...] [In contrast], it is unforgivable to violate discipline. This is about your attitude and your commitment to the work. (IIIB17)

On the other hand, they admitted that the current regulations are overly strict, and individual needs have not been fully considered; these tough regulations have made teachers really tense (IIIA17, IIIA19). Ironically, there is no criticism on these over-strict regulations from the teacher respondents; they appear to be used to this style of management (IIIF18). Furthermore, the administrative regulations for students have also become more explicit and stricter (LYNC, 2008, p. 75). The respondents feel that the students in LYNC have become more disciplined than before, and their commitment to study has improved significantly (IIIG16).

Secondly, a set of specific procedures and standards in terms of every section of teaching work have been established in LYNC. A College leader reported:

> Previously, people just did their jobs in the ways they preferred or they were used to. [...] Nowadays, every part of teaching has the standardised procedure for teachers to follow, [...] [including] lesson preparations, class teaching, and student performance assessment, etc. The impact of the QAUE is profound. (IIIA17)

All teaching documents need to be carried out in standardised formats, such as lecture syllabus, handouts, criteria of student performance assessment, and student examination papers (LYNC, 2008, p. 64; IIIF15). Thus, "now you [a teacher] can not go to a classroom to give a lesson with text books only [without any preparations], as you did before" (IIIF15). The procedures of collecting and archiving these documents have become standardised as well (IIIH18). These regulations were implemented strictly during the period of preparing for the QAUE. There was an extreme example: "a faculty leader was dismissed from his post, just because a teacher in his faculty made a mistake in scoring a student's examination paper" (IIIA3). These regulations were sustained properly in LYNC after the evaluators left, and teachers have got used to them (IIIE15, IIIF15 and IIIH18).

Almost all of the respondents think the procedures and standards for completing teaching work, which have been established following the requirements the QAUE, are beneficial, especially to the newly-established institutions such as LYNC (IIIB1, IIID1, IIIE1, IIIG13 and IIIH18). A faculty leader said:

> We [LYNC] only have limited experience of providing undergraduate education. [...] The basic quality requirements for every section of teaching work are necessary. We need to set them up. [...] Only on the ground of them, is the further improvement of education quality possible to happen. (IIIB1)

For teachers,

> We did not know what the normative teaching is. The QAUE told us. For

example, now we have the standardised way of marking examination papers, and this is very helpful. (IIIH25)

Only one respondent questioned the relationship between these standardised requirements for teaching documents and teaching effectiveness. He does not think that it means a productive class to prepare the detailed content of each lecture before the class, since this precludes the possibility of spontaneous behaviour. He doubted "[that] the lesson plan is really helpful for assuring and improving teaching quality of higher education" (IIID14).

The internal quality monitoring system

As can be seen from the self-evaluation report and the perspective of respondents, the internal quality monitoring system of LYNC has been improved significantly, pushed by the QAUE (LYNC, 2008, p. 67; IIIA24, IIIC22, IID21 and IIIF20). Firstly, a couple of internal quality assurance measures were already adopted in LYNC before the QAUE such as student course evaluations and classroom observations. However, a complete internal quality monitoring system did not exist. It has been established particularly to meet the requirement of the QAUE (IIIA24, IIID7 and IIIF20). Now, there are classroom observations which are operated by the Teaching Supervision Committee of the College and the committee of every faculty/department, student course evaluations of each term, and a secret student investigator in every class. In addition, the tutor of every class of undergraduate students is required to attend all the courses of this class; by which, they could monitor the teaching effectiveness of teachers and the commitment of students to study. The College also operates a 24-hour hot line to receive students' complaints about teaching quality. Through these quality monitoring mechanisms, the awareness of internal quality assurance has been raised in LYNC as well. (LYNC, 2008, p. 125) College leaders think that developing an internal quality monitoring system is somewhat a response to the internal needs of university running, but the QAUE has indeed speeded up its establishment in LYNC. "Without the QAUE, it would never have happened so quickly" (IIIC22).

Secondly, the intensiveness of internal quality monitoring has increased in LYNC. For example, the frequency of classroom observations conducted by teaching supervisions committees has risen (III21, IIID21, IIIG17 and IIIH15). Most of the respondents feel that classroom observations and the follow-up reviews are very helpful for the improvement of teachers' teaching skills, especially for junior staff (IIIF19, IIIG13 and IIIH14). One of them said:

> The suggestions from the class reviewers are very helpful. Without them, we [junior teachers] would take a longer time to master these teaching skills by ourselves. [...] Helped by them, we have become more proficient in teaching, [...] and it is easier for students to comprehend our lectures. Now we become more confident in teaching. (IIIG13, junior)

At the same time, some senior respondents indicated that the internal reviewers' suggestions are not very helpful because they did not touch the essential problems of teaching contents, but only about the teaching tips and tricks, such as teachers' voices and blackboard writing (IIIE16, senior).

Thirdly, the performance indicators of the student course evaluation have been revised in LYNC (IIIC22). The results of student course evaluations have also been used to judge teachers' performances. There is the ranking of teaching effectiveness, which is formed based on the results of student course evaluations. Moreover, the evaluation results become a crucial determinant of the academic career of teachers. If a teacher fails in student course evaluations, his/her professional promotion will be deferred regardless of their research achievements (LYNC, 2008, p. 68; IIIB32, IIIC23, IIID20, IIIF23 and IIIG18).

7.4.4 Teaching and learning

Teaching contents

The self-evaluation report illustrates that LYNC has initiated curriculum reform since

2004. Teaching contents have been updated according to the need for social and economic development and the latest research outcomes have been added. Teachers have also been encouraged to conduct curriculum reform under the *Excellent Curriculum Project* (LYNC, 2008, p. 44). However, the respondents did not perceive visible change of teaching contents in LYNC as a result of the QAUE (IIID6, IIIE5 and IIIH5). In their opinions, "curriculum reform need long-term efforts and can not be completed within a short time" (IIIH5), and this is not related to the QAUE very much. Especially, the QAUE evaluators are not academic peers from the same subject field and thus they could not scrutinise the teaching contents from a professional perspective (IIIC9). In addition, the respondents indicated that the MOE specifies most of the curricula that each undergraduate programme should offer and their core contents. There is limited autonomy left for institutions to make essential reforms (IIIA10).

Pushed by the QAUE, LYNC has also modified the procedures of reviewing and selecting text books (LYNC, 2008, pp. 48-49). In general, only the classic text books recommended by the MOE can be used in LYNC (IIIA11, IIIB9, IIIC10 and IIIE5). Some respondents think:

> Using the MOE-recommended text books is suitable for the low-level institutions, such as LYNC, [...] because not many academics here are able to write their own text books. At least, using the classic text books can ensure that the teaching contents would not be too bad. (IIIB10)

At the same time, some of them do not agree with using the standardised text books. A teacher said:

> [...] using the same text books along with the same examination papers [...] has made the teaching/learning process in universities as standardised as in schools. Do you think the teaching quality has been improved or got worse? (IIIE6)

In order to compensate for shortcoming of standardisation, LYNC tends to "select more than one text book for each course. In this case, students can get more knowledge" (IIIA11).

Teaching methods

The self-evaluation report and the perspective of respondents demonstrate that LYNC has initiated strict quality management of undergraduate courses to respond to the requirements of the QAUE. A college leader described:

> Every course needs to be listened and reviewed, before it starts. [...] [This] is conducted by the teaching supervision committees, which are composed of senior academics. If not pass, the course has to be stopped, [...] and the involved teacher is compelled to take additional training. (IIIA3)

Based on the course reviews, "the suggestions about both teaching contents and methods are offered to teachers" (IIIG7). Consequently, the respondents believe that junior staff have improved their teaching skills considerably (IIIB11, IIIG7 and IIIH5), and, in general, they are qualified to teach undergraduate courses now (IIIB11). However, the effects on senior staff seem not to be very obvious, probably "because their teaching approaches have become stable and could not be easily changed" (IIIH5). In addition, as requested by the QAUE, the teaching aids, such as multi-media assisted instruction, have been used much more than before in LYNC (IIIG2). To a large extent, this change has benefitted from the improvement of teaching facilities.

Furthermore, LYNC has encouraged teachers and students to adopt student-centred teaching approaches and inquiry-based learning (LYNC, 2008, p. 50). In particular, the respondents mentioned that LYNC has created "question-based teaching and learning", which means students learn through solving questions. This is a creative teaching method to encourage students to think independently (IIIA12, IIID8). Nevertheless, teachers do not feel these strategies have triggered real change of daily

teaching approaches in LYNC (IIIE5, IIIF5 and IIIH6). "The teacher-centred teaching approach, i.e. teachers talk and students listen, still dominates the classroom teaching practices in daily set" (IIIE5). The so-called change just occurred in those classes rehearsed for the examination of the QAUE evaluators (IIIA13, IIIH6). "It will be ideal if you can make every class as good as those, but everybody knows it is impossible" (IIIA13). Teachers do not think the suggestions from the QAUE evaluators are helpful as well. "Those advices were too general, and did not touch the essential problems of teaching" (IIIE11).

By and large, the QAUE has pushed junior staff to master the basic teaching skills and techniques, but did not have notable impact on the change of teaching methods *per se,* such as the transformation from teacher-centred to student-centred teaching. The respondents admitted that it is very difficult to change teachers' teaching methods, "as difficult as changing their own life styles" (III13). Compared with the impulse of external forces in a top-down way, they think that the transformation will be more likely to occur if teachers can experience the advanced teaching methods at first hand. For example,

> [...] letting teachers go abroad and stay in foreign universities for some time as visiting scholars. [In this case,] they can perceive the essence of these advanced teaching methods disseminating from abroad, [...] learn them, and put them into practice when they come back. (IIIA13)

Practical training

The self-evaluation report and the perspective of the respondents show that the practical training in LYNC has been significantly improved, pushed by the QAUE. Firstly, the institution has re-designed the entire practical training framework (LYNC, 2008, p. 53; IIIA15). The respondents conceded that before the coming of the QAUE, the practical training in LYNC was very poor, especially in the newly-established undergraduate programmes (IIIA15, IIID11, IIIF11 and IIIH9). "Without the necessary experimental equipment, many practical courses could not be opened

(IIIH9)", and thus "there were only some basic experiments open to students" (IIIA15). Since the QAUE, the teaching facilities have been improved significantly. With the adequate experimental equipment and more proper laboratory management, many advanced practical courses have been established (IIIA15, IIIC14 and IIIF11).

Secondly, in order to meet the specific requirements of the QAUE for students' basic skills (such as English and computer skills, the skills of doing experiments, and the teaching skills of students in teacher-training programmes), LYNC has provided ad hoc training for students as well. Consequently, it is firmly believed that the practical abilities of students have improved considerably (IIIB1, IIIC14, IIIE10 and IIIH9). However, the training of students' basic skills was diminished after the external evaluators left (IIIE10).

Moreover, there is no notable change of the practical training outside colleges as a result of the QAUE (IIIB14, IIID11 and IIIE9). In this case, compared with the essential changes, the respondents feel that more efforts have been made in LYNC to falsify satisfactory curriculum syllabuses and course schedules to manipulate the external evaluators (IIID11, IIIE10 and IIIF10). College leaders admitted that there are many difficulties for LYNC "to arrange placement learning outside colleges for so many students" (IIIB14).

Besides the impulse of the external evaluation, the respondents think the improvement of practical training in LYNC is also a result driven by the labour market for students' practical abilities. In particular, it is just the College's purpose to prepare students with professional skills to meet the demands of regional economic and social development (IIIB14).

Graduation projects

The QAUE has pushed LYNC to enhance the quality management of students' dissertations and graduation projects (LYNC, 2008, p. 71; IIIB18, IIIC18, IIID15,

IIIE14, IIIF16, IIIG14 and IIIH12). The graduation project is regarded as one of the most important indicators of the QAUE to evaluate the education quality of institutions (IIIC18, IIIF16 and IIIH12). Thus, LYNC has made efforts to improve the quality of students' dissertations. Drawing on the experience of other institutions, the specific requirements for every procedure of completing dissertations have been set up in LYNC (LYNC, 2008, p. 71; IIIB18). In order to meet these requirements, "both teachers and students devoted lots of time to dissertations, [...] especially those dissertations completed at the year when the QAUE evaluators visited" (IIIE14). For example, a teacher said "I revised the dissertations of my supervisees for about 20 times" (IIID15). The quality standards that the College set were quite high: "many students could not pass the viva voce examination at the first time, and need to do it again and again" (IIIB18). Consequently, the quality of students' dissertations has improved significantly (LYNC, 2008, p. 71; IIIC18, IIID15, IIIE14 and IIIF16), and thus these dissertations were appreciated by the external panel (LYNC, 2008, p. 71), and many of them have been published (IIID15, IIIF16). The respondents think that "although not every student's dissertation is excellent, [...] at least, after the training, students know the procedures, methods and ethics of doing research" (IIIC18). "Before the coming of the QAUE, undergraduate students' dissertations were full of plagiarism. [...] now at least they complete dissertations by themselves, but not copy others' work" (IIIG14).

Nevertheless, some respondents admitted that it is very difficult to keep the quality standards of dissertations that the QAUE requires, in the long term. As one of them explained,

> Students work on their dissertations at the seventh or eighth term [final year]. [...] They are bothered by job hunting, and the entrance examination to postgraduate programmes, etc. [...] They could not concentrate on dissertations. (IIIC18)

Teachers have made a great deal of effort to supervise students, but the quality

improvement of dissertations, especially their creativity, could not depend only on supervisors' efforts (IIIC18, IIIH12). After the QAUE evaluators left, the quality requirements for graduation dissertations were slightly loosened, which "conform to the abilities of undergraduates more closely now" (IIIF16). At the same time, some respondents doubt that it is necessary for undergraduate students (who are not trained for doing research) to complete such high-quality graduation projects (IIIC18).

7.4.5 Teaching-research balance

According to the perspective of the respondents, the tension between teaching and research is quite slight in LYNC, because it is always a teaching intensive institution, without postgraduate programmes; thus, in principle, teachers could concentrate on undergraduate teaching (IIIA18, IIIC20 and IIIG20). Nevertheless, the College also encourages teachers to carry out research, in order to improve its research level and pave the way for the upgrade from a college to a university (IIIC20). as a teaching intensive institution, LYNC has particularly "encouraged teachers to do those kinds of research that are related to teaching or can serve teaching [research on teaching]" (IIIB20). However, the respondents conceded that there is still a long way to go before the emergence of an efficient collaboration between teaching and research (IIIB20).

Pushed by the QAUE, LYNC has enhanced the internal monitoring on teachers' commitment to teaching and their teaching effectiveness. As mentioned before, the link between teaching effectiveness (measured by student course evaluations) and professional progression of academics has been reinforced. For example, the teacher's professional promotion will be deferred if he/she fails in student course evaluations, regardless of their research achievement. Nevertheless, the respondents believe that success in research is still the dominant factor determining the professional progression of academic staff. "Only when your [teachers'] teaching effectiveness is extremely bad, will your promotion be held up" (IIIE18, IIIG6). In this case, a majority of teachers just make sure that their teaching effectiveness is tolerable and

then concentrate on research. Usually, the junior staff in LYNC focus on improving their teaching abilities, while the senior members tend to give their preferences to research (IIIE18, IIIF25 and IIIG20).

7.5 Summary

The LYNC has made all-out efforts to meet the requirements of the QAUE. Firstly, the College has improved its teaching facilities and increased the teaching expenditure significantly. The number of teaching staff has grown considerably, and many new teachers with high education qualifications were appointed. Secondly, the mission and development purposes have been clarified in the self-evaluation report, but it turns out that they do not have much actual effects on the university operations. The capacities of the College to develop special features seem to be limited, although it has the aspiration to do this. Thirdly, LYNC has enhanced its quality management, through setting up strict disciplines for teachers and students and the standardised teaching procedures. It has also established an extensive internal quality monitoring system. Fourthly, the teaching skills of junior staff have improved to an acceptable level, the advanced teaching technology has been used more, and the practical training inside colleges has been improved notably in LYNC. However, there is not visible adjustment in terms of teaching contents and methods. LYNC has enhanced the quality management of graduation projects, but it was not sustained after the QAUE evaluators left. Fifthly, the impact of the QAUE on the balance between teaching and research is not notable in LYNC.

In summary, this chapter detailed the actual effects of the QAUE on LYNC, the last case, and explained the reasons why the intended impact of the QAUE has or has not emerged in LYNC. The next chapter is going to summarise the findings from the three cases and generalise the impact of the QAUE on the evaluated institutions in China.

CHAPTER EIGHT: RESEARCH FINDINGS

8.1 Introduction

Based on the findings from the case studies, the impact of the QAUE on university change in China is explored in this chapter. Before the impact analysis, the ways in which the evaluated institutions and their members responded to the QAUE and their reasons for doing so are depicted. Then five dimensions of the effects of the QAUE are discussed, including the resource commitment to undergraduate education, university identification, quality management, teaching and learning, and the balance between teaching and research. In each dimension, firstly, what has changed and the ways in which the change occurred are interpreted, as well as the extent to which it changed, the timing of the change and what has not changed. The similarities and differences of the changes between the three cases are also interpreted. Moreover, whether the norms of "good" higher education defined by the QAUE have been accepted by the evaluated institutions is also inferred from their behaviours and the opinions of the internal members. Secondly, the reasons why the expected changes in each dimension have or have not occurred are explained. Both the external impetus of the QAUE and the internal forces of change are considered in the process.

8.2 Responses of the evaluated institutions to the QAUE

The case studies show that the evaluated HEIs made all-out efforts to respond to the QAUE. They mobilised almost all the university staff and students to prepare for the external quality review. In order to impel their staff and students to be cooperative, universities used various ways (such as holding meetings and distributing publicity materials) to make them aware of the significance of the QAUE, for both the universities and their members. In addition, the evaluated institutions established ad hoc offices, most of which were temporary, to deal with the work for quality assessment. They also organised mock evaluations before the site visit of the QAUE evaluators.

Universities attached great importance to the QAUE, and thus, they tried to maximise their evaluation results by every means. In the cases selected for this study, universities responded to the quality assessment as if they had been called to war (IB3). Every person was allocated some responsibility (IID30). As expressed by a respondent in NWNU, "whoever screws up takes the consequences" (IIK1). During the site visits, the universities made a great deal of effort to please the QAUE evaluators. The Guangxi Normal University case[16] was referred to by many respondents to confirm this idea (IC26, ID22, IF1, IG17, IIH1, III26 and IIK17). Moreover, some institutions in the case studies, such as NWNU and LYNC, falsified teaching documents to satisfy the evaluators.

Relatively speaking, the less elite institutions paid more attention to the quality assessment than the elite ones (IA34, IB31 and IC26). In the case studies, the newly-established institution, LYNC, postponed the evaluation in order to have more time to prepare for the external quality review (LYNC, 2008). The elite university, BNU, seemed more confident to "open the box and show the reality to the external evaluators" (IA35).

