

Deep Analysis and Reflection on the Prevalence of Chinese Credentialism from Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Abstract

Recently, education has undergone dramatic development, while the pursuit for higher credentials among people is growing increasingly fierce. Resulting in devaluation of credential, this phenomenon is gradually transforming into credentialism. The key research points of our essay lie in the background, phenomena, reasons, and solutions to credentialism.

Keywords

Credentialism; Credential Devaluation; Educational Reforms; Cross-Cultural Perspective.

1. Background

Is outside tuition popular in your country? Is it common for you to seek outside tutoring to further your grades? Do you think that possessing a good educational credential is the essential than anything else? In recent years, the rapid development of education has brought these questions into our daily lives. The students' direct aim of getting extra tutoring outside schools is to get better grades, while the ultimate aim is to be admitted by a better university. In recent years, there has been a driving tendency of studying for a higher level of educational credential, which is a manifestation of credentialism.

Credentialism is the idea that people's competence in study, work, life and society is assessed by the degrees they hold. So credentialism is extremely closely linked to degree. Credential, or more precisely, degree, means an award conferred by a college or university signifying that the recipient has satisfactorily completed a course of study. The reasons why it is created are inseparable from the development of industrial society [1].

Based on the above and related questions, it is not difficult to realize that, the symbolic indication of education, our performance, and the degree, are deeply rooted as the main bases for proof of status and competence. It has also become a grip for changing current social status, and achieving social mobility [2]. Nowadays, with the popularity of higher education, there is an so impetuously quest for degrees that develop into credentialism.

What is the most important is that credentialism has led to a deviation from the essence of education. The over-stating of exams, grades and degrees has resulted in a shifting of the fundamental values of education, and we students tend to focus more on the acquisition of qualifications, while the content of education is taking a back seat. A degree is no longer proof of knowledge and ability, meanwhile, education produces either diminutive talent or examination excellence, so the quality of talent is greatly vanishing. Besides, in order to improve their academic performance and increase their competitiveness, students are forced to plunge into a sea of books And attend various tutorials, which not only distorts the aim of teaching, but also makes learning itself to lose its fun [3].

For the purpose of learning more about credentialism, we have conducted relevant research in a number of countries

2. Phenomena

2.1. China

In China, people have a deep-rooted notion that degree is a critical shortcut to success and happiness. Thus, failure to be enrolled in college is considered a disaster that may cause unemployment or low incomes. However, the national gross enrollment rate of higher education is only 54.4% according to China's Ministry of Education [4], which means nearly a half student is inferior in the job markets and hardly respected by society. Besides, more and more people get their degrees nowadays. Thus, employers require more in addition to degree, such as published papers, with some special emphasis on requiring SSCI journal (Social Science Citation Index) papers [5].

2.2. Japan

Japanese have a strong obsession with degree. In 2018, 34-year-old Kiryu was arrested for killing her mother and then splitting her body and abandoning it because he could not stand the pressure of his mother's long years of persecution and academic expectations. Kiryu's mother was unusually obsessed with medical degrees, forcing Kiryu to have to get into the ideal medical degree, even when Kiryu had already lived a nine-year-long life of re-testing [6]. Such parents are very common in Japan, though not every parent is that extreme [7].

2.3. Australia

On the contrary, researchers in Australia hold a different view. According to NCVET ((National Centre for Vocational Education Research in Australia), the punishment for credentialism is about the same as labor market mismatch[8]. As part of the usual dynamics of the labor market, individuals are in jobs for which they are over-educate. But the degree of credentialism is quite modest: though a majority of employers consider formal qualifications as essential for job recruitment, there are still some industries do not take diploma as mandatory. According to a study conducted by Australian catholic university, 78 percent employers of trades in construction take certifications more important in job recruitment. While 50 percent Employers of manufacturing industrial tend to give high ratings to work experience [9].

2.4. Finland

The Finnish Basic Education Act of 1999 banned grading and evaluating students in a competitive way, aimed at focusing on learning itself, rather than learning for the sake of degree [10]. What's more, Finnish education is respectful and cautious of both intellectual and talent competitions. Additionally, Finland education emphasizes individual differences rather than comparing all students within one framework system. It is an individual choice rather than the only path, in the eyes of Finns, that students with special talents and interests to choose special schools or continue studying in ordinary schools from secondary school onwards.

All in all, though people's attitude towards credential is varied, it cannot be denied that the credentialism is very prevalent in the world and growing popular in most countries in the world. But why? From a cross-cultural perspective, a wildly difference between different countries will be considered to be a matter of course. Why these countries shared such a similarity on this matter? Or in other word. Why is credentialism is so prevailed in the society?

3. Reasons

The reasons why credentialism has its rise in the society can be seen in many aspects.