In fact, almost all the respondents admitted that the QAUE was not wholeheartedly embraced by the evaluated institutions and their members. There were lots of complaints about being evaluated. Firstly, "this is the first time there has been a large-scale quality assessment since the establishment of the higher education system in China about 100 years ago" (IC26). "Resistance to reform is inevitable, especially radical reform" (IIA44). Furthermore, there was also resistance to quality assessment *per se*. "Nobody is willing to be evaluated" (IA30, IIA44 and IID38). The case studies show that there were more complaints from elite institutions than from low-level ones (IB31). This may be because they have a longer history of operating a university, and

[16] In Guangxi Normal University, the president and other university leaders gave a red-carpet welcome to an assistant working for the evaluation committee. This news was reported by the mass media, and was strongly criticised.

thus have more inertia. As a BNU leader said, "They [elite institutions] hate radical change" (IC26). Moreover, elite institutions also have more confidence in their own quality of education and do not think that an external quality assessment is necessary. In contrast, the QAUE was more easily accepted by the low-level institutions, which do not expect to be exempted from a quality assessment. In addition, the elite universities make stronger requests for institutional autonomy, so they were reluctant to undergo an external evaluation imposed by the state. For example, some respondents from BNU challenged the authority of the state to evaluate universities (IC26, ID1). One of them said "who gave it [the MOE] the right to evaluate us?" (ID1).

Complaints about the QAUE largely came from the teaching staff. The respondents in the case studies conceded that the quality assessment was abhorrent to most teachers, to varying extents (IA33, IB31, ID1, IG1, IIA24, IIC34, IID38, IIF32, IIG23, IIH32, IIJ25, IIK22, IIIC35 and IIIF33). First of all, the workloads of teachers increased considerably. Teachers had to complete most of the specific preparation work for the QAUE, such as completing a great number of teaching documents. Some of the preparation work had nothing to do with education quality improvement, such as falsifying many records. Secondly, teachers had to adjust their behaviour to meet the requirements of the QAUE (IID31, IIF32, IIJ24 and IIK22). Nobody likes to have to radically change old habits, and teachers are no exception (IA30, IC26 and IH21). This reluctance was particularly because some of the requirements of the QAUE were not rooted in the reality of the evaluated universities (IIIC33). For example, teachers in BNU (an elite university) did not agree with the strict disciplines and standardised teaching documents required by the QAUE. These requirements were incompatible with their inherent management culture. Thirdly, teachers did not agree with the evaluation methods used by the QAUE, and the ways in which universities responded to the QAUE. For example, the QAUE evaluators were not peers at a subject level, and evaluators from outside the subject fields came to observe classes and made judgments. To some extent, this offended the academic authority of academics. The

senior academics in the elite universities felt especially uncomfortable about it (ID21). In an effort to maximise the evaluation results, many universities asked teachers to falsify records to please the external evaluators. They felt that this behaviour offended their professional ethics and their dignity as intellectuals (IIB1, IIC34).

Despite the private complaints, the evaluated institutions actively responded to the QAUE. As mentioned previously, the QAUE is organised by the state. In China, although "the HEIs have much more autonomy than the time before the 1980s" (IIA36), the state still has a strong level of control over HEIs, and thus, universities tend to follow the requirements of the state (IA27, IIH18 and IIIA29). Moreover, the QAUE is a compulsory evaluation. "Under no circumstances could an individual institution not be evaluated; if not, it will be compelled to stop enrolment" (IC26). Universities had come to realise that the external evaluation would not go away, whether they accepted it or not. In this case, "they chose to get actively engaged and tried to do their best" (IB24). What is more important, the QAUE evaluation results have a strong influence on the gains of universities from the state (IIA45, IIB33). For example, in the case of LYNC, a good evaluation result would help its upgrade from a college to a university and the accreditation of its post-graduate programmes (IIIB29). At the same time, the evaluation results can also influence the reputation of the evaluated institutions, which are crucial to their long-term prosperity (IIC28). "A bad evaluation result could ruin the University's future" (IIA45, IIIE19). After various methods of persuasion, teachers were convinced that the evaluation results would have enormous implications for universities, and hence, are indirectly related to their own benefits (IIC34). As one of them said, "If we [teachers] perform well in the quality evaluation, the College will have more chance to upgrade to a university. [...] This will be beneficial for everybody" (IIIF33). The case studies show that, despite the emotional opposition and private complaints, teachers did not resist the QAUE in practice (ID21, IE24, IF22, IG21, IH21, IIB36, IIC34, IIG23, IIH32, III24, IIJ25, IIIC35, IIIE25 and IIIF33).

Competition among the evaluated institutions of the same tier was also a very strong driving force behind their active responses to the QAUE (IB26, ID22, IF27 and IIIA27). The QAUE was supposed to be an accreditation. However, the evaluated institutions did not end with achieving the quality standards the QAUE set up. They regarded the QAUE as a chance to re-rank their academic standing, and thus, they tried to do their best to compete with others. For example, a respondent described the motives of BNU: "there are 19 sub-indicators; the East China Normal University [which is not regarded as good as BNU] has got a straight A. How can we [BNU] not be as good as them?" (ID22). In addition, isomorphism was also involved in the responses of the evaluated institutions to the QAUE. When other institutions had responded to the quality assessment in an active way, the ones which were evaluated later appeared to feel pressured to do the same or even better (IIA47). The QAUE is the first nationwide higher education quality assessment, so the universities had no experience and did not know the extent to which they should meet the requirements of the QAUE. In this case, they tended to do more rather than less (IIIA27).

On the other hand, the case studies suggest that the evaluated institutions also attached importance to the QAUE on their own initiative. NWNU and LYNC, which are affiliated with local governments, regarded the QAUE as being a rare opportunity to get extra funding from their sponsors (IIB31, IIF17 and IIIA27). This is also one of the reasons why LYNC postponed its evaluation from 2005 to 2008. "If we [LYNC] were evaluated in 2005 and got an 'excellent' [grade], there would be no reason for Linyi City [the local government] to give us more funding to improve the university infrastructure" (IIIA27). Accordingly, they needed to achieve satisfactory evaluation results to provide accountability for investment from local governments (IIF17). Furthermore, inside the HEIs, university leaders and managers used the QAUE as an external pressure to compel the groups they managed, both faculties/departments and individual teachers/students, to follow the institutional rules and regulations (IA33, IIIA27). As the LYNC leader said, "They [faculties/departments, teachers and students] usually do not care what you want them to do. [...] Now, they have to meet

the requirements of the College [...] in the name of the external quality assessment" (IIIA27). In addition, LYNC regarded the QAUE as being an opportunity to improve itself. For example, LYNC devised complete administrative regulations and established an internal quality assurance mechanism following the requirements of the QAUE.

8.3 Resource commitment

8.3.1 University infrastructure, teaching facilities, expenditure and teaching staff

Changed or not?

The case studies suggest that, firstly, the improvement of universities' infrastructure, teaching facilities and expenditure is one of the most significant effects of the QAUE on the evaluated institutions. In all the cases studied, the teaching facilities have been considerably improved and the continuous growth of teaching expenditure has been ensured. The increased funding for the improvement has come from both the grants of external sponsors and the adjustment of internal resource allocation. On the one hand, universities persuaded their sponsors to increase their financial support. This mainly happened to the institutions which are affiliated to local governments. On the other hand, the internal resource allocation in the evaluated institutions was adjusted, which gave priority to undergraduate education.

Secondly, the evaluated institutions have increased the recruitment of teaching staff to meet the quantitative requirements of the QAUE for student-teacher ratios. At the same time, they have adjusted their priorities of staff recruitment. Following the requirement of the QAUE, people with high academic qualifications and diverse educational backgrounds have been preferred. The selection criteria for new staff have become regularised. In addition, the evaluated institutions have encouraged the existing staff to take in-service post-graduate education, with the aim of raising their academic qualifications. In the case studies, this has mainly happened in NWNU and

LYNC, where the qualifications of their staff had not reached the standards set by the QAUE. The respondents conceded that, in addition to these genuine changes, various strategies had been adopted to manipulate the external evaluators. For example, NWNU and LYNC recruited some part-time staff, who did not actually work there, to achieve the staff numbers required by the QAUE. NWNU opened its own post-graduate courses and awarded degrees to its staff without providing adequate academic training, which was a trick to meet the demands of the QAUE for teachers' qualifications.

The case studies note that the extent of the change is related to the gap between the existing conditions of an institution and the requirements of the QAUE. In the case studies, the improvement of teaching facilities, expenditure and teaching staff in LYNC is much more significant than in BNU. As an elite university, BNU already had essential teaching facilities, and relatively adequate staff with high academic qualifications and diverse educational backgrounds. Furthermore, the extent of change also depends on the capabilities of the evaluated institutions to make improvement. The amount of resources available for an institution is an important factor which indicates whether or not it can improve. The comparison between NWNU and LYNC demonstrates that it was easier for the institutions which have sufficient financial resources (such as LYNC) to improve their teaching facilities and recruit staff. Apart from their financial capabilities, whether universities are able to successfully recruit qualified staff depends on many other factors, such as their reputation and geographic location.

In terms of norms, the case studies show that the evaluated institutions always believe that sufficient teaching facilities and staff are essential for ensuring the educational quality and the long-standing prosperity of universities. QAUE did not bring new norms of what constitutes "good" higher education in the respect of resource commitment into universities, except that the new criteria of "good" teaching staff - with high academic qualifications and diverse educational backgrounds- have been

accepted by the evaluated institutions and become regularised there.

Forces and sources of change

The evaluated institutions basically agree with the requirement of the QAUE for sufficient teaching facilities and staff. As mentioned above, these are always believed to be indispensable for "good" higher education. However, since the expansion in the number of students at the end of the 1990s, there have been insufficient teaching facilities in the majority of Chinese universities and student-teacher ratios have increased considerably. The growth of resource commitment cannot keep pace with the expansion in the number of students. Therefore, the evaluated institutions had a strong desire to improve their teaching facilities and increase their number of teaching staff. In their eyes, the QAUE provided a valuable opportunity for them to do these. Then, they could persuade their sponsors (such as local governments) to give them more grants to make improvements. With regard to the academic qualifications and educational backgrounds of the teaching staff, the respondents indicated that the teaching competences of academics do not always have a positive relationship with their level of education (IA6, IIF3 and IIH3). Nevertheless, they think that there is nothing wrong with appointing staff with high academic qualifications and avoiding "intellectual inbreeding". Thus, they also expressed agreement with the requirement of the QAUE in this respect.

At the same time, the respondents indicated that the performance of teaching facilities and staff are quantifiable. As university leaders said, "the evaluators can easily review them, and hence there was no chance to play any games [deceive them]" (IIIA8). So, "no matter how difficult it was, HEIs had to make great efforts to meet these requirements [for teaching facilities and staff]; they had no other choice" (IIA33). In other words, the evaluated institutions had to meet the requirements of the QAUE in terms of resource commitment if they wanted to pass the evaluation, whether or not they were happy about doing it. In this case, the change appeared to be mandatory. Relatively speaking, the numbers and qualifications of teaching staff are not as visible

as infrastructure and teaching facilities. It seems that the evaluated institutions had slightly more of an opportunity to falsify the records in terms of teaching staff, which they actually did, as mentioned above.

Thus, the improvement of teaching facilities and expenditure was derived from both internal motivation and external pressures. The respondents indicated that university infrastructure, teaching facilities and the number of staff would have gradually improved in any event; however, the improvement would never have been so fast without the QAUE (IIA8, III5, IIJ4, IIIC7, IIIE4, IIIF4, IIIG4 and IIIH4). Thus, the QAUE is efficacious as an external force pushing universities to increase their resource commitment (IB16). However, the swift change was accompanied by some problems. For example, the respondents complained that the quality of some urgently-built buildings and other facilities was not satisfactory (IIIF2). The research into students' perceptions of the QAUE also confirmed this (Liu, 2008). The LYNC case offers an example that the selection criteria had to be slightly lowered when appointing a large number of teachers at one time (IIIH4).

Moreover, the evaluation criteria were uniform in terms of resource commitment, and have not taken the internal needs of the evaluated universities into account. For example, in order to satisfy the requirements of the QAUE, the evaluated institutions had to suddenly buy in many items of advanced equipment, some of which was not what the institutions really needed, at least not right now, such as LYNC in the case studies. The requirement of the QAUE for low student-teacher ratios caused a dramatic expansion in the number of teaching staff, which will conflict with the shrinkage of student enrolment in the future as a result of a demographic decline. This phenomenon is expected to happen soon in the low-level institutions such as LYNC (IIIB5).

Furthermore, the capabilities of the evaluated institutions to implement change have also not been considered. The standardised requirements for infrastructure and

teaching facilities have imposed a big economic burden on the institutions which have insufficient financial resources, such as NWNU in this research. The requirement of the QAUE for the number of teaching staff is somewhat high when compared with the capabilities of most HEIs. The case studies suggest that the student-teacher ratio was one of the most difficult standards for the evaluated universities to achieve (IIIB5). Even BNU (an elite university) had difficulty in meeting this requirement (IA28). Staff enrolment is a game between universities and the employment market. For example, whether or not they can successfully attract high-level academics does not only depend on an institution's ambition and financial offerings. The market competitiveness of HEIs is related to many other factors, such as their reputation and geographic location, which are not easy to change. Thus, although the evaluated institutions have made a great effort, many of them still feel powerless to attract as many qualified teachers as the QAUE required. The NWNU case is an illuminating example. It is difficult for it to keep the existing staff and stop a brain drain, never mind being able to attract new talented ones. In this case, many institutions chose to manipulate the evaluation, as mentioned above.

8.4 University identification

8.4.1 University mission, development purposes and special features

Changed or not?

The case studies suggest that, firstly, the QAUE has pushed the evaluated universities to clarify their mission and development purposes, which were quite ambiguous before. The evaluated institutions were asked to state their mission and describe their development purposes explicitly in self-evaluation reports. In order to complete the statement, university leaders held a variety of discussions, and consulted people outside. Teachers and students were also asked to provide their ideas. Based on the internal discussions and external suggestions, the mission and development purposes of the evaluated institutions have become clearer and more synchronised with the external demands. The impact of the QAUE reached from the institutional level to the

level of basic units. Faculties and departments were also required to conduct self-assessment, through which they reflected on their own mission and objectives of educating students.

However, the case studies show that the guidance of these mission and development purposes articulated in the self-evaluation reports on university operation is limited in practice. LYNC provides an example of many low-level institutions which regarded themselves as being teaching intensive institutions in their self-evaluation reports, yet in reality, they pay more and more attention to research. In the case of NWNU, the QAUE evaluators suggested it focus on teacher training which it is good at (IID2). However, its step toward becoming comprehensive has never stopped or slowed down. The respondents explained that student enrolment is the key parameter of both public funding and tuition fees; striving for maximum financial gains has motivated NWNU to expand its student enrolment by establishing new non-teacher training programmes (for which it usually charges more tuition fees than the teacher training programmes). LYNC has made every effort to pursue research productivity to fulfil its ambition to upgrade from a college to a university.

Secondly, the QAUE also requested the evaluated institutions to summarise their special features, i.e. what they are excellent at doing and/or what they do differently from other institutions, in self-evaluation reports. However, the answer to the question of whether the ambition has been accomplished varies from case to case. In the case studies, there seems to be more resources and means available for BNU (an elite university) to create and develop their special features. The leaders in NWNU and LYNC (the less elite institutions) conceded that their capabilities to do so are limited, although they also have the aspiration.

In terms of norms, the case studies show that the evaluated institutions agreed that universities should have reasonable and explicit mission and development purposes, which should also be aligned with external demands. These are believed to be

essential to their long-standing prosperity. They also believe that developing special features is imperative for universities, since this will be helpful for their success in competing with others. The respondents especially indicated that universities in China will have to confront fierce competition for enrolling students as a result of a demographic decline in the near future (IIB4). The case studies show that the motivation of the evaluated institutions to create special features has been enhanced on their way to meeting the requirement of the QAUE.

Forces and sources of change

As mentioned above, the evaluated institutions consented to the requirements of the QAUE for specifying their mission and development purposes, and developing special features. They admitted that they did not give full consideration to this issue before the quality evaluation; at least they lacked collective action. Thus, the evaluated institutions appreciate that the QAUE has provided them with an opportunity to make progress in these areas.

As an external force, the QAUE has pushed the evaluated institutions to specify their mission and development purposes as well as to create their special features. However, it has not told them the specific approaches to change. In this respect, the performance indicators of the QAUE are qualitative and not standardised. Thus, the evaluated institutions have adequate autonomy to define their mission, development purposes and special features. Moreover, without sufficient knowledge of the evaluated institutions, the external evaluators also hesitated to challenge the direction in which the universities have decided to develop. Relatively, the QAUE evaluators appeared to be more confident in providing suggestions to low-level institutions, albeit very minor ones (IA2, IIA4). By and large, the change in this respect rests largely with the initiatives and capacities of the institutions themselves. The respondents indicated that the elite universities have more initiative to independently define their development purposes than low-level institutions which used to imitate those institutions which perform better than themselves (IIA5). The potential of NWNU and LYNC (the less

elite institutions) to create and develop special features is also not as great as expected. Thus, there seems to be a gap between the ambition of the majority of universities to improve in this respect and their institutional capacity to achieve improvement.

Furthermore, external evaluators could only review the discourse on the self-evaluation reports; they could hardly see whether or not these statements conform to their practices. As discussed above, the mission stated in the self-evaluation reports and shown to the external evaluators did not always match the reality. Based on the available data, it may be premature to conclude that the responses of the evaluated institutions to the QAUE in this respect were just symbolic, without any actual effects, but clearly, the evaluated institutions have to strike a balance between the plausibly legitimate requirements of the QAUE and their own interests. In a case where the mission and development purposes fit the external expectations, but are not in the interest of the universities, such as being teaching intensive and focusing on teacher training, they would hardly be implemented.

8.5 Quality management

8.5.1 Administrative regulations and approaches

Changed or not?

The case studies suggest that the improvement of quality management is one of the most significant effects of the QAUE on the evaluated institutions. It has pushed universities to revise their rules and regulations in terms of teaching. The revised administrative regulations have imposed strict disciplines on teachers and students. However, the approaches to management which concern individual needs have not emerged as the QAUE expected in the evaluated institutions. Furthermore, following the requirements of the QAUE, the specific procedures and standards for completing teaching work have been set up in the evaluated institutions, such as the standardised format of teaching documents and the archive management systems. The revision of rules and regulations was completed before the site visit of the QAUE evaluators.

They were implemented strictly during the period of preparing for the site visit, but after the evaluators left, the implementation varied from case to case. In the case studies, they were sustained better in NWNU and LYNC than BNU, which will be explained later.

The case studies show that the effects of the QAUE on institutions with different statuses are not the same. LYNC (a newly-built institution) has established a large number of administrative regulations to meet the requirement of the QAUE. BNU (an elite university) has only slightly adjusted their regulations to make them explicit, and implemented them more strictly than before. A respondent from BNU indicated that this is because "the newly-built colleges usually do not consider the establishment of rules, [...] but the top ranking universities always gear their regulations to changing situations on their own initiative, and so external pressures do not have many implications for them" (IA17). That is to say, the extent of the change is largely related to the gap between the existing situations of the evaluated institutions and the requirements of the QAUE.

In terms of norms, the respondents in the case studies believe that it is necessary to adjust university teaching management in the context of the changing external environment and the diversified teacher and student bodies. The explicit rules and regulations could also provide external audiences with accountability, which is being required more and more (Fu & Zhao, 2009; Zhou, 2010). However, whether the administrative methods the QAUE devised are ideal for all of the evaluated universities in China is questionable. Firstly, with regard to the strict disciplines, the respondents indicated that most teachers are self-disciplined because of their own intrinsic professional ethics rather than adhering to extrinsic regulations (ID10, IIA15, IIB20, IID19, IIH14 and IIID16). At the same time, they admitted that it is not enough to depend only on teachers' professional ethics (IH8, IG1, IIB20, III9 and IIK10). The strict disciplines have indeed eliminated intolerable behaviour, but these are very occasional cases in most HEIs. The majority of teachers are believed to be

self-disciplined, and over-strict administration could offend their professional dignity and reduce their job satisfaction (IIE11). By and large, the strict disciplines have been accepted better by LYNC in the case studies. People there seem to be used to this kind of administrative action, which is always believed to be necessary for assuring educational quality. In contrast, the academics in BNU (an elite university) complain about it more. They used to enjoy relatively more freedom, and so have a stronger belief in the management approaches which consider individual needs. The research into the perception of students also found that, compared with the elite institutions, the strict disciplines are more compatible with the inherent administrative culture of the low-level institutions; hence, they have been better implemented and sustained in those (Liu, 2008).

Secondly, as for the specific procedures and standards for completing teaching tasks, some teachers believe that standardised requirements are necessary for teaching documents. Following these requirements, teachers have to prepare the teaching documents carefully, which is beneficial to quality assurance (IID20, IIE1, IIF12, III3, IIIA17, IIIB1, IIID1, IIIE1, IIIF15, IIIG13 and IIIH18). Other teachers emphasise that these requirements have no essential relationship with teaching effectiveness (ID13, IH8), and the standardised requirements for teaching and learning have made higher education resemble school education. They feel that creative work has been excluded, which goes against the aim of quality improvement. In summary, the specific procedures and standards for carrying out teaching are useful for guaranteeing education quality at a basic level, but they are not helpful for creative teaching activities. Comparatively speaking, NWNU and LYNC in the case studies are more inclined to consent to the requirements of the QAUE in this respect. They believe that the QAUE has provided the paradigm of teaching processes, which is exactly what they have been missing and will be beneficial to quality improvement (IIF11, IIJ8, IIIB1 and IIIH25). In contrast, people in BNU (an elite university) think that they had already done a satisfactory job on their own before the quality assessment, and that the requirements of the QAUE have made the procedures more standardised and rigid,

which was unnecessary (ID13, IH8).

Forces and sources of change

As mentioned above, the case studies show that the requirements of the QAUE for strict disciplines and standardised teaching procedures have been accepted by NWNU and LYNC (the less elite institutions), but people in BNU (an elite university) do not think they are beneficial to quality assurance and improvement.

The changes were initiated in all of the cases, whether or not the internal members wanted them. On the one hand, this was driven by the external pressure of the QAUE, because the QAUE evaluators directly examined the implementation of these administrative regulations. For example, they conducted classroom observations and reviewed teaching documents, and through these, they could see whether or not the teachers and students were disciplined, and whether or not the formats of these documents met the requirements of the QAUE. In this case, if universities aimed to get better evaluation results, they had to meet the requirements of the QAUE in this respect, at least at that moment. On the other hand, clearly, adopting the strict and standardised administrative ways the QAUE required could make the administrative centres of institutions more powerful. In this case, unsurprisingly, the QAUE was harnessed by the administrative centres of the evaluated institutions to compel faculties/departments and individual teachers to follow the institutional rules and regulations. University leaders in the case studies admitted that they have used the QAUE as an opportunity to enhance teaching management (IA33, IIIA27). They said that, without the external threat (QAUE), "nobody cares what we say" (IA33, IIIA27). This is probably one of the reasons why the QAUE demands university management to be strict and consider individual needs, but the evaluated universities have only responded to the strict part.

However, the implementation of these revised administrative regulations not only depends on the initiative of the administrative centres of institutions (change agents),

but also rest with the efforts of individual teachers and students. Under pressure to obtain better evaluation results, university members were very cooperative and followed the new regulations strictly, whether they were happy or not. However, after the QAUE evaluators left and the external threat disappeared, their behaviour became more flexible. The case studies suggest that, when university teachers agree with the new administrative regulations and believe that they are beneficial to improving the quality of undergraduate education, they tend to follow them. On the contrary, if they think that these requirements are merely formalities (IH21), unrelated to, or even going against, quality assurance, they are inclined to ignore them. This does not only depend on monitoring and punishment, because as the respondents said, "it is impossible to monitor every class" (IB22, IH21). Comparatively speaking, the adjusted rules and regulations have been better implemented in NWNU and LYNC than in BNU. This is firstly because the strict disciplines and standardised teaching procedures have been accepted by the low-level institutions, which have somewhat integrated them into their general university management. Yet, they seem to be incompatible with the inherent management culture of elite institutions, and thus, it is very hard to implement them there. Secondly, it is believed that the capability of low-level institutions to implement top-down reforms is greater than the elite institutions (Gong, 2009). The bureaucratic authority in the less elite institutions seems stronger than that in elite institutions (IIG11, IIH17). The elite universities have relatively stronger academic authority, and thus, the top-down reforms tend to encounter more resistance from the bottom there.

8.5.2 Internal quality monitoring systems

Changed or not?

The case studies show that the QAUE has stimulated the improvement of the internal quality monitoring systems in the evaluated institutions. They have increased the intensiveness of internal quality monitoring and paid more attention to the feedback lines to teachers. Moreover, universities have made more use of the results of the

internal quality evaluations. All of the three institutions in this research have linked the results of student course evaluations directly to reward schemes. These changes were initiated before the site-visit of the QAUE evaluators, and they have been properly continued. Since the QAUE, the awareness of internal quality assurance has also risen in the evaluated universities.

The extent of change is related to the gap between the existing internal quality monitoring scheme of an institution and the requirements of the QAUE. In the case studies, the impact is more significant in the newly-established college - LYNC, where the internal quality monitoring systems were not sound before the quality assessment. The top-ranking university - BNU - already had extensive and well-established frameworks for internal quality monitoring and feedback, so the QAUE had a minor impact on them.

Forces and sources of change

The QAUE evaluators examined the establishment and implementation of the internal quality monitoring systems. This pushed the evaluated institutions to make efforts in this respect. The respondents in the case studies admitted that internal quality monitoring schemes are essential for universities. With the discrepancy in information between the participants in the teaching process (Huisman et al., 2007), quality monitoring is required in the evaluated universities. Based on the internal peer reviews and student course evaluations, the administrative organisations and the teachers themselves would be able to know about their teaching performance, and thus, take any necessary actions to improve it (IC21, ID14, IF13, IIC22 and IIIC24). Whether internal monitoring mechanisms are beneficial to the improvement of teaching quality is still a subject for debate. Nevertheless, almost all of the interview respondents admitted that they can help to eliminate intolerable behaviour. Teachers also recognise that the requirement for accountability in terms of teaching is overwhelming from both inside and outside universities (IIIC23). Basically, they accept that the administrative centres of universities have the right to monitor teaching

quality, but they do not agree with some of the approaches used by them, such as secret student investigators used in NWNU and LYNC (IIF16, IIG15, III12 and IIJ13). Furthermore, different from the radical change regarding strict disciplines and standardised teaching procedures, the adjustment of internal quality assurance systems in the evaluated institutions was rather incremental: it was built upon the existing means of monitoring quality. In this case, resistance to the adjustment in this respect was relatively minor.

8.6 Teaching and learning

8.6.1 Teaching contents

Changed or not?

The case studies show that the evaluated institutions agree with the norms defined by the QAUE that teaching contents should be adapted to the diversified student bodies and the changing social and economic demands. They have made efforts to adjust teaching contents to meet the requirement of the QAUE. Firstly, the evaluated universities have reinforced their incentive schemes, such as the building of *Excellent Curricula* in all of the three cases. They have encouraged teachers to revise curriculum components and write text books. However, the case studies show that only a small group of teachers have been engaged in these activities. Secondly, the evaluated institutions have enhanced their control over the selection of text books, as requested by the QAUE. They have preferred the classic text books recommended by the MOE. However, most teachers do not feel that the teaching contents had been confined because of this. On the whole, the impact of the QAUE was limited in this respect.

Forces and sources of change

As mentioned above, the evaluated institutions and their members consented to the requirement of the QAUE for reforming teaching contents. In fact, HEIs have always encouraged teachers to conduct curriculum reform, and their efforts in this respect

have grown under the pressure of the external quality assessment. For example, they have increased their financial support for curriculum reform and text book production, and although teachers have appreciated these funding projects (IF22), only a small group of them have benefitted from them. With respect to text book management, teachers do not think that these new regulations have restricted their freedom to decide what to teach. Notwithstanding, most of them do not agree with the requirement of the QAUE, that text books should be standardised. They especially argued against all universities in the whole country using the same text books (IIE8, IIH6).

As an external force driving the reform of teaching contents, the QAUE focused on the efforts made by the evaluated institutions to improve their teaching contents, but the QAUE evaluators did not review the teaching contents *per se,* such as the training plans, curriculum syllabuses, and class handouts. The evaluators were not academic peers from the subject groups. They did not have sufficient knowledge to challenge the teaching content in a subject field in which they were not specialists. Thus, when the evaluators conducted classroom observations, most of their reviews were about teaching techniques rather than contents. Thus, the evaluated institutions did not feel much pressured to make improvements in this respect. The case studies show that there were no collective actions at the subject level, which is supposed to be the most important agent driving the change of teaching contents.

Furthermore, the QAUE encouraged HEIs to conduct curriculum reform. However, there is not much room for universities to change in this respect, since they are subject to the state curriculum regulations. The MOE controls the compulsory courses of every undergraduate programme in China, and specifies their key contents (Wang & Liu, 2009, p. 81). Thus, the efforts of HEIs could only concentrate on elective courses. In the opinions of the respondents, elective courses *per se* tend to match their contents to the changing needs of social and economic development and the natural advancement of subject knowledge. The QAUE's influence was also slight in this

respect. Moreover, the improvement of teaching contents depends largely on efforts made at the subject level. The reforms initiated at the institutional level in a top-down way are not believed to be effective. On the whole, limited changes can be made to teaching contents at the institutional level.

8.6.2 Teaching methods

Changed or not?

The increased use of advanced educational technology is the most noticeable change concerned with teaching methods. This has benefitted from the improvement of teaching facilities (such as multi-media equipment) and the training to use educational technology provided by the evaluated institutions. Furthermore, the LYNC case offers an example that the QAUE has stimulated junior staff to master the basic teaching skills within a very short time with the help of internal staff training and supervision mechanisms. This has mainly happened in the less elite institutions, which have recruited a large number of staff recently, with the aim of meeting the demands of the QAUE for student-teacher ratios. The sudden expansion in the number of junior staff has made internal staff development particularly necessary. However, the case studies show that the essential transformation of teaching methods, from teacher-centred to student-centred, is not noticeable. The administrative centres of institutions are encouraging teachers to use diverse teaching methods as always. However, the respondents conceded that the change at the level of individual academics was really limited. Research into the perception of students also found that the QAUE did not cause the change of daily teaching approaches (Liu, 2008).

In terms of norms, the evaluated institutions basically agree with the criteria of "good" teaching methods defined by the QAUE. They always believe that basic teaching skills are necessary for assuring educational quality. About teaching methods, from the point of view of academics, it is debatable whether the inquiry-based teaching and learning required by the QAUE could produce better teaching

effectiveness than the traditional methods. Some respondents stressed that the traditional teaching approaches had their own advantages (IIE9, IIH12). The basic subject knowledge needs to be imparted to students, since without the basic knowledge, their inquiry would be shallow. Thus, they do not think a radical change from teacher-centred to student-centred teaching approaches is appropriate (IH5, IIG6), but they agree with the requirement of the QAUE for increasing use of student-centred teaching approaches and adopting diverse teaching methods. Similarly, teachers basically agree with the requirement of the QAUE for the use of teaching aids, as shown in the case studies. In fact, not all of them think that advanced educational technology (such as multi-media assisted instructions) is beneficial for improving teaching quality. Nevertheless, most teachers admit that advanced educational technology has made the teaching and learning process more convenient for teachers and more visual for students.

Forces and sources of change

The requirement of the QAUE to transform teaching methods is not new. The higher education system in China, from the MOE on the top to almost all HEIs on the bottom, always encourages teachers to use student-centred instead of teacher-centred teaching approaches, and students are expected to learn based on inquiry (Wang & Liu, 2009, p. 248). However, it turns out that these efforts have not been very effective hitherto. The respondents in the case studies indicated that there are many difficulties in adjusting teaching methods. For example, big class sizes make it difficult for teachers to organise group discussions in class (IIH13, IIIE7 and IIIF7). Most teachers have been trained with the traditional teacher-centred teaching methods and thus, they do not like (or do not know how) to use student-centred teaching approaches (IA25, IIIE7 and IIIF7). Students are also not active in expressing their own ideas in class. This may be rooted in the traditional Confucian culture, which does not encourage students to challenge their teachers, and also attributed to their school education, which adopted traditional teaching methods to train them (IIH13, IIIE7 and IIIF7).

The difficulties in transforming the teaching methods mentioned above could not be resolved solely by external pressures, such as the QAUE. The respondents believe that universities should provide teachers with more opportunities to go out and experience advanced teaching methods at first hand (IID13, IIG5 and IIIA13), which could help them to perceive the advantages of these advanced teaching methods and learn how to use them. This is believed to be more efficient than compelling them to change their teaching methods in a top-down way, as the QAUE did. Furthermore, the QAUE was not conducted by academic peers from the same subject fields, and there were also no pedagogic experts in the evaluator groups. When the evaluators conducted classroom observations, they could usually only see whether there was an active interaction between teachers and students in classes on the surface. However, they could not perceive whether that interaction had indeed contributed to the development of students' independent and creative thinking. Accordingly, teachers also focused on the superficial adjustment of teaching methods by increasing group discussions and other visible classroom activities. At the same time, the respondents indicated that there is no absolute definition of "good teaching", and it is difficult to judge whether a teaching method is good or not. Two evaluators may have completely different opinions on the same class (III7). In this case, they would hesitate to challenge the teaching methods used by the teachers. The advice from the external evaluators was usually about techniques, such as board writing and teachers' voices, but not the essence of teaching methods. The teachers in the case studies did not think that these suggestions were very helpful for the transformation of teaching methods. Moreover, many evaluated institutions rehearsed some classes for the reviews of the QAUE evaluators in order to maximise the evaluation results. In this case, the evaluators had no chance to see the real classes, which made things even worse.

Concerning teaching technology, most teachers admit that advanced educational technology has made the teaching and learning process more convenient for teachers and more visual for students. As one of them said, "if they use the traditional teaching methods without educational technology, teachers will get very tired; [...] and

students will not be happy either [who are believed to prefer the visual effects of the advanced technology]" (IIB15). Using educational technology can also help teachers to score in student course evaluations, where the use of teaching aids is a very important performance indicator. Thus, teachers could benefit from the use of advanced educational technology. Compared with the transformation of teaching methods, the use of teaching aids is also comparatively easier for external evaluators to assess. Thus, if the evaluated universities wanted to pass the evaluation, they had to push their teachers to adopt advanced teaching aids as the QAUE requested. At the same time, the improvement of teaching facilities has also made the change process more prone to occur.

8.6.3 Practical training

Changed or not?

The case studies suggest that, pushed by the QAUE, the evaluated HEIs have improved their practical training. For example, they have opened new practical courses and adjusted their existing ones, extended the time of practical training, and conducted ad hoc training for students. Since the ad hoc training was operated immediately before the site visit of the external evaluators with the aim of maximising evaluation results, it was transitory. Apart from this, the changes of practical training have been properly sustained since the site-visit of the QAUE evaluators. The enhanced practical training has contributed to the improvement of students' practical abilities. Furthermore, to some extent, the development of practical training has generated a change in educational concepts (norms): more emphasis has been put upon the practice-oriented components of curricula (IB15).

Practical training in universities mainly involves activities outside universities, such as student internship and social surveys, and training inside universities such as laboratory experiments and extracurricular activities. Compared with the improvement of practical courses inside universities, the effects of the QAUE on the

outside practical training are relatively weaker, which will be discussed later. The effects of the QAUE on universities with different statuses are also not the same. In the case studies, the improvement of practical training in LYNC (a low-level institution) is more significant than in BNU (an elite university). This may be because there is more space for LYNC to improve, since it was not doing a satisfactory job before. Furthermore, in the process of improving practical training, BNU emphasised the improvement of students' practical ability to do research, while LYNC paid more attention to students' employment-related skills (IIIA28). This reflects the difference in the purposes of educating students between them.

Forces and sources of change

The evaluated institutions agree with the requirements of the QAUE to enhance students' practical abilities, which they believe are necessary to meet the demands of the employment market. From the perspective of students, practical abilities are directly related to their competitiveness in the employment market. Thus, they greatly appreciate the improvement of practical courses in universities and are keen to engage in the training (Liu, 2008).

The QAUE evaluators examined the basic skills of students directly, such as their ability to do experiments, and the teaching skills of students in the teacher training programmes. Universities have improved their practical courses and conducted ad hoc practical training for students with the aim of maximising their evaluation results. The advancement of teaching facilities has smoothed the change process. For example, LYNC has developed many advanced practical courses, and the respondents stressed that this would have never happened without the newly-equipped sophisticated experimental apparatuses (IIIA15, IIIC14 and IIIF11). The improvement of practical training outside universities, such as student internship, is not as visible as that inside them. On the one hand, they are very difficult to operate. The respondents indicated that there is inadequate social support for student internship (IA11, IIIB14), and the change will be limited when it only depends on the efforts of universities. On the

other hand, the QAUE evaluators only examined the practical courses outside universities by reading the teaching documents rather than inspecting the training processes on site (IIID11). In this case, the universities could easily manipulate the evaluators by falsifying the teaching documents, as LYNC did.

8.6.4 Graduation projects

Changed or not?

The case studies show that the evaluated institutions have enhanced the quality management of students' dissertations and graduation projects. They have set up specific standards for every procedure of completing dissertations. As a result, the quality of students' dissertations is fairly assured. At the very least, students comply with academic ethics now, and plagiarism has diminished. In the case studies, the impact is more significant in NWNU and LYNC, i.e. the less elite institutions, where students did not do as well as those in elite institutions before. Although the new quality standards were strictly implemented in the evaluated institutions before the site visit of the QAUE evaluators, they were not sustained properly after that. In terms of norms, people indicated that undergraduate students were not trained to conduct research, and thus they did not think that it was necessary for undergraduate students to complete such high-quality dissertations as those requested by the QAUE (IIIC18).

Forces and sources of change

As mentioned above, the respondents in the case studies basically failed to express their agreement with the high demand of the QAUE for the quality of students' graduation projects, although they admit that students' performance in this respect was not satisfactory before. In addition, from the perspective of the students, the quality of their dissertations has nothing to do with their success in the employment market or the post-graduate entrance examinations. Thus, they also lack motivation to make them perfect (IIC20, IIIC18). However, the quality of students' dissertations and graduation projects shows up twice in the QAUE performance indictors and it was

also examined directly by the QAUE evaluators. Thus, this is regarded as a very important indicator to measure the educational quality of universities. The evaluated institutions have made a great effort to enhance their quality management of students' dissertations and graduation projects in order to maximise their evaluation results. With the external threat of the QAUE, the students were also quite cooperative before the site visit of the evaluators. However, subsequently, although the quality requirements for dissertations still metaphorically exist, the respondents in the case studies conceded that their actual effects had diminished (IIC20, IIIC18, IIIF16 and IIIH12). The quality assurance and improvement of dissertations cannot only depend on strict management, but also needs students' commitment and creative abilities. In the long term, it is very difficult to maintain the high quality requested by the QAUE without the commitment of students.

8.7 Teaching-research balance

Changed or not?

The impact of the QAUE on the balance between teaching and research is not very visible in the low-level institutions which do not provide post-graduate education, and thus, the tension between teaching and research is quite slight (IIIA18). In the three cases studied, change mainly occurred in BNU and NWNU. In terms of norms, the QAUE has pushed universities to increase the importance they attach to teaching. All of them declared that teaching is their fundamental mission rhetorically. In terms of operations, the evaluated universities have made a great deal of effort to achieve a better balance between teaching and research by adjusting their resource allocation and institution-wide policies and regulations. Firstly, they have given priority to undergraduate education in terms of funding allocation. Secondly, they have adjusted their staff policies, with the aim of enabling excellent teaching staff (human resources) to serve undergraduate education. Now, more undergraduate courses than before are undertaken by the teachers with the qualification of *principal lecturer*. All professors and associate professors have to teach a certain number of undergraduate courses as

requested by the QAUE.

Although these strategies are beneficial for increasing the resource commitment to teaching, it seems difficult to sustain them in the long term. Firstly, it is not so clear whether universities could keep giving priority to teaching in terms of funding allocation. The university leader respondents in the case studies were not optimistic about this (IIA21). Secondly, university leaders and teachers agree with the requirement of the QAUE that senior academics should teach undergraduate courses. However, they indicated that this is not quite feasible. For example, in BNU, professors have to teach undergraduate courses as requested; at the same time, lecturers and associate professors also need to do a certain amount of undergraduate teaching to be qualified for professional promotion. However, there are insufficient undergraduate courses available for both groups to accomplish their assignment. Thus, it is hard for universities to implement this mandate. The NWNU people also conceded that they have not performed properly in this respect, even at the time of the QAUE site-visit.

The adjustment of institutional policies involves both mandates and rewards. Firstly, universities have reinforced the quality management of undergraduate courses, as discussed previously. Strict disciplines have been imposed on teachers to ensure that they are committed to teaching. The respondents in the case studies indicated that the strict disciplines have only constrained badly-performing staff, which is a very small group in universities. The majority of teachers are always self-disciplined, so it is hard to say whether these strict disciplines have stimulated them to increase their commitment to undergraduate teaching, or have diminished their enthusiasm for teaching. By and large, compared with academics, university leaders and administrators have more confidence in the efficiency of management mechanisms. Secondly, universities have adjusted the ways in which teachers' salaries are determined, adding more weight to teaching performance. At the same time, teaching-related criteria are also applied to consideration for promotion. All of the

three cases in this present study have initiated punitive mechanisms. If teachers fail their student course evaluations, their professional promotion will be deferred regardless of their research achievements. However, because of a lack of fair criteria with which to measure teaching performance, the impact of both rewards and penalties is limited, which will be explained below. Thirdly, universities have increased the funding for teaching enhancement projects (such as the reforms of the curriculum and teaching methods). These projects have encouraged teachers to commit to research on teaching, but only a few teachers have engaged in these projects. Most of them prefer to do non-teaching-related research projects, which are believed to be more beneficial to their career development (IIB24). These new institutional policies still exist after the QAUE, but their actual effects on the everyday work of academics are slight.

From the perspective of individual academics, the case studies suggest that their awareness that teaching is the key task of universities has been reinforced. University and faculty leaders disseminated this idea extensively during the period of preparing for the QAUE, and as a result, teachers have paid more attention to teaching. However, their behaviour has not changed noticeably. As already discussed, although universities have specified the minimum working time of teaching, implemented strict quality management, and initiated a variety of incentive schemes, only a very small group of people have been involved in these mandates and rewards. Almost all of the teacher respondents indicated that research is still their preference, just as it has always been.

Forces and sources of change

In theory, the evaluated institutions agree with the requirement of the QAUE for a better balance between teaching and research. They also admit that research has become more of a concern to universities and academics in the majority of Chinese universities, and that teaching has been somewhat ignored (IC2, IIB23, IIIA2 and IIIC1). The respondents stressed that "universities are not as the same as research

institutes; teaching is also their responsibility, as important as research" (IC1). Thus, it is necessary to change this situation. However, in reality, their motivation to move their focus from research to teaching seems quite low. Firstly, nowadays, the state uses research productivity as a key indicator to evaluate universities' performance and allocate resources to them (IA23, IIA20, IIB23 and III17). In the context of the knowledge economy, research productivity is one of the main determinants of a country's competitiveness. So, it is not surprising that research attracts more attention from the state. Furthermore, research achievement is also crucial to the reputation of universities. In this case, universities always try to produce as many research outputs as they can, with the aim of pursuing the maximum funding and reputation (Ma, 2008; Li & Cao, 2008). They use research productivity as the dominant criterion to measure teachers' performance, and decide their professional promotion and salaries. Thus, whereas almost all of the evaluated universities professed that teaching was the most important task for them, as requested by the QAUE, this seems to be contrary to reality. Moreover, research outcomes are much easier to assess and compare than teaching effectiveness, and this may be another reason why research performance is favoured in evaluation systems, both when the state evaluates universities, and when universities evaluate their staff.

Even if universities genuinely intend to emphasise teaching, the case studies show that their strategies could slightly influence the behaviour of academics. It is well known that there are no absolute definitions of "good teaching" and so there are no reliable means to measure teachers' teaching effectiveness. The only quantitative way used by Chinese universities is student course evaluation, which is widely believed to be unreliable. In other words, teaching effectiveness is somewhat unmeasured (IA23). In this case, the strategies the universities have adopted, both mandates and rewards, may not be based on the real teaching effectiveness of teachers. Universities can only use the measurable indicators available to assess teachers' performance, such as the class hours a teacher has worked, whether a teacher is disciplined, and his/her research outcomes on teaching. As a result, ironically, they have encouraged teachers

to commit to research on teaching rather than classroom teaching *per se* (IG7, IIH25). By the same token, universities have reservations about the use of punitive schemes. For example, they declare that teachers' professional promotion will be deferred if they fail their student course evaluations. However, because the results of student course evaluations are not sufficiently reliable, the symbolic value of this sanction appears to be more important than its practical effects. Only those teachers with an intolerable teaching performance, a very few, have actually been punished. In summary, without fair ways of measuring teaching performance, both rewards and penalties have limited effects on the behaviour of individual academics.

From the perspective of academics, the evaluated universities increased the weight attached to teaching effectiveness when assessing staff performance. However, research is still the most important factor which influences the professional promotion and revenue of academics. Basically, as long as their teaching effectiveness is tolerable, their professional promotion will not be held back. In contrast, they will not be promoted without adequate research outcomes, no matter how excellent their teaching is (Yu et al., 2008). The respondents stressed that the countervailing pressures on them from research assessment are much stronger (ID18, IG6, IH13, IIF22, IIH24, III16, IIJ15, IIIE18, IIIF25 and IIIG20). Furthermore, compared with teaching effectiveness, research outcomes are more important for academics to obtain the esteem of their peers. As a respondent said, "they [academics] could gain both honour and money from doing research; but the commitment to teaching has to rest with teachers' conscience" (IIB23). In this case, many teachers tend to ensure that their teaching effectiveness is tolerable, and then devote themselves to research (Li & Cao, 2008). This could also be attributed to the repetitive nature of the teaching task and the more challenging nature of research (ID18).

The QAUE reviewed the efforts at the institutional level, i.e. the strategies the universities have used to achieve a better balance between teaching and research. However, there was no way to examine the actual effects of these strategies, i.e. what

happened at the individual level. In this case, the effects of the QAUE on the evaluated institutions were limited.

8.8 Summary

The case studies show that the evaluated institutions made all-out efforts to respond to the QAUE. The respondents conceded that they did not like being evaluated. However, the QAUE was conducted by the state and had enormous implications for their financial income and reputation. Thus, they had no alternative but to actively respond to the QAUE. Relatively speaking, the less elite institutions paid more attention to the QAUE than the elite universities.

The impact of the QAUE on the evaluated institutions involves five dimensions: resource commitment to undergraduate education, university identification, quality management, teaching and learning activities, and the balance between teaching and research. The case studies show that the effects of the QAUE on the various dimensions at different HEIs are not the same. The outcomes generated by the QAUE in the three cases are roughly summarised in Table 8.1 (on the next page).

In fact, it is not very precise to describe the impact of the QAUE, using "change", "continue", and "NA" (which means the change is unnecessary, mainly because the evaluated institutions have achieved the requirements of the QAUE). Sometimes, both "change" and "continuity" may emerge in a specific dimension in one institution. Taking the growth of the staff numbers in NWNU and LYNC as an example, universities tried to recruit as many new teachers as they could, but they still failed to meet the requirement of the QAUE for student-teacher ratios. In this case, they also tried to bridge the gap by means of deception. For example, they recruited part-time staff who actually did not work there to reach the number required by the QAUE. Thus, both genuine change and manipulation occurred.

Table 8.1 Outcomes of the QAUE in the three cases

Dimensions	Items	BNU	NWNU	LYNC
Resource commitment	Teaching facilities and expenditure	Change	Change	Change
	Number of teaching staff	NA	Change	Change
	Priorities of staff recruitment	Change	Change	Change
University identification	University mission and development purposes	NA	Continue	Continue
	Special features	Change	Continue	Continue
Quality management	Administrative regulations and approaches	Continue	Change	Change
	Internal quality monitoring	NA	Change	Change
Teaching and learning	Teaching contents	Continue	Continue	Continue
	Teaching methods	Continue	Continue	Continue
	Teaching technology	Change	Change	Change
	Teaching skills	NA	NA	Change
	Practical training (inside)	Change	Change	Change
	Practical training (outside)	Continue	Continue	Continue
	Graduation project	NA	Continue	Continue
Teaching-research balance	Teaching-research balance	Continue	Continue	NA

Although they are not absolutely precise, these summaries can help to see the different outcomes generated by the QAUE clearly. By and large, change has mainly occurred in terms of resource commitment and quality management. Teaching facilities have been improved and teaching expenditure has increased significantly. The number of teaching staff has grown and the priorities of staff recruitment have been adjusted. Quality management and internal quality monitoring systems have also been adjusted considerably, especially in NWNU and LYNC (the less elite institutions). On the contrary, except for the noticeable improvement of practical training and the increasing use of educational technology, the change in terms of teaching and learning has been fairly slight. Universities' mission and development purposes have been clarified and their aspirations to develop special features have risen. However, the change has been more rhetorical rather than practical, especially in NWNU and LYNC (the less elite institutions). In addition, although the evaluated

universities have made efforts to achieve a better balance between teaching and research, the practical effects were negligible.

Furthermore, the extent of "change" at different universities is not the same. This is related to the gap between the existing situation and the requirement of the QAUE. Basically, compared with the elite universities, the change is more significant in the less elite institutions. They did not do a satisfactory job before the QAUE, and thus, they have more room to improve. It is also associated with the capability of the evaluated institutions to implement change. For example, universities have different financial capabilities to improve their teaching facilities and increase teaching expenditure. Their ability to attract high-level teaching staff and their innovative capability to develop special features are also distinct.

Besides the operational change, the adjustment of norms caused by the QAUE was also discussed. Some of the new norms of what constitutes "good" practices of higher education defined by the QAUE were brought into the evaluated institutions accompanied by the change in terms of operations. For example, the new criteria of "good" teaching staff defined by the QAUE have been accepted by the evaluated institutions and regularised there. The standardised teaching procedures have become paradigm in some of the evaluated institutions (NWNU and LYNC in the case studies). The motivation of universities to develop special features and to make a better balance between teaching and research has been enhanced. The awareness of internal quality assurance has risen. More emphasis has been put on the practical knowledge and training for students. Some of the norms defined by the QAUE were already recognised by the evaluated institutions before, and thus no visible change occurred. For example, universities always believe that adequate resources, strict disciplines (in NWNU and LYNC), basic teaching skills are necessary for assuring educational quality. They also agree that universities should have explicit and reasonable mission and development purpose, reform teaching contents, adopt diverse teaching methods and use advanced teaching technology. However, some of the norms defined by the

QAUE were not accepted by the evaluated institutions, such the requirements of the QAUE for high-quality dissertations, and for strict disciplines and standardised teaching procedures (in BNU).

The change and continuity as a result of the QAUE, in terms of both operations and norms, will be discussed in depth in the next Chapter, to explore the reasons why the QAUE could or could not generate the intended changes.

CHAPTER NINE: QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND UNIVERSITY CHANGE

9.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the outcomes of the QAUE and discusses the reasons why it can or cannot cause genuine change in the evaluated institutions. Based on the empirical results from the study of the QAUE, a model is proposed to describe how quality assessment causes university change. This chapter begins by reviewing the impact of the QAUE on the various dimensions of the evaluated institutions; what has changed and what has not. The reasons the QAUE generated change and continuity are explained. Based on these explanations, the driving forces of change, both external and internal, are elaborated. Their sources and influential factors are explored. With the help of the empirical results, a model is proposed in the subsequent section to describe how external quality assessment interacts with the evaluated institutions and causes them to change. The ideal conditions under which a quality assessment can cause university change are indicated, and its inherent limitations are considered.

9.2 Outcomes of the QAUE

As discussed in the last chapter, the case studies show that the impact of the QAUE on the various dimensions of quality provisions at different universities has not been the same. The effect on the resource commitment to undergraduate education and quality management has been quite significant, especially in the less elite institutions, while there has been slight change in terms of university identification, teaching and learning activities, and the balance between teaching and research. The outcomes of the QAUE involve both the adjustment of operations and the shift of norms. The change and continuity as a result of the QAUE are discussed in this section.

9.2.1 Change

The changes generated by the QAUE are summarised below.

Firstly, university infrastructure, teaching facilities and teaching expenditure have been significantly improved and increased in the evaluated institutions. The numbers of teaching staff have grown notably. The priorities of staff recruitment have been adjusted, and more emphasis has been put upon high academic qualifications and diverse educational backgrounds. These new selection criteria for teaching staff have been regularised, accompanied by an adjustment of the definition of what constitutes high-level teaching staff. Secondly, encouraged by the QAUE, the desire of the evaluated institutions to create special features has risen and actual improvement in this respect has emerged in BNU (an elite university). Thirdly, the evaluated institutions have imposed strict disciplines on teachers and students and set up standardised teaching procedures. Enhanced quality management has been appropriately sustained in NWNU and LYNC (the less elite institutions), and a paradigm of teaching processes has also been established there. Furthermore, the QAUE has stimulated the improvement of the internal quality monitoring systems in the evaluated institutions, and the awareness of internal quality assurance has been enhanced. Fourthly, in terms of teaching and learning activities, the use of educational technology has increased in the evaluated institutions and the basic teaching skills of the junior staff in LYNC (a lower-level institution) have been raised to an acceptable level. The practical training inside universities has improved significantly; meanwhile, more importance has been attached to practice-oriented knowledge and training.

The change involves the approaches to achieving high quality (the operational mode) and the norms of "good" higher education (the normative mode). By and large, it can be seen that the QAUE has caused two different kinds of change in the evaluated institutions. In the first case, the change only involves the adjustment of the approaches to achieving high quality, which can be defined as single-loop learning. In

the second case, the adjustment of operations was accompanied by a transformation of norms of "good" higher education, which can be regarded as double-loop learning.

Single-loop learning

Single-loop learning means only adjusting the operational modes (Argyris, 1999). In the case where quality assessment causes university change, this means that the approaches to achieving high quality are shifted, but the norms of what constitutes high quality are retained. The following outcomes of the QAUE can be defined as single-loop learning:

- The improvement of teaching facilities, an increase in teaching expenditure, and the growth in the number of teaching staff;
- The imposition of strict disciplines on teachers and students in NWNU and LYNC (the less elite institutions);
- The increasing use of educational technology and the improvement of the basic teaching skills of junior staff in LYNC (a low-level institution).

In the group of single-loop learning, the norms of what constitutes good practice in higher education, as defined by the QAUE, were always accepted by the evaluated institutions. Notwithstanding, their actual operations did not align with the norms they believed in. People believed that adequate resources, strict disciplines (in less elite institutions) and basic teaching skills were necessary for assuring educational quality. However, as a result of the dramatic expansion of higher education enrolment from the end of the 1990s, teaching facilities and expenditure, the number of teaching staff and their teaching skills, and teaching management, could not keep pace with the expansion of student bodies in the majority of Chinese universities (sub-section 3.3.1). In this context, the QAUE emerged. It was harnessed by the evaluated institutions as an opportunity to push their sponsors (such as local governments) to increase financial support for them, to push teachers and students to follow institutional policies, and to push teachers to improve their teaching skills to an acceptable level. Similarly, university leaders and teachers always believed that advanced educational technology

could make the teaching and learning process more convenient for teachers and more visual for students. However, without adequate teaching facilities, the use of educational technology was not satisfactory in the evaluated institutions before the quality assessment. Pushed by the QAUE, universities have equipped themselves with advanced teaching facilities and conducted internal staff training for the use of educational technology, such as multi-media assisted instruction. As a result, the use of educational technology has grown to meet the requirements of the QAUE and the internal needs of the evaluated institutions.

As shown in Figure 9.1, the external reviews of the QAUE have pushed the evaluated institutions to adjust their operations, and match them with the requirements of the QAUE as well as their own norms. The existing disequilibrium between the normative and operational modes has been corrected and a new equilibrium has been established.

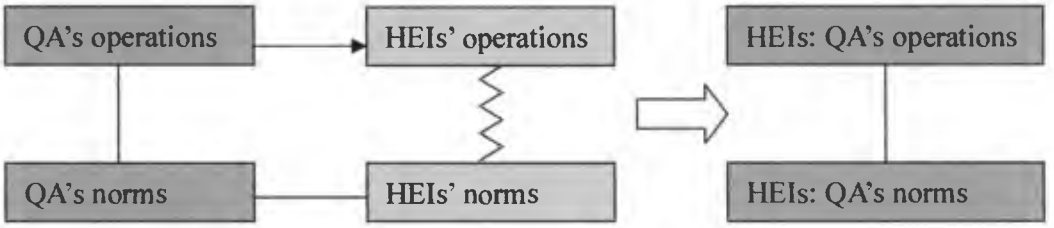

Figure 9.1 Single-loop learning[17]

Double-loop learning

Double-loop learning involves the transformation of both operational and normative modes (Argyris, 1999). In the case where an external quality assessment causes university change, double-loop learning means that the approaches to achieving high

[17] **Key to the diagrams (Figure 9.1 - Figure 9.4):**

Straight line	in a balanced state
Wavy line	in an unbalanced state
Arrow	imposing influence
White arrow	from one state to the next
Blue filling	requirements of the QAUE
Yellow filling	practices of HEIs before the QAUE

quality are shifted and the norms of high-quality education are altered correspondingly. The following outcomes of the QAUE can be described as double-loop learning:

- Priorities of staff recruitment have been adjusted, with more emphasis on high academic qualifications and diverse educational backgrounds, and the concept of high-level teaching staff has changed accordingly;
- Special features have been created in BNU (an elite university), and the desire of these institutions to be distinguished has been enhanced;
- Standardised teaching procedures have been adopted and a paradigm of teaching processes has been established in NWNU and LYNC (the less elite institutions);
- Internal quality monitoring systems have been improved, and the awareness of internal quality assurance has been strengthened;
- Practical training inside universities has been improved and the importance attached to practice-oriented knowledge and training has been increased.

In the group of double-loop learning, the norms of what constitutes good practice in higher education, as defined by the QAUE, were somewhat different from those previously adopted by the evaluated institutions. The evaluated institutions agreed with the norms defined by the QAUE and they were able to implement the expected operational changes. In the meanwhile, since the operations were directly reviewed by the external evaluators, they had to change somewhat if they wanted to pass the QAUE. For example, in terms of the improvement of practical training, the evaluated universities and their internal members believe that the practical abilities of students are important for enhancing their employability in the labour market. High employability of students is essential to the long-term prosperity of universities. At the same time, teaching facilities were improved, which made it easier to improve practical training inside universities. The QAUE evaluators reviewed the practical courses on site and examined the practical abilities of students. In this case, the evaluated institutions were motivated to make improvements in this respect, with the aim of maximising their evaluation results. In line with the operational adjustment of practical training, the educational philosophy in the evaluated institutions also shifted:

more emphasis was put on practice-oriented knowledge and training. Similarly, the evaluated institutions agreed with the requirements of the QAUE for recruiting teaching staff with high academic qualifications and diverse educational backgrounds, establishing extensive internal quality monitoring mechanisms, and adopting standardised teaching procedures (in the less elite institutions). These requirements were believed to be beneficial to quality assurance and improvement. At the same time, the evaluated institutions had the capacity to make corresponding adjustments to their operations, and the direct examination of external evaluators in these respects also made the evaluated institutions more liable to do so.

As shown in Figure 9.2, the external review pushed universities to adjust their operations, and the new norms were accepted by the evaluated institutions, and replaced the existing ones. Thus, the existing equilibrium between the normative and operational modes was broken and a new equilibrium was established.

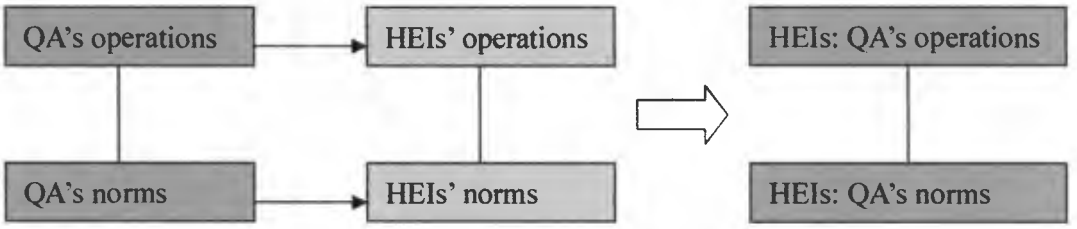

Figure 9.2 Double-loop learning

9.2.2 Continuity

The case studies show that some of the intended changes of the QAUE have not been generated in the evaluated institutions, as outlined below.

Firstly, some of the evaluated institutions have not recruited as many qualified teachers as the QAUE required because of their limited financial resources and low competitiveness in the labour market (NWNU and LYNC). With the aim of obtaining better evaluation results, they chose to manipulate the evaluators by recruiting

part-time staff who hardly ever work there, and awarding academic qualifications to their own staff without adequate training. Secondly, the evaluated institutions have clarified their mission and development purposes, and made these conform more closely to external demands. The motivation to develop special features has been strengthened. However, it turned out that the adjusted mission and development purposes, which were articulated in the "front-staged" documents, had limited impact on university operation. The capabilities of the institutions, especially the less elite ones (NWNU and LYNC) to develop special features were not as high as expected. Thus, the practical change in this respect has been quite slight. Thirdly, BNU (an elite university) also set up strict disciplines and standardised teaching procedures. However, these new regulations seemed to be less compatible with their inherent management culture and thus, have not been sustained. Fourthly, there has not been much essential change in the teaching contents and teaching methods as a result of the QAUE, although the evaluated institutions agree with the requirements of the QAUE for adapting teaching contents to the diversified student bodies and the changing social and economic demands, and adopting student-centred teaching approaches. A strict quality management of students' graduation projects was initiated in the evaluated institutions, but this has not been properly sustained, especially in NWNU and LYNC (the less elite institutions). Fifthly, the evaluated universities have made efforts to achieve a better balance between teaching and research through resource allocation and the adjustment of institutional policies. However, the practical effects of these strategies are negligible. At the individual level, research still engages most of the time and energies of academics.

By and large, two different kinds of continuity can be observed when considering the outcomes in terms of operations and norms. In the first case, the evaluated institutions espoused the norms of "good" practices of higher education defined by the QAUE, but without a corresponding change in operations. In the second case, apart from the continuity of operations, the evaluated institutions also did not accept the norms defined by the QAUE.

In the first case, the norms of high-quality education as defined by the QAUE were espoused, but the corresponding change of operations did not emerge. Thus, the evaluated institutions had merely responded to the external requirements symbolically. The outcomes of the QAUE in terms of university mission and development purposes, special features in the less elite institutions, teaching contents, teaching methods, practical training outside universities, and the balance between teaching and learning, can be defined as being symbolic responses. The evaluated institutions agreed with the requirement of the QAUE:

- to have adequate teaching staff with high academic qualifications;
- to have explicit and reasonable mission and development purposes, which should align with external demands;
- to develop special features;
- to adapt their teaching contents to the changing needs of students and the external environment;
- to change teaching methods from teacher-centred to students-centred;
- to conduct practical training;
- to achieve a better balance between teaching and research.

However, no corresponding changes were made in operations, and in some cases, this was because the evaluated institutions did not have sufficient capacity to implement them, even though they were motivated to do so. For example, the evaluated institutions did not have adequate financial resources and competitiveness in the labour market to recruit as many qualified teachers as required by the QAUE; some of them, especially low-level institutions, did not have the expected innovative capabilities to develop special features; the evaluated institutions did not have the autonomy to reform curriculums which are subject to the state curriculum regulations. At the present time, the conditions required to use student-centred teaching methods have not been made available in most Chinese universities; social support for operating practical training outside universities was inadequate; the strategies initiated

at the institutional level to strike the right balance between teaching and research did not have much actual effect on the individual behaviour of academics, and research still engages most of their time and energies. In some cases, implementing change would have been contrary to the interests of the evaluated institutions, so they did not have much internal motivation to change. For example, the practical interests of universities would be hurt if they aligned their mission with external demands to become teacher training oriented or teaching intensive. As shown in the case studies, universities could acquire more funding by developing non-teacher training programmes (NWNU), and research achievements are essential to upgrading their status from a college to a university (LYNC). By the same token, universities do not have much motivation to transfer their focus from research to teaching, because both their financial and reputational resources largely depend on their research productivity rather than their teaching effectiveness. Thus, basically, there has been no change of operations in this group, either because they are not motivated to change or are incapable of changing, or both.

In cases where the QAUE evaluators directly reviewed certain aspects of university operations, the evaluated institutions tended to manipulate the evaluators with the aim of maximising the evaluation results. For example, many institutions rehearsed classes with advanced teaching methods to manipulate the classroom observation of external evaluators; they also falsified the records of practical training outside universities. In contrast, if there was no direct review by the external evaluators, the evaluated institutions may have felt less pressured to deceive, so they tended to respond to the QAUE orally. For example, they declared themselves to be teacher training oriented institutions in their self-evaluation reports, but their steps to develop non-teacher training programmes have never slowed down. While they professed teaching to be the most important task of universities, in reality, research was still their major concern.

As shown in Figure 9.3, the evaluated institutions espouse the new norms proposed by the QAUE orally, but they did not have sufficient capacity and/or motivation to adapt their operations to the QAUE's requirements. Thus, the norms governing their operations, theory-in-use in the words of Argyris (1999), are still the same as before. The two norms exist incompatibly in the evaluated institutions.

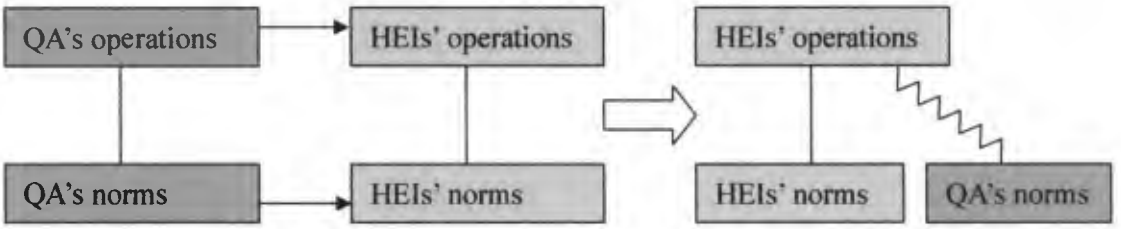

Figure 9.3 Symbolic responses

In the second case, the evaluated institutions neither adjusted their operations nor accepted the norms of "good" higher education defined by the QAUE. They did not think that the requirements of the QAUE were beneficial to quality assurance and improvement, such as the requirements for the quality management of graduation projects and for the strict disciplines and standardised teaching procedures in BNU (an elite university). The examination of the QAUE evaluators pushed them to make a transitory compliance in terms of operations. They did not think that it was necessary for undergraduate students to complete such high-quality dissertations as those requested by the QAUE, because they were not being trained to conduct research. However, the quality of graduation projects is shown as a performance indicator of the QAUE twice, and thus, it is regarded as one of the most important indicators to judge the outcomes of undergraduate education. In this case, the evaluated institutions had to comply with the requirement of the QAUE at that time in order to maximise their evaluation results. However, when the QAUE was finished, the concern about the quality of dissertations and graduation projects diminished. Similarly, BNU initiated strict disciplines and standardised teaching procedures to meet the requirement of the QAUE, although people there did not think that these strategies were beneficial to quality assurance and improvement. In this respect, the adjustment of operations was

not properly sustained. After the QAUE, people continued to do what they thought was right.

As illustrated in Figure 9.4, the external reviews pushed universities to adjust their operations, but they did not accept the norms defined by the QAUE. Disequilibrium between the operational and normative modes emerged, but it did not last long. After the external pressure disappeared, the transitory compliance also stopped and people still did what they used to do before.

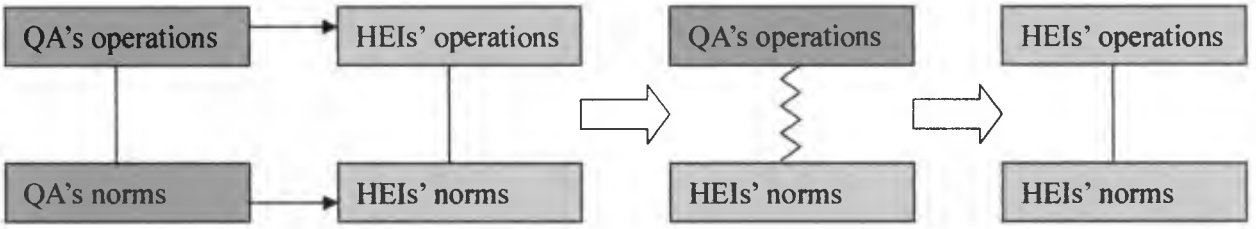

Figure 9.4 Transitory compliance

The analysis of the outcomes of the QAUE shows that genuine change is accompanied by the establishment of a new equilibrium state between the operational mode and normative mode, which can be reached by correcting the disequilibrium between them (single-loop learning) or breaking the existing equilibrium and creating a new equilibrium (double-loop learning). The empirical results suggest that the attainment of a new state of equilibrium depended on the following conditions: the evaluated institutions accepted the norms of "good" higher education defined by the QAUE; the external quality examination pushed the evaluated institutions to make operational adjustments, which were well within their capacity and making the adjustments would not harm their interests. When the evaluated institutions did not accept the norms of "good" higher education defined by the QAUE, the external pressure could only cause a transitory compliance. If they did not have the capacity to implement change and/or doing so would harm their interests, even if they espoused the norms defined by the QAUE, genuine change would not occur. They would choose to respond to the external requirements symbolically to acquire better

evaluation results. On the whole, when the HEIs had the internal motivation and capacity to implement change in a certain aspect, external forces could facilitate the process and genuine change would emerge. When the evaluated institutions did not have the internal motivation or capacity (or both) to change, the existence of external examination would simply push them to comply with the external requirements transitorily, or respond to them symbolically, or even deceive the examiners. Thus, genuine change can only be derived from a combination of both internal and external forces. As an external force to cause university change, the QAUE seems to have been more successful when it was integrated with internal motivation and capacity to create change. The external and internal forces involved in the process will be elaborated in the next section.

9.3 Forces of change

9.3.1 Impetus of external quality assessment for university change

Firstly, on the whole, the QAUE was regarded as being a very strong external impetus. The case studies show that the evaluated institutions have actively responded to the QAUE. They have attached great importance to the evaluation results and have made all-out efforts to meet the requirements of the QAUE with the aim of achieving better evaluation results. Some of them even chose to manipulate the QAUE. Symbolic responses, transitory compliance, and even deception, emerged.

As indicated in Chapter Two, the governing forces of the owner of a quality assessment scheme and the influence of the evaluation results on financial resources and reputation of universities pushed the evaluated institutions to pursue maximum evaluation results. In principle, these were the stimuli for universities to meet the requirements of the external quality assessment. For example, the extent to which evaluated institutions would respond to the requirements of a state-run quality assessment scheme is largely determined by the extent to which HEIs are controlled by the state, and the extent to which the evaluation results can influence public

funding from the state and university reputation (which is indirectly linked with funding from the market). The better the state can steer the evaluated institutions, and the more the evaluation results are linked to the gains and losses of funding and the reputation of institutions, the more that these institutions feel pressured to meet the requirements of an external quality assessment.

In China, the QAUE is a state-run quality assessment scheme. Its owner, i.e. the state, dominates the coordination of the higher education system (sub-section 3.2.2). The link between the evaluation results and resource allocation among institutions was also emphasised by the policy designer (sub-section 3.4.1). Thus, the evaluation results are believed to be crucial to the long-term prosperity of universities. The respondents who were interviewed in the case studies confirmed that universities did not like to be evaluated. However, because the QAUE was conducted by the state and had enormous implications for their financial incomes and reputation, the evaluated institutions had no alternative but to actively respond to it (sub-section 8.2).

Theoretically, the governing forces of the owner of a quality assessment scheme, and the influence of its evaluation results on resource allocation, are not the same for every institution. For example, the level of the state's control over universities differs, largely depending on the institutional autonomy enjoyed by an evaluated institution. The influence of the evaluation results on the gains and losses of an institution's funding and reputation depends on the existing reputation of the institution and its available financial resources. That is to say, the impetus of a certain external quality assessment scheme is not the same for all institutions: it relates to the characteristics of the institutions evaluated. In the case of the QAUE, the empirical study shows that the less elite institutions made more effort to respond to the quality assessment than the elite universities (sub-section 8.2), and this may have been because the elite institutions have more institutional autonomy in China and their reputation is less vulnerable to the QAUE evaluation results. Thus, relatively speaking, they did not need to pay as much attention to the QAUE as the less elite institutions did.

Secondly, the empirical study of the QAUE shows that the evaluated institutions did not respond to all of the specific requirements of the quality assessment in the same way. The impetus of various aspects of performance indicators in a certain quality assessment scheme is not the same. The determining factor is whether the external evaluators have directly reviewed the performance of a certain dimension and can make a reliable and unambiguous judgement. Evaluation results which are comparable among institutions are more influential. The evaluated institutions tend to give more attention to the indicators which have more influence on the final evaluation results.

The type of evaluation results produced by a quality assessment (whether or not they are reliable and distinctive) is determined by the evaluators, the evaluation methods, and the aspects being evaluated, i.e. 'who evaluates what and how'. For example, a peer review can generally provide a more reliable judgement than a review by lay evaluators. Quantitative evaluation criteria can provide more unambiguous judgement than qualitative ones. It is much more difficult to review teaching effectiveness (without reliable evidence to measure it) than teaching facilities, which can easily be done by box-ticking. In the case of the QAUE, the evaluators did not review items associated with professional knowledge, such as teaching contents. Since they were not academic peers from the subject group, they could not provide reliable and unambiguous judgment of these aspects. However, they gave a narrow examination of the teaching facilities. Accordingly, the evaluated institutions responded symbolically to the requirements of the QAUE in terms of teaching contents. In contrast, they had to meet the requirements of the QAUE for teaching facilities, no matter how difficult this was.

In summary, the external impetus of a quality assessment is mainly derived from the governing forces of the quality assessment scheme's owner and the influence of the evaluation results on resource allocation among institutions. Ideally, external evaluators should review the performance of the evaluated institutions and produce

reliable (fair) and unambiguous (comparable) evaluation results through which an external quality assessment can exert some influence on the evaluated institutions. The amount of the external impetus is related to the design of the external quality assessment schemes, including the owners (the governing forces they possess), the link between evaluation results and resource allocation, and the types of the evaluation results they produce (whether or not they are reliable and unambiguous). At the same time, it is varied by the characteristics of the evaluated institutions. As discussed above, the pressure from the state (which is the owner of external quality assessments in many cases) is mediated by different levels of the institutional autonomy of the evaluated institutions; the influence of the evaluation results on resource allocation is conditioned by the existing reputation of the evaluated institution and the financial resources available for it. Figure 9.5 depicts the external impetus of quality assessment schemes for university change and the main influencing factors.

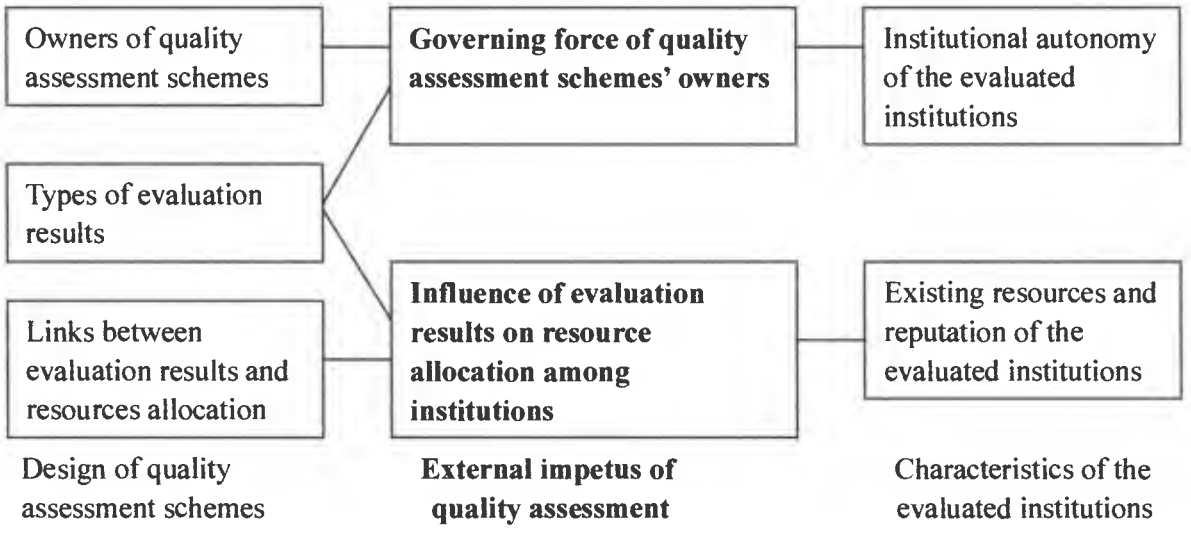

Figure 9.5 External impetus of quality assessment for university change

9.3.2 Internal motivation and capacity to create change

The empirical study of the QAUE indicates that the internal forces of change involve both the motivation of the evaluated institutions to create change and their capacity to

accomplish it. The motivation to initiate change firstly depends on whether or not the evaluated institutions accept the norms of "good" higher education defined by the external quality assessment scheme. When they believe that the external requirements are beneficial to quality improvement, they will be motivated to change in order to meet the requirements. Secondly, whether meeting the requirements of the quality assessment is in the interests of the evaluated institutions or contrary to them is also a key factor which influences their motivation to change, and this will be explained in detail later. From the operational perspective, whether or not the evaluated institutions are able to accomplish the change is also a significant factor. Change cannot be implemented without sufficient capacity, no matter how much the institution desires to change. As shown in the case of the QAUE, universities need a variety of capabilities to meet external demands, such as financial resources to improve teaching facilities, creative ability to develop special features, the capacity to implement top-down reforms in terms of quality management (such as imposing strict disciplines on teachers and students, and pushing teachers to follow standardised teaching procedures), and the autonomy and capacity to conduct curriculum reforms.

On the one hand, the motivation and capacity of the evaluated institutions to implement change are significantly related to the design of the evaluation criteria and the characteristics of the evaluated institutions, i.e. whether the requirements of the external quality assessment match the internal needs of the evaluated institutions and their capacity to implement change. A proper evaluation criterion means that the evaluated institutions agree with the norms of "good" higher education defined by the external quality assessment scheme. At the same time, there is a certain gap between the external requirement for operations and the existing operational mode in the evaluated institutions, which makes it necessary for them to improve. Moreover, meeting the requirement is within their grasp. Clearly, the definition of what constitutes good practice of higher education is not the same in various institutions. The existing situations and the capacity to meet the external requirements of quality assessment also differ from institution to institution. Thus, in principle, mission-based

quality assessment (the evaluation criteria are designed based on the self-defined purposes of the evaluated institutions) can work better than standards-based evaluation (the evaluation criteria are the objective and ideal standards defined externally) (sub-section 2.2.3).

In the case of the QAUE, the evaluation criteria were used uniformly for all the evaluated institutions. Most of the evaluation criteria were completely standards-based, and did not consider the difference between institutions, their internal needs and their capacity to accomplish change. For example, in terms of teaching facilities, the requirement for some advanced teaching facilities did not consider the needs of the evaluated institutions and their financial capacity. As a result, some low-level institutions (such as LYNC in the case studies) brought in many teaching facilities they did not need, in order to meet the QAUE's requirement. This requirement placed a huge economic burden on the institutions in undeveloped areas. At the same time, there was not a big gap between this uniform requirement and the existing situation of the elite institutions (such as BNU in the case studies), so they did not feel much pressured to make improvements. Similarly, the requirements for developing special features did not consider the creative ability of low-level institutions (NWNU and LYNC). In addition, the uniform requirements of the QAUE for strict disciplines and standardised teaching procedures were incompatible with the inherent management culture of the elite institutions (BNU), so were not accepted by them. In this case, the universities had no internal motivation to meet these requirements. Some other evaluation criteria were not completely standards-based, and there was some flexibility for the evaluated institutions to fit them into their self-defined purposes. For example, universities made efforts to improve their practical training from various perspectives: the elite institutions paid more attention to the research skills of students, and the less elite institutions focused on employment-related skills. Universities seem to have been more motivated to implement those changes which were compatible with their internal needs.

On the other hand, the HEIs were not completely subjected to the steering of external quality assessment. Universities made their own strategic decisions to respond to external pressures. As shown in the case studies, facing an external evaluation scheme, i.e. the QAUE, the evaluated institutions calculated whether or not the evaluation results could affect their financial resources and reputation. Based on this judgement, they chose the ways in which they were going to respond to the external evaluation. The method adopted by an institution could be located at a point on the continuum from completely ignoring the requirements to entirely complying with them.

Even when faced with a certain external quality assessment scheme, universities did not respond to all of its requirements in the same way. Instead, they distinguished the items according to their influence on the final evaluation results, and accordingly, responded to them in various ways. The evaluated institutions considered whether or not meeting the requirements of the external quality assessment was beneficial to their long-term prosperity. If so, they tended to use the assessment as an opportunity to maximise change. For example, the requirement of the QAUE for adequate resource commitment to undergraduate education was used by the evaluated institutions as an external threat to push local governments to increase financial support for them. In contrast, when they believed that the change had nothing to do with, or even hurt, their interests, they tended to manipulate the external evaluators, acquiring satisfactory evaluation results with minimum change. For example, the evaluated institutions and their internal members did not think that completing high-quality graduation projects related to the competitiveness of students in employment markets, and thus, to the reputation and prosperity of the universities. However, this aspect was quoted by the QAUE as being a very important indicator to measure the quality of education in universities. In this case, the evaluated institutions chose to comply with the requirement transitorily to manipulate the external evaluators without making a genuine change.

The relative gains from the expected change were measured. In the eyes of the

evaluated institutions, the external quality assessment was not the sole external force to influence their interests. They appeared to make decisions based on a holistic analysis. For example, the QAUE required HEIs to pay more attention to teaching in order to achieve a better balance between teaching and research. The evaluated institutions agreed to this requirement and admitted that they had not done a satisfactory job in this respect before. However, research achievement is regarded as being the dominant factor influencing the financial resources and reputation of HEIs in China (sub-section 3.2.2), so its influence on resource allocation was believed to be much stronger than the QAUE's evaluation results. In this case, the evaluated institutions chose to respond to the requirement of the QAUE symbolically, but in reality, they did not move their concern from research to teaching.

The collective interest of institutions was not the exclusive concern when they chose the ways of responding to the QAUE. Conflict among internal interest groups was also involved in the process. The interest groups in the position of power tended to create the changes which were beneficial to them. For example, the QAUE required the teaching management in the evaluated institutions to be strict and to consider the needs of individuals. However, the evaluated institutions only responded to the strict part, while the requirement for considering individuals' needs was ignored. Strict management seemed to be more useful for enhancing the authority of the administrative centres of institutions. University leaders and administrators admitted that they used the QAUE as an opportunity to compel faculties/departments and individual teachers/students to follow the institutional regulations. Sometimes, even though the university leaders did not think that strict disciplines were really beneficial to quality improvement (which mainly occurred in the elite institutions), they still imposed them on teachers and students, which might be derived from their ambition to gain more power. Faced with the external threat of the QAUE, the groups being managed (teachers and students) were quite cooperative, but after the quality assessment ended, they still did whatever they liked. In this respect, change was not properly sustained and conflict between interest groups is still continuing.

Thus, the existence of the internal motivation and capacity of the evaluated institutions to create change depends upon the following conditions: the evaluated institutions accepting the norms of "good" higher education defined by external quality assessment schemes; agreement that meeting the requirements of external quality assessment schemes is in the interests of the evaluated institutions; and the capacity of the evaluated institutions to implement change. These are related to both the design of evaluation criteria and the characteristics of the evaluated institutions: the compatibility between the norms of "good" higher education defined by external quality assessment schemes, and the internal norms and values of the evaluated institutions; the gap between the requirements of the external quality assessment and the capacity of the evaluated institutions to fill it. Furthermore, the evaluated institutions have the initiatives to decide whether to change or not. The dominant driving force behind their decision is to maximise the interests of the evaluated institutions and especially the interests of the group in power. The internal motivation and capacity of the evaluated institutions to create change, and the main influencing factors are shown in Figure 9.6.

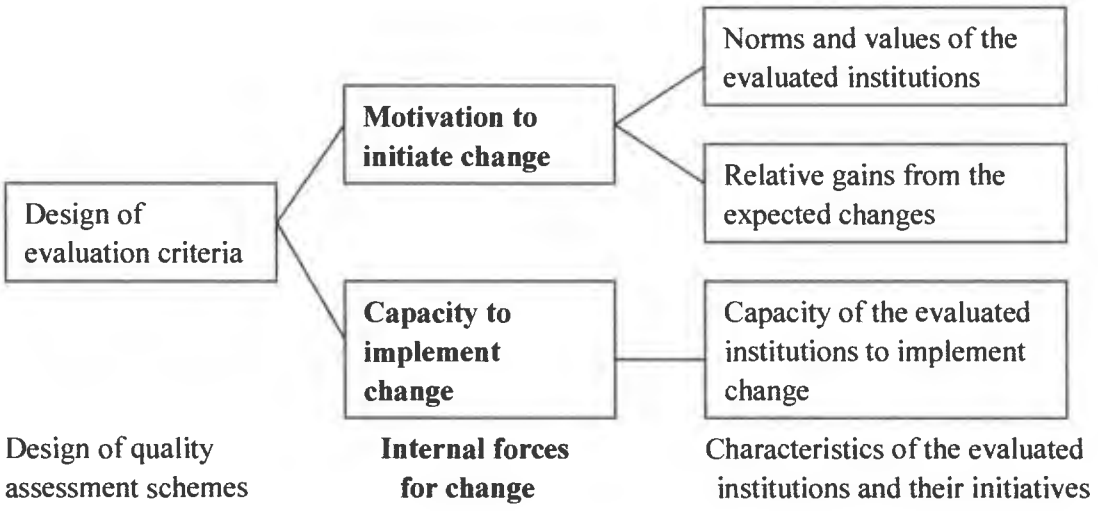

Figure 9.6 Internal motivation and capacity of the evaluated institutions to create change

This section details the external impetus of quality assessment schemes and the internal motivation and capacity of the evaluated institutions to create change, their sources and main influencing factors. Both external and internal forces for change are

related to the design of quality assessment schemes and the characteristics of the evaluated institutions. As shown in Figures 9.5 and 9.6, the main influencing factors of the design of quality assessment schemes include their owners, the types of evaluation results they produce, the links between the evaluation results and resource allocation, and the design of evaluation criteria. The related characteristics of the evaluated institutions include the level of institutional autonomy they enjoy, their existing resources and reputation, their internal norms and values, their capacity to implement the expected changes, and their relative gains from the changes.

On the whole, the QAUE had great external impetus for university change, derived from the strong governing force of its owner, i.e. the state, and the close link between the evaluation results and resource allocation. However, the external impetus for change was different for various universities. By and large, the impetus for the less elite institutions was greater than the top ones which have more institutional autonomy, and whose funding and reputation are less vulnerable to the QAUE evaluation results. Moreover, the external impetus for change in the various dimensions was also unequal: it was largely determined by whether or not the evaluators can make fair and comparable judgments in this respect. The impetus for change was stronger in terms of resource commitment and quality management, since it is easier to measure the performance of these than of other dimensions. With regard to the internal motivation and capacity to create change, basically the QAUE used uniform evaluation criteria to review all the evaluated institutions. Facing the uniform external requirements, the internal forces to implement change were largely determined by the characteristics of the evaluated institutions *per se*: their internal norms and values, their existing situations and their capacity to implement change, i.e. whether or not they match the external requirements. The initiatives of universities were also involved in the process of responding to the QAUE. They measured their relative gains from the changes the QAUE expected and decided whether or not to implement those changes. They interpreted and even re-defined the external requirements for their own good.

The final impact of the QAUE is determined by the interaction between the external impetus and the internal motivation and capacity of the evaluated institutions to implement change. With a relatively strong external impetus, genuine change occurred when the evaluated institutions had internal forces for change. However, when universities did not have an internal motivation or capacity (or both) to implement change, the external impetus pushed them to make symbolic responses or transitory compliance. As analysed above, both the external impetus of quality assessment and the internal motivation and capacity of institutions to create change were related to the design of the QAUE scheme and the characteristics of the evaluated institutions. Thus, only considering the weaknesses of the design of the quality assessment scheme is insufficient to explain why the QAUE did not generate the expected change. Based on the empirical results of the QAUE, the ways in which an external quality assessment interacts with the evaluated institutions and causes them to change will be elaborated in the next section.

9.4 External quality assessment causing university change: A theoretical discussion

An external quality evaluation is regarded as being a process in which a group of external evaluators examine the operations of HEIs against defined criteria and make judgments. The evaluation process is initiated by the owner of the quality evaluation scheme. The evaluation criteria are designed based on external norms of "good" higher education, and the final judgement is embodied in the evaluation results. The governing forces of the owner of a quality assessment scheme on institutions, and the influence of the evaluation results on resource allocation among institutions, push the evaluated institutions to meet the requirements of external quality assessment. In the process during which HEIs match their operations to the evaluation criteria, the external norms of "good" higher education are introduced into the evaluated institutions, and thus change will emerge. Figure 9.7 (on the next page) describes the process by which the external quality assessment affects the evaluated institutions.

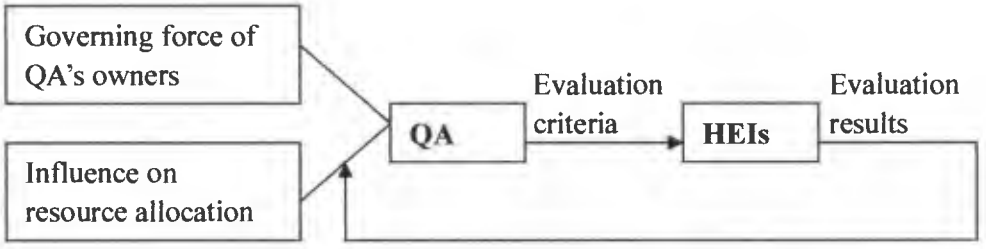

Figure 9.7 Ways in which an external quality assessment affects HEIs

As mentioned above, the change caused by quality assessment involves both the adjustment of operations and the alternation of norms. As shown in Figure 9.8, genuine change will emerge when an old equilibrium between the operational mode and normative mode is broken, and a new equilibrium is established (Figure 9.8-I), or an old disequilibrium is corrected (Figure 9.8-II).

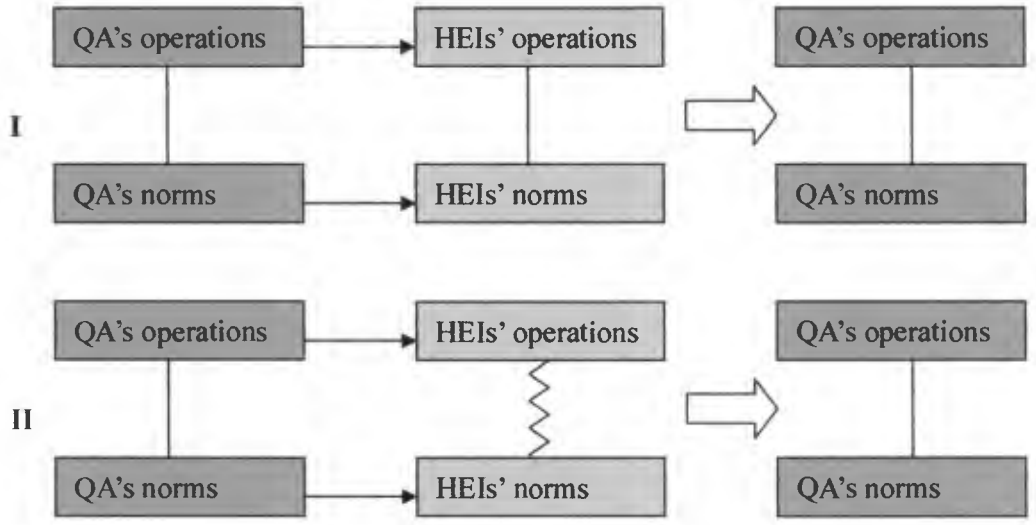

Figure 9.8 Impact of an external quality assessment on university change

The empirical study shows that genuine change can be generated when the external impetus is integrated with the internal motivation and capacity of universities to create change. On the one hand, the norms of "good" higher education defined by an external quality assessment scheme are accepted by the evaluated institutions, either being the same as the existing ones or replacing them. That is to say, the evaluated institutions believe that the requirements of the external quality assessment are

beneficial to quality assurance and improvement. On the other hand, the external quality assessment could provide adequate impetus for change through the governing forces of its owner and the influence of the evaluation results on resource allocation, as discussed above. The external review of the performance of universities should push them to make adjustments. At the same time, the evaluated institutions should have the capacity to meet the requirements of the external quality assessment, and this is not contrary to their interests. Under these circumstances, they could change their operation. With both the adjustment of operations and the acceptation of norms, genuine change can occur; otherwise the new equilibrium between the normative mode and the operational mode cannot be established.

As discussed in the last section (9.3), the external impetus of quality assessment schemes is determined by both the design of quality assessment schemes and the characteristics of the evaluated institutions. The internal motivation and capacity of universities to create change are also related to these two aspects. The ideal condition in which an external quality assessment can generate university change is the integration of external and internal forces, which can be achieved by following certain principles. Firstly, the owner of the evaluation scheme should have some governing force, and/or the evaluation results should have some influence on the reputation and funding of the evaluated institution. As suggested by Westerheijden (1990), without any influence, why should any one take quality assessment seriously? However, there should not be too much influence; with excessive influence on the gains and losses of the evaluated institutions, they would be compelled to meet the external requirements even if they were not capable of doing so. In this case, they would be more liable to manipulate the external evaluators, such as the transitory compliance and deception which was practiced in China. The amount of governance force of the evaluation schemes relates to its owner and the institutional autonomy of the evaluated institutions; the influence of the evaluation results on resource allocation among institutions is related to the link between the evaluation results and resource allocation, the existing reputation of the evaluated institutions, and their financial resources. In a

general way, van Vught and Westerheijden (1994) suggest that the national agencies responsible for quality assessment should have a legal status, but be independent from governments, and there should be no direct link between the outcomes of quality assessment and the funding of institutions.

Secondly, ideally, the external evaluators should review the performance of universities and make fair and comparable judgments, through which the evaluation scheme can exert its influence on the evaluated institutions. As already discussed, the type of evaluation results produced by a quality assessment is determined by many factors, such as the evaluators, evaluation methods, and the aspects being evaluated.

Thirdly, with regard to evaluation criteria, the norms of "good" higher education defined by the external quality assessment (on which the evaluation criteria are built) should be accepted by the evaluated institutions. Furthermore, there should be a certain gap between the operational requirements of the external quality assessment and the existing conditions of the evaluated institutions for them to improve, but not so great that it is beyond their capacities. Thus, basically, mission-based evaluation is better than standards-based evaluation.

However, these are just the ideal circumstances under which an external quality assessment can cause university change. In reality, firstly, it is difficult to make the governing force of the evaluation's owner and the influence of the evaluation results on resource allocation proper. In most cases, they are perceived as being either too much or too little. As shown in the empirical results of the QAUE in China, the evaluated institutions indicated that, because the QAUE is conducted by the state, which has strong control over HEIs in China, the evaluated institutions responded to the QAUE in a compliant way. Thus, they suggested that the external quality assessment should be conducted by independent organisations; however, they also admitted that if it was, nobody would take any notice of it (IIB32). By the same token, it is also difficult to find a proper way to link evaluation results to resource allocation.

The external impetus is a double-edged sword. It is hard to design a quality assessment scheme which could push the evaluated institutions to improve, but exclude the compliance phenomena. As discussed in the sub-section 2.2.1, quality assessment is expected to undertake three main functions: improvement, accountability and control. This reflects the dilemma between the two functions of quality assessment: as a way of pushing institutions to improve their performance quality (improvement) and as a regulatory device to ensure that institutions behave as the state wants them to behave (control).

Secondly, the external impetus of quality assessment depends on fair and comparable evaluation results, but which are not always available (Bovens, 2007). It is very difficult to measure some dimensions of HEIs' performance, such as teaching methods and teaching effectiveness (which are at the core of teaching and learning). Because of a lack of reliable evidence, it is almost impossible to provide reliable and unambiguous judgments in these respects. In this case, quality assessment tends to focus on the aspects which are easily quantified to the detriment of important aspects which are difficult to quantify, and this leads to "tunnel vision" (Smith, 1995). Moreover, as shown in the empirical results of the QAUE, the evaluated institutions could acquire better evaluation results in some dimensions of performance through manipulation, such as rehearsing classes with advanced teaching methods. Thus, the evaluation results became untrustworthy. Trow (1996) indicates that this phenomenon is more likely to occur when the evaluation results are closely related to the resource allocation. "When information flowing up the line powerfully affects the reputation and resources flowing down from the centre" (Trow, 1996, p. 314), the motivation for the evaluated institutions to manipulate becomes stronger, and there is less chance to hear the truth. By and large, quality assessment cannot produce reliable evaluation results in some cases, which may be because of the nature of the objects being evaluated or manipulation by the evaluated institutions. If this is so, especially when it becomes a consensus between evaluators and the part being evaluated, the external evaluation will merely be a strategy to show that "something is being done" under the

pressure of accountability (Westerheijden et al., 2007b). Then, its influence on the behaviour of universities will be slight.

Thirdly, compatibility between the internal and external norms of "good" higher education is very difficult to achieve. An external quality assessment reflects the external norms of "good" higher education. They have external legitimacy, with the purpose of providing accountability for the outside society. However, they may conflict with the internal norms of "good" higher education or be beyond their capacity. For example, the requirement of the QAUE to use student-centred teaching methods instead of teacher-centred ones represents the external norms of advanced teaching and learning, so it is externally legitimate; but this is beyond the capacity of the evaluated institutions, at least at present. The requirement of the QAUE for standardised teaching procedures and strict disciplines mirrors the external norms of efficient organisational management, and thus, has strong external legitimacy. However, it conflicts with the internal norms of teaching management in elite institutions, where people believe that the operations required by the QAUE are not beneficial to creative teaching and learning, and hence, go against quality improvement. So, the "improvement" from the external perspective becomes "damage" from the internal perspective (Brennan & Shah, 2000). In this case, some of the evaluated institutions chose to meet these requirements by making symbolic responses and/or transitory compliance. As a result, accountability and compliance were generated, but without genuine change. Essentially, it is difficult to coordinate two of the functions of quality assessment, the first of which is to provide accountability to outside society following the external norms of "good" higher education, while the second is to push universities to make improvements following their internal norms and based on their existing capacity. Many authors have discussed the tension between accountability and improvement (for example, Ewell, 2002; Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995; Thune, 1996; Danø & Stensaker, 2007). Some of them think improvement follows accountability, which regards improvement as a secondary function of the monitoring process; while some of them believe

improvement and accountability are essentially contradictory (Harvey & Newton, 2007). The operating mechanisms of quality assessment revealed in this research demonstrate that the relationship between accountability and improvement is connected with the relationship between the external and internal norms of "good" higher education. When the external and internal norms are compatible, improvement and accountability will be realised simultaneously; when they are incompatible, the conflict between improvement and accountability will emerge.

Fourthly, the internal norms of "good" higher education and capabilities to complete improvement are not the same for all HEIs. At first glance, a mission-based evaluation is better than a standards-based one. A mission-based evaluation respects the internal norms and capabilities of the evaluated institutions, in which case, universities should have relatively stronger internal motivation and capacity to meet the requirements. However, it is very difficult for a mission-based evaluation to produce evaluation results which are comparable among institutions. Without reliable and comparable evaluation results, the impetus of an external quality assessment for university change could not be exerted adequately. In this regard, it is almost impossible to simultaneously strengthen external impetus and internal forces for change. In the case of the QAUE, on the one hand, people criticised the standardised evaluation criteria, such as its requirements in terms of university infrastructure and teaching staff, for not considering the internal needs and capacity of the evaluated institutions. On the other hand, there are indeed some non-standardised evaluation criteria, such as the indicators of measuring practical training, which regard quality as *fitness for self-defined purposes*. They leave flexibility for the evaluated institutions to make improvements following their internal norms and values and based on their own capabilities, but a certain amount of arbitrary power is also left for evaluators to make a judgment in this respect. Arbitrary power is believed to be one of the most important driving forces behind the phenomenon that the evaluated institutions tried every way possible to please the evaluators, even involving corruption (IA28, IB32). This made it even harder to obtain fair and reliable evaluation results. Accordingly, the external

impetus in the related respects was weakened, although the internal forces for change were relatively strong. Thus, as already indicated, it is difficult to simultaneously obtain strong external and internal forces for change; only one of them can be guaranteed in both mission-based and standards-based evaluations. In reality, it is almost impossible to realise the dream of integrating external impetus with internal motivation and capacity.

Thus, it is very difficult to meet the ideal conditions specified above, especially to meet them all simultaneously. An ideal design of a quality assessment scheme seems to be non-existent. At first glance, quality assessment is a very smart design, which incorporates the power of both market and state to intervene in the evaluated universities. It pushes the evaluated institutions to meet the operational requirements embodied in the evaluation criteria, and by doing so, it brings the external norms of "good" higher education into universities. However, as an external force driving university change, it has its limitations. As discussed above, the multi-functions a quality assessment is expected to perform often contradict each other, such as the clashes between improvement and accountability, and between improvement and compliance. Quality assessment relies on fair and comparable evaluation results to exert its influence on the evaluated institutions, but it is very difficult to produce this kind of judgment in reality, so this is the vulnerability of quality assessment. It is also not easy to integrate the external impetus with the internal forces for change, either through a mission-based evaluation or a standards-based one. In addition, the initiatives of the evaluated institutions are also involved in the process. They bring their own interests into the calculation when faced with the requirements of an external quality assessment. Sometimes they re-define the external requirements for their own good or manipulate external evaluators to obtain better evaluation results. Thus, even if there was such a thing as a perfectly-designed quality assessment scheme, it could not ensure that the expected changes would happen. In this case, the only thing that can be done is to find a balance between the various functions of quality assessment: improvement, accountability and control, and find a position to

make the "composite force" of the external impetus of quality assessment and the internal forces for change as big as possible. Adopting this rationale, some suggestions will be made in the next section to make the QAUE more effective to encourage change.

9.5 Suggestions for the QAUE

Firstly, the QAUE is a state-run quality assessment scheme. The strong governing force of the state and the close link between the evaluation results and resource allocation give the QAUE great external impetus for university change. The evaluated institutions have made all-out efforts to meet the requirements of the QAUE. In order to obtain better evaluation results, some of them chose to manipulate the QAUE by means of transitory compliance and even deception. These manipulative strategies led to a huge waste of resources, both financial and human, and have become the main focus of external criticism on the QAUE. In this case, it is suggested that, firstly, the link between the evaluation results and resource allocation should be slightly loosened. Secondly, the independence of the QAUE from the state should be enhanced. The national quality assessment agency, HEEC, is currently a department of the MOE, but it should be allowed more independence. It could become a quasi-governmental organisation, related to the MOE but not completely supervised by it. In this case, the influence of the external evaluation will still exist, but it will not be as excessive as it is now, and so the compliance phenomena would be expected to be lessened.

Secondly, the QAUE was conducted at the institutional level and covered various dimensions of quality provisions within universities. The comprehensive quality assessment had quite a strong influence on the evaluated institutions. However, it transpires that the external impetus from the QAUE for change in various dimensions was not equal, and was largely determined by whether or not the evaluators can make fair and comparable judgments, as shown by the empirical results. The impetus for change in terms of resource commitment and quality management was quite strong,

while its effects on the teaching and learning activities, the core of educational quality, were not notable. As discussed above, it is essentially difficult to measure the performances of teaching and learning and make an unambiguous judgment. At the same time, the evaluators of the QAUE are not academic peers from the same subject group. Without professional knowledge, it is almost impossible for them to make reliable judgments or effective recommendations. Thus, it is suggested that the evaluation of teaching and learning should be separated from the current QAUE scheme, and conducted at subject level. In this case, peers from the subject group will be selected as evaluators. They could produce more reliable evaluation results and their recommendations would be more helpful for transforming teaching contents and methods. Furthermore, the case studies indicate that the top-down way is not effective for reforming teaching contents and methods. The reforms are more likely to happen in a bottom-up way, initiated by departments and individuals. Thus, the subject evaluation will be a more effective change agent than the QAUE which is at the institutional level.

Thirdly, basically, the QAUE used uniform evaluation criteria to review all the evaluated institutions, and this did not consider the internal norms and values of the evaluated institutions, or their capacity to implement change. The internal forces for change were not encouraged. This can be improved by increasing the participation of HEIs. During the process of designing evaluation criteria, HEIs should be consulted, so that their internal norms of "good" higher education practices and their capacity to make change could be taken into consideration. Furthermore, it is necessary to diversify the evaluation criteria to match the various evaluated institutions. It is suggested that all of the 589 HEIs which provide undergraduate education should be divided into several groups, based on their mission and status. The results of the QAUE's first-round of evaluation can provide some information for the grouping. Then, uniform evaluation criteria can be designed for each group, considering their existing resources, educational levels and internal norms of "good" higher education. It is proposed that the evaluation criteria leave some gap for the evaluated institutions

to improve, but not beyond their capacity. Essentially, standards-based evaluation is used within each group, while the evaluation is basically mission-based among various groups. This is expected to combine the advantages of mission-based evaluation and standards-based evaluation: it respects the internal norms and capacity and encourages the internal forces for change, while also providing relatively comparable evaluation results to guarantee the external impetus of the QAUE. Thus, the internal and external forces for change can be integrated to some extent.

9.6 Summary

This chapter firstly reviewed the impact of the QAUE on the evaluated institutions. The change and continuity it has brought were analysed respectively. Both the adjustment of operations and the alternation of norms were considered. The reasons why the QAUE can or cannot generate the expected change were explored in depth. It was found that genuine change depends on the integration of external impetus from the quality assessment scheme with the internal motivation and capacity of the evaluated institutions to create change. Then, the sources of the external and internal forces for change and their main influential factors were explored, and these were both found to be related to the design of quality assessment schemes and the characteristics of the evaluated institutions. Referring to the empirical results of the QAUE and the related theories, a model was proposed to describe how quality assessment, as an external force, impinges on the internal life of universities and generates change. The ideal conditions upon which an external quality assessment can generate university change were suggested and the inherent limitations of the ability of an external quality assessment to cause university change were indicated. Finally, a few suggestions were made to make the QAUE more effective.

CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION

10.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a review of the research journey of this thesis. It then proceeds to summarise the central findings of the research and its implications at both theoretical and contextual levels. The subsequent section indicates the limitations of this research and proposes further work in this field.

10.2 Research journey

This research focused on the *Quality Assessment of Undergraduate Education* (QAUE) in China. It sought to interpret the impact of the QAUE on the evaluated institutions and explore the reasons why the intended changes have or have not been generated. Referring to the empirical results of the QAUE, it aimed to explore how external quality assessment interacts with the evaluated institutions and causes university change at the theoretical level.

In order to achieve the research aims, existing studies on quality assessment in higher education were reviewed in Chapter Two. These suggested the context in which higher education quality assessment had emerged and its purposes, the various perspectives of understanding "quality", and the approaches to operating quality assessment, as well as the main effects of external quality assessment on the evaluated institutions. This provided a reference to analyse the operations and the intended impact of the QAUE in China. Then, the focus of this chapter changed to a theoretical exploration of how quality assessment causes university change. The theories about organisational change, the working processes and structures of higher education systems, and the operating mechanisms of quality assessment were examined. Building on these theories, a perspective of understanding the ways in which quality assessment causes university change was tentatively proposed. Quality assessment is

regarded as an external force, which can impinge on the internal life of universities. Its possible outcomes involve the adjustment of operations and the alteration of norms. Both the external impetus of quality assessment and the internal environment of the universities and their initiatives in creating change should be noted when considering the driving forces for change.

Chapter Three moved to the Chinese context. The higher education system in China was introduced, including its historical evolution and current state. The higher education quality assessment systems in China were also presented, including the context in which they emerged and the development of related policies and practices. The subsequent section of the chapter focused on the QAUE, one of the most important national quality assessment schemes. Firstly, its approaches to evaluation were depicted. The QAUE is a state-run external quality assessment scheme. The evaluators were scholars of various subjects with high academic reputations or management experience. The evaluation procedures included self-assessment, site visits and follow-up reforms. The evaluation criteria were designed by the MOE, including eight major performance indicators; they were used to evaluate all the institutions which provide undergraduate programmes. Close links have been established between the evaluation results and resource allocation among institutions. Secondly, the intended impact of the QAUE was indicated, derived from the context in which it emerged, the purposes defined in the policy documents, and the design of the evaluation criteria. It was found that the QAUE intended to push universities to increase their resource commitment to undergraduate education, clarify their mission and development purposes and create special features, enhance quality management, improve teaching and learning activities, and achieve a better balance between teaching and research.

The research methods used to examine whether or not the intended effects of the QAUE have been generated in Chinese universities were described in Chapter Four. A case study method was used in order to better understand the interaction between the

QAUE and the evaluated institutions. Three HEIs with different statuses which specialise in teacher education were selected as cases. The data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. In total, nine university and faculty leaders and 20 teachers from various subject fields were interviewed. Based on the explicit data from the related documents and the perspectives of internal participants (university leaders and teachers), the impact of the QAUE on these institutions was explored.

The fifth, sixth and seventh chapters presented the outcomes generated by the QAUE in the three institutions, namely, BNU, NWNU, and LYNC. In each case, whether or not the intended impact of the QAUE had been successful on the five dimensions of quality provisions, namely, resource commitment to undergraduate education, university identification, quality management, teaching and learning activities, and the balance between teaching and research, was assessed. The reasons for change and continuity were explained in each specific institutional context. The findings from the case studies were summarised in Chapter Eight. The actual effects of the QAUE on the five dimensions of quality provisions were discussed respectively. In each dimension, I interpreted what has changed and how, the extent of the change and its sustainability, and what intended effects have not emerged, and the reasons why. The similarities and differences among institutions were indicated. Besides the operational change, whether the new norms of "good" higher education defined by the QAUE have been accepted by the evaluated institutions was also discussed. The effects of the QAUE on various dimensions, and in different universities, were found not to be the same. The QAUE has caused genuine change, but it has also led to symbolic responses and transitory compliance (continuity).

The change and continuity as a result of the QAUE were discussed in Chapter Nine. Both the adjustment of operations and the transformation of norms were considered. The reasons why the QAUE can or cannot generate the expected change were explored in depth. It was found that both the external impetus of quality assessment

and the internal motivation and capacity to implement change were involved in the process and genuine change occurred when the external impetus was integrated with internal forces. Then, the sources of external and internal forces of change were analysed, as well as the factors which affect their strength. Drawing on the empirical results of the QAUE, a model was developed to describe the ways in which quality assessment causes university change. How external quality assessment schemes interact with the evaluated institutions to generate change was interpreted. Building on this model, the ideal conditions upon which quality assessment can generate university change were proposed, and its inherent limitations in doing so were discussed. In addition, some recommendations were made for the reform of the QAUE at the end of the chapter.

10.3 Central findings

A model describing how quality assessment causes university change

Referring to the empirical results of the QAUE and the related theories, a model was produced to describe how external quality assessment impinges on the evaluated institutions to generate change. An external quality evaluation is regarded as a process in which a group of external evaluators examine the operations of HEIs against defined criteria and make judgments. The evaluation criteria are designed based on the external norms of "good" higher education. In order to achieve the best evaluation results, HEIs are supposed to match their operations to the evaluation criteria. In this process, external norms of "good" higher education are introduced into the evaluated institutions. Change is expected to emerge, which involves both the adjustment of operations and the alteration of norms. Genuine change will occur when an old equilibrium between the operational mode and normative mode in the evaluated institutions is broken and a new equilibrium is established, or an old disequilibrium between them is corrected.

Both external and internal forces are involved in the change process. The external

impetus of quality assessment is derived from the governing forces of the owner of the quality assessment scheme (such as the state) and the influence of the evaluation results on resource allocation among institutions. Both of these aspects push the evaluated institutions to meet the requirements of the external quality assessment. The strength of the external impetus is related to the design of the quality assessment scheme: its owner, and the consequences of the evaluation. Reliable and comparable evaluation results are required, through which the external quality assessment can exert its influence on the evaluated institutions. The extent to which they respond to the external requirements is also related to the characteristics of universities *per se*: the level of institutional autonomy they enjoy, and their existing reputation and financial resources. The internal motivation and capability to create change is the result of the interaction between the evaluation criteria and the evaluated institutions: whether or not the norms of "good" higher education defined by external quality assessment can be accepted by the evaluated institutions; whether or not the evaluated institutions have the capability to meet the external requirements; and whether doing so is in their interests. This empirical study of the QAUE shows that genuine change will happen when the external impetus is integrated with internal motivation and capacity to create change. The design of quality assessment schemes and the characteristics of the evaluated institutions are the main variables which influence the strength of the external and internal forces for change, and thus, the final outcomes of the quality assessment.

Building on this model, the ideal conditions in which external quality assessment is able to cause university change were suggested. However, it was found that the ideal conditions, which involve integrating the external impetus with internal forces, are very difficult to achieve. As an external force causing university change, quality assessment has inherent limitations.

Impact of the QAUE on the evaluated institutions in China

The impact of the QAUE on the evaluated institutions in China can be summarised

based on the findings from the case studies. The intended changes involve five dimensions: resource commitment to undergraduate education, university identification, quality management, teaching and learning activities, and the balance between teaching and research. The case studies illustrate that there have been significant improvements in university infrastructure, teaching facilities and expenditure as a result of the QAUE. The numbers of teaching staff have grown considerably, and the priorities of staff recruitment have been modified. Quality management and internal quality monitoring systems have also been adjusted, especially in the less elite institutions. Strict disciplines for teachers and students and standardised teaching procedures have been established. Apart from the noticeable improvement of practical training and the increased use of educational technology, the change in terms of teaching and learning activities is fairly slight. Universities' mission and development purposes have been clarified, and their motivation to develop special features has been enhanced, but the change has been fairly rhetorical and the adjustment of practices is not visible, especially in the less elite institutions. The evaluated universities have made efforts to achieve a better balance between teaching and research, but the practical effects are negligible. Research still engages most of the time and energies of academics. In addition, the extent of the change at different universities is not the same. By and large, the impact is more and more significant when moving from the top universities to the less elite ones. Basically, the impact of the QAUE on various dimensions of quality provisions at different universities is not the same. When taking the transformation of norms into account, the change generated by the QAUE can be further divided into two groups: firstly, there is operational change but no normative alteration (single-loop learning); secondly, there are both operational change and normative transformation (double-loop learning). Two different kinds of continuity are also observed: firstly, the norms defined by the QAUE are espoused by the evaluated institutions but without corresponding change in operations; secondly, there is no operational change and the norms are not accepted as well.

The reasons why the QAUE has or has not generated the intended changes were explored. On the whole, the QAUE had quite a strong external impetus, because its owner, i.e. the state, has control over the HEIs in China, and there are close links between the evaluation results and resource allocation. However, its impetus for change was not the same for the various institutions: it was stronger for the less elite institutions than those at the top, which have more institutional autonomy and are less reliant on the QAUE's evaluation results for their funding and reputation. The external impetus for change in the various dimensions was also not equal, since it is largely determined by whether or not the evaluators can make reliable and comparable judgements in this respect. The impetus for change in terms of resource commitment and quality management was greater, since these are easier to measure than the performance in other dimensions. When it comes to internal motivation and capacity to create change, the QAUE used uniform evaluation criteria to review all the evaluated institutions. Faced by uniform external requirements, the internal forces for change largely depended on the characteristics of the evaluated institutions, i.e. whether or not their internal norms and values were compatible with the QAUE's requirements, and whether or not they had sufficient resources and capacity to implement change. By and large, when the evaluated institutions had the internal motivation and capacity to create change, the relatively strong external impetus from the QAUE facilitated the process. However, when they did not have the internal motivation or capacity (or both) to change, the existence of the external examination pushed them to make symbolic responses or transitory compliance. Thus, the impact of the QAUE is the result of the interaction between the QAUE and the evaluated institutions.

10.4 Research significance

Theoretical contributions

This research has proposed a model to describe how external quality assessment causes university change. This details how an external quality assessment interacts

with the evaluated universities, the forces of change, the change process and the outcomes. Previous studies have indicated that the impact of quality assessment is related to the characteristics of assessment schemes and the national and institutional context of the evaluated institutions (Huisman et al., 2007; Brennan & Shah, 2000; Hodson & Thomas, 2003). Notwithstanding, how external quality assessment and the evaluated institutions interact with each other and generate impact has not been discussed in-depth or theorised, and this present research helps to fill this gap. This is particularly important in the absence of a solid and reliable analytical framework of quality assessment in higher education, as argued by Pratasavitskaya and Stensaker (2010), and there is thus a need for more systematic knowledge accumulation. This model also depicts the ideal conditions upon which an external quality assessment is able to generate university change; it can therefore provide some guidance for policy-makers when designing new quality assessment schemes.

This model originates from an interactive perspective for understanding change. Change is regarded as being a result of the interaction between the external and internal factors of HEIs. Universities are believed to have initiatives, and are not completely shaped by external pressures. They are supposed to be rational and to make decisions to maximise their own interests. At the same time, the socio-cognition model of organisational change was adopted, which emphasises the side of the norms and values of organisations. Change depends on an alignment between the normative mode and the operational mode. The perspective for understanding change in this research is different from previous impact studies, which regarded change as a linear consequence of policy implementation. They concentrated on the characteristics of quality assessment schemes to explain the reasons why such schemes had or had not generated the expected changes in universities. Compared with them, the model proposed in this research is believed to more closely mirror reality. At the very least, it can provide an overall explanation of the outcomes of a certain quality assessment scheme in a specific national and institutional context.

Furthermore, the inherent limitation of a quality assessment to cause university change was indicated. It was found that this limitation relates to the multiple functions of quality assessment. Apart from encouraging university change, it also undertakes the functions of providing accountability to the external society (accountability) and ensuring that universities comply with the state regulations (compliance). Thus, it is difficult for quality assessment schemes to coordinate these functions, which are not always compatible. The limitation is also derived from the mechanisms through which quality assessment affects the internal life of the evaluated institutions. An external quality assessment depends on the reliable and comparable evaluation results to exert its influence on the evaluated institutions. However, such evaluation results are not easily obtained. By and large, the reason a quality assessment cannot cause university change may be because of various contextual factors in reality, such as the poor design of quality assessment schemes and the insufficient capabilities or initiatives of the evaluated institutions. Notwithstanding, the limitation of quality assessment *per se* indicated above cannot be ignored. This can help to explain why people always complain that quality assessment has contributed little to effective quality improvement in HEIs, regardless of the quality assessment schemes and implementation context. In this regard, the model also implies that expectations over the use of quality assessment as an external force to drive university change should not be too high.

Contextual contributions

Based on the case studies in three universities, this research depicted the impact of the QAUE on the evaluated institutions in detail, and interpreted the reasons why the intended changes have or have not been generated. Based on the interpretation, firstly, recommendations to improve the QAUE scheme were proposed, such as enhancing the independence of the QAUE from the state, loosening the links between the evaluation results and resource allocation, separating the evaluation of teaching and learning from the QAUE scheme and conducting a subject evaluation, increasing the participation of the evaluated HEIs, and diversifying the evaluation criteria

(sub-section 9.5). These proposals could make the QAUE more effective in encouraging university change, and thus have important implications for policy reforms.

Secondly, the case studies show that the final impact is a result of the interaction between the QAUE and the evaluated institutions. Unlike previous studies, which solely focused on the design of the QAUE, the present research also emphasised the internal forces of change. It was found that effective university change cannot only depend on external forces; the capacity and initiatives of universities to implement change are very important influencing factors. The evaluated institutions interpreted, and even redefined, the external requirements of the QAUE for their own good. In this regard, this present research has provided a more reasonable explanation of the results of the QAUE. This is particularly important in the context that people in China have attributed the failures in causing university change completely to the weakness of the QAUE's design, and focused their efforts on reforming the QAUE without considering the internal factors of the evaluated institutions.

10.5 Research limitations and further work

This research also has some limitations, which originate from the research topic, research methods, and research subjects, respectively.

In terms of the research topic, firstly, a study on the impact of quality assessment is not easy because it is impossible to control all the relevant factors to be able to map causal relationships. Quality assessment is only one of the external and internal policies HEIs need to handle and react to. Isolating the effects of a particular process is therefore difficult (Stensaker, 2003; Harvey & Newton, 2004; Rosa et al., 2006). As indicated in sub-section 4.3.1, the direct impact of the QAUE on the evaluated institutions was emphasised, when collecting and analysing the data from the informants and the related documents in this research. Nevertheless, it was difficult to

exclude other influencing factors for change. Secondly, a particular problem when analysing the impact is related to the potential political and economic gains of being a "good implementer" of quality assessment. Due to managers' and other stakeholders' interests in developing a successful image of their own efforts, the impact of quality assessment may have been reported too optimistically (Stensaker, 2003; Harvey & Newton, 2004; Rosa et al., 2006). Thirdly, time is also an important factor in relation to impact studies (Huisman et al., 2007). Quality assessment has both long-term and short-term effects on the evaluated institutions (Brennan & Shah, 2000). This research was conducted after the first round of the QAUE evaluation, and although it was easier for the informants to perceive the direct impact of the QAUE, it necessarily excluded a consideration of the long-term effects. Thus, only the short-term effects were considered (sub-section 4.3.1). In addition, the specialities of the first-time evaluation should be noted, since the influence of a first-time evaluation seems stronger. As indicated in the case studies, the evaluated universities have made all-out efforts to respond to the requirements of the QAUE because this is the first-time nationwide higher education quality assessment. Since universities did not have sufficient information about its consequences, they preferred to do more rather than less (IIIA27). The empirical studies in other countries also show that a lack of experience can bring enthusiasm and commitment to the evaluated institutions (Brennan & Shah, 2000, p. 38). Moreover, when the evaluated institutions become familiar with the rules of external quality assessment, they are more liable to decode the evaluation criteria and manipulate the evaluators to obtain the maximum evaluation results with minimum change (Morley, 2003). Thus, the findings of this research (from the first-time evaluation) about the impact of quality assessment on university change probably show change to its maximum extent.

With regard to the research methods, case studies have the advantage of investigating university change (Kondakci & Van den Broeck, 2009). They can interpret the interaction between the QAUE scheme and the evaluated institutions more thoroughly than other research methods. Meanwhile, the limitation of case studies in terms of

generalisation should also be noted. Multi-case studies were used in this research to make the conclusions more generalisable. Three HEIs with different statuses and geographic distributions, but the same type - normal institutions (which are essentially comprehensive), were selected. Notwithstanding, three cases can hardly represent all the HEIs in China; thus, the results of this study may not be completely generalisable. If other types of universities were to be studied as cases in the future, the different impact of the QAUE on various types of universities could be indicated. Furthermore, as mentioned in sub-section 4.2, because of the practicalities of case selection, not all the selected universities underwent the QAUE evaluation at about the same time. The evaluation of NWNU was five years earlier than those of BNU and LYNC. In order to compare the effects of the QAUE on different universities, the direct impact of the QAUE was emphasised during data collection and all the informants were selected from those who have personally experienced the evaluation to recall what happened at that time. Notwithstanding, it is still impossible to control all the influencing factors on the changes of universities. For example, the capacities of universities to implement change could alter over time. NWNU would probably have had more financial resources to improve its teaching facilities, expenditure and teaching staff if it had been evaluated a few years later.

In addition, the empirical study was conducted in China. The cultural characteristics of the research subjects should be considered. Firstly, *keeping face* is a notable cultural characteristic of the Chinese (Hu, 1944; Hwang, 1987). This is an important driving force behind the evaluated institutions' efforts to pursue the maximum evaluation results, besides the steering of the state (the owner of the QAUE) and the great influence of the evaluation results on resource allocation. That is to say, the motivation of the evaluated institutions to comply with the requirement of external quality assessment has been somewhat enhanced by this cultural characteristic. Secondly, the Chinese tend to arrive to their goals by any possible means: explicit rules are often ignored in China (Wu, 2001). This research found that the evaluated institutions tended to manipulate the external evaluators to obtain better evaluation

results; even deception was used. This phenomenon may be less likely to happen in other countries where people are apt to follow the explicit rules. The ways in which the evaluated institutions responded to an external quality assessment were related to their cultural characteristics. Thus, the model's explanatory power may be weakened in other cultural backgrounds. The impact of an external quality assessment in other national contexts can be done in the future, which will help to modify the model.

10.6 Concluding remarks

Currently, higher education quality assessment is globally ubiquitous, despite criticisms of its low efficiency in improving quality. Its importance in practice cannot be overlooked. However, theoretical developments have not kept pace with practice. As indicated by Pratasavitskaya and Stensaker (2010, p. 48), there is no "joint terminology and little agreement on central concepts ... [which] may limit more systematic knowledge accumulation in this area". In this research, referring to the empirical results of the QAUE and the related theories, a model has been proposed to describe how an external quality assessment interacts with the evaluated universities and generates changes in them.

In China, currently more than 11 million undergraduate students enrol in universities and colleges. The quality of undergraduate education has raised increasing concerns. As the most important national teaching quality assessment scheme, the QAUE has been heavily criticised for its ineffectiveness in causing university change and quality improvement. This research described the impact of the QAUE on the evaluated institutions in China. It explored the reasons why the QAUE has or has not generated the intended effects. It adopted an interactive perspective to understand the results of the QAUE, and has provided an explanation of its successes and failures.

Appendices

Appendix I Higher teacher education in China

The establishment of the *Teacher Education Division of Peking Imperial University* (now Beijing Normal University) in 1902 marked the beginning of the university-level teacher education in China. Because of the debate of whether teacher education should be provided by independent normal universities and colleges or be integrated into the comprehensive universities, there was fluctuation of teacher education system in the 1920s[18]. Afterwards, China formed a mixed teacher education systems before 1949. It consisted of teacher universities and colleges, and departments (or colleges) of education within comprehensive universities. During the restructuring of the higher education system in 1952, the Chinese government aimed to establish an independent teacher education system (sub-section 3.2.1). The departments of education in comprehensive universities were turned into independent teacher colleges, or integrated into independent teacher universities or colleges (Wang, 2004). There were 31 independent teacher education universities and colleges after the restructuring (China Education Yearbook Editors, 1981). Similar to other types of HEIs, the teacher education institutions also went through a decade of devastation during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and the restoring and expansion after it. The number of teacher education institutions increased to 188 as of 2008, including 140 universities and colleges providing degree programmes and 48 short-cycle colleges for diploma education (MOE, 2008). Six of them were affiliated with the central government and all the others were governed and funded by local governments (MOE, 2008).

Teacher education institutions also underwent large-scale reforms from the 1980s

[18] Teacher education was provided by independent teacher colleges at the beginning. Based on the new school law in 1922, all the teacher colleges were either transformed into comprehensive universities or incorporated into comprehensive universities, except for Beijing Normal University. The independent teacher education system was terminated. However, this reform led to a severe lack of teachers. Thus, the independent teacher education system started to be restored from 1925. In 1949, there were 12 independent teacher colleges and universities, with an enrolment of 12,039 students (Wang, 2004).

[sub-section 3.2.2]. Similar to other types of HEIs, they experienced the transformation of governance model from rigid state control to a kind of state-supervising, and started to enjoy more autonomy than before. They share the same internal management mechanisms with other types of HEIs. Some elite teacher education universities have benefitted from the extra funding projects. For example, Beijing Normal University is sponsored by the 985 Project and seven normal universities were funded from the 211 Project. There is also lack of diversity within the group of teacher education institutions. Teacher education institutions also face the challenges of student enrolment expansion and the reduction of state funding and have to get incomes by themselves.

Appendix II **Profiles of the semi-structured interviewees**

Case 1 (BNU)	**Leaders**		*Position*					*Code*
		1	Dean of Academic Affairs Office					IA
		2	Vice-dean of Faculty of Chemistry					IB
		3	Vice-dean of Faculty of Education					IC
	Teachers		*Gender*	*Qualific -ation*	*Title*	*Working length*	*Subject*	*Code*
		1	Female	Doctor	Professor	8 years	Social science	ID
		2	Female	Doctor	Associate professor	20 years	Social science	IE
		3	Female	Master	Associate professor	13 years	Social science	IF
		4	Male	Doctor	Associate professor	10 years	Science	IG
		5	Male	Doctor	Associate professor	6 years	Science	IH
		6	Male	Doctor	Lecturer	5 years	Science	II
Case 2 (NWNU)	**Leaders**		*Position*					*Code*
		1	Dean of Academic Affairs Office					IIA
		2	Vice-dean of Faculty of Humanities					IIB
		3	Vice-dean of Faculty of Mathematics					IIC
	Teachers		*Gender*	*Qualific ation*	*Title*	*Working length*	*Subject*	*Code*
		1	Male	Doctor	Professor	20 years	Science	IID
		2	Male	Master	Associate professor	8 years	Science	IIE
		3	Female	Master	Associate professor	18 years	Social science	IIF
		4	Female	Master	Lecturer	15 years	Social science	IIG
		5	Male	Master	Lecturer	8 years	Social science	IIH
		6	Male	Master	Associate professor	8 years	Social science	III
		7	Male	Master	Lecturer	8 years	Science	IIJ
		8	Male	Master	Associate professor	22 years	Science	IIK

Case 3 (LYNC)	**Leaders**		*Position*					*Code*
		1	Dean of Academic Affairs Office					IIIA
		2	Vice-dean of Faculty of Education					IIIB
		3	Vice-dean of Faculty of Mathematics					IIIC
	Teachers		*Gender*	*Qualific -ation*	*Title*	*Working length*	*Subject*	*Code*
		1	Male	Doctor	Professor	18 years	Social science	IIID
		2	Female	Master	Associate professor	24 years	Social science	IIIE
		3	Female	Master	Lecturer	4 years	Social science	IIIF
		4	Male	Master	Assistant lecturer	3 years	Science	IIIG
		5	Male	Master	Associate professor	18 years	Science	IIIH
		6	Female	Master	Assistant lecturer	3 years	Science	IIII

***Appendix III* Preliminary interview schedule**

1. Could you please tell me your general opinions of the *Quality Assessment of Undergraduate Education* (QAUE)?
2. Do you think the QAUE has caused the improvement of infrastructure and teaching facilities in your university, such as libraries, laboratories, internet, sports facilities and mass-media equipment?

   If so, how did they happen? Do you think quality assessment is an effective ways of driving the improvement in university infrastructure and teaching facilities?

   If not, what were the difficulties of making the improvement?

   How do you think about the requirement of the QAUE for infrastructure and teaching facilities?
3. Do you think the QAUE has caused the improvement of teaching staff in your university, including the recruitment of new employees and the training of the current staff?

   If so, how did they happen? Do you think quality assessment is an effective way of driving the change of teaching staff?

   If not, what were the difficulties of making the change?

   How do you think about the requirement of the QAUE for teaching staff?
4. Do you think the QAUE has caused your university to clarify and/or re-define its mission and development purposes?

   If so, how did this happen? Did the ideas come from the internal reflection and discussion or from the suggestions of the external evaluators?

   If not, why can the QAUE not affect this?

   How do you think about the requirement of the QAUE for the identification of mission and development purposes?
5. Do you think the QAUE has caused your university to develop special features?

   If so, what are the special features? How did these happen?

   If not, what were the difficulties of generating this change?

   How do you think about the requirement of the QAUE for developing special features? Are they helpful for the long-term development of your university?

6. As for quality management, do you think the QAUE has caused the change of the teaching management in your university, such as the adjustment of administrative regulations and rules?

   If so, how did this happen?

   If not, why?

   How do you think about the requirement of the QAUE in this respect? Are the new ways of quality management helpful for the improvement of education quality?

7. Do you think the QAUE has driven the improvement in the internal quality monitoring system in your university?

   If so, how did this happen? How does the internal quality monitoring system work in your university?

   If not, why?

   How do you think about the requirement of the QAUE for the internal quality monitoring? Do you think this system can effectively assure education quality?

8. Do you think the QAUE has caused the change of teaching contents in your university, such as curriculum reform and the selection of text books?

   If so, how did these happen?

   If not, why?

   How do you think about the requirement of the QAUE for reforming teaching contents? Is it helpful for the improvement of education quality?

9. Do you think the QAUE has caused the change of teaching methods?

   If so, how did these happen?

   If not, why?

   How do you think about the requirement of the QAUE for reforming teaching methods? Is it helpful for the improvement of education quality?

10. Do you think the QAUE has caused the change of practical training, including the increase in the amount of practical courses and the improvement of their quality?

    If so, how did these happen?

If not, what were the difficulties of generating the change?

How do you think about the requirement of the QAUE for enhancing practical training? Is it helpful for the improvement of education quality?

11. Compared with research, do you think teaching has been paid more attention in your university (faculty/department), as requested by the QAUE?

    If so, how did these happen?

    If not, why? What were the difficulties of generating the change?

    How do you think about the requirement of the QAUE for a better balance between teaching and research?

12. Do you think teachers have been more committed to teaching than before, as required by the QAUE?

    If so, how did this happen? Do you think the increased concern about teaching has placed more work pressure on teachers?

    If not, why? What were the difficulties of generating the change?

13. Besides the dimensions I have asked about, do you think the QAUE has caused some other changes in your university?

14. You have mentioned the changes in your universities as a result of the QAUE, including xxx. So, when did these changes happen, at the stage of self-evaluation preparing for the visit of external evaluators, or after their visit, or both?

    Have these changes been sustained properly after the QAUE evaluators left?

15. Could you please give some description of how your university (and you faculty/department) responded to the QAUE?

    When preparing for the external quality assessment, did your university conduct mock evaluations? For how many times?

    Was there any resistance in your university when the QAUE was implemented?

    If so, from whom? Any examples? Why?

    If not, why?

16. Do you have any other comments on the QAUE?

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