3.1. Credential as a Currency in Essence

The essence of the credential as a kind of man-made currency is the chief reason for the rise of credentialism. According to Collins in *The Credential Society*, educational credential serves as a currency that can exchange for job occupations and social status [11]. Yet it is because of this characteristic that educational credential, as well as any other kind of currency, has the potential to cause inflation. As more and more people have managed to obtain higher education qualifications, educational credential will be inevitably devalued in the employment market. "Now college graduation had become the requirement for many positions for which no such education had been required before. College education, once an incidental accomplishment of high status, now became the prerequisite of mere respectability." [11] That is to say, jobs that previously required a high school diploma, such as construction supervisors, insurance clerks, and executive assistants, now may increasingly require a bachelor's degree. Some jobs that used to require a master degree, such as junior scientific researchers and university lectures, now may require a PhD. Such tendency of educational inflation derived from the essential property of credential as a currency or exchange will in turn drive people to seek for higher educational credentials, which will only be followed by a larger scale of educational inflation.

3.2. Cultural and Historical Perception

The high value attached to a higher credential has existed in people's perception for a long time. Such perception can be traced back to centuries ago. Credentialism has roots in English society. The British Empire's honors system has provided a unique form of credentialism. Honors are bestowed by the Queen and are usually associated with performing exceptional public service. These honors were highly sought after in the 20th century and they still exist today. However, their use as a symbol of status has largely disappeared. Today, "gongs" as they are colloquially known in Australia, are seen as an anachronistic hangover of the old Empire. Where once they were handed out to only the elites, they are now awarded to all walks of life.

Another example can be seen in ancient China, the long existence of Chinese imperial examination system has exerted a profound influence on people's attitude toward credential and degree. Almost everyone could gain a higher social status as long as he succeeded in the examination. This system was introduced to surrounding countries such as Korea and Japan, and even to European countries. Nowadays, even if the imperial examination has been abolished, its cultural influence is still at work. Taking specialized examination is a necessary way to get into higher educational system, thus higher educational credentials. As we can see, credential has been historically related with some positive conceptions such as honor, success and higher social status. The long-lasting cultural impact have shaped some social psychological factors of the rise of credentialism.

3.3. The Expansion of Education System

The educational expansion is also one of the reasons for the rise of credentialism. According to the data in Collins' *The Credential Society*, the educational expansion in the United States has been existing since late 19th century. "The United States is the most credential society in the world, and its educational system is correspondingly unique...College attendance built up to close to one-half of the young adult population, college graduation came near to one-fifth, and postgraduate studies have expanded at an unprecedented rate. Moreover, as we have seen (Table 1), these trends have been building up steadily since the late nineteenth century." [11]

Table 1 [11]

1. Note the following figures from the early 1960s for the percentages of the population in the industrialized countries that complete various levels of education.

Country	Percentage completing secondary school ^a	Percentage attending university	Percentage graduating from university
United States	75	39	18
USSR	47	19	9
Japan	57	11	12
France	30	11	—
England	12	6	5
West Germany	11	6	—

Sources: Bereday (1969, 80, 281); Havighurst (1968, 55–56); Blewett (1965, 113, 118, 122, 158–159).

^aPercentages refer to relevant age groups.

In 2005, the enrollment of postgraduate students in China was 316,000. While in 2010, the number increased to 472,000, about 1.5 times of that in 2005. [12] It has gaining increasing acknowledgement in China that people should manage to obtain at least a master's degree to get a commonly recognized decent job. The demand has caused the expansion of recruit plan of universities. And the educational expansion will aggravate the social climate of credentialism.

4. Methods

Seen from above, we can conclude that the rampant credentialism nowadays is increasingly encouraging the devaluation of degrees, thus leading to the severe social involvement. Almost everyone is putting on a desperate fight for a higher credential, just because "People have always done it this way". In this way, we have formed an education vicious circle: the higher credential demanded, the more pressure enduring, while nobody is benefiting from it.

Faced with increasingly fierce academic competition in the society, people are forced to hopelessly give in to the cold and absurd reality, or to suffer the great pain of nervous breakdown. To pave way for sustainable development in the education cause, it is high time that we took immediate action to deal with the demonized "credentialism". Education system, in the era of innovation, is committed with educational reform and quality upgrading [13]. First and foremost, putting up a balanced education structure is of great necessity. High school should not be the only key to an ideal job, nor is college or university [14]. The vocational school should also play its role in nurturing qualified personnel for our country.

In our country, prejudice against vocational schools is deeply-rooted in people's minds. Many of them consider secondary vocational schools much inferior to high school, which are only for those "bad students" who get poor grades; it also seems to them that university is more advanced while college is lower. This twisted notion must be corrected immediately. Our government should put more emphasis on the importance of vocational education, and give adequate relevant policy support, such as providing substantial funds, improving teaching staff's academic and moral levels etc. Seen in this respect, Germany's education system has set a perfect model for us. Their vocational education system is of the highest standard worldwide. Owing to Germany's "Dual System", students can study theoretical knowledge in vocational schools, while also train and advance their practical skills in big companies. Regarded as of high operative ability, vocational school graduates are always most competitive in the employment

market. It is estimated that around sixty percent of Germans choose to attend vocational schools, while there is no superiority or inferiority at all, for every walk of life is equal [15]. The very ultimate aim of education is to discover possibilities and stimulate the potentials of every student. Just as the old saying goes: "There are masters in all walks of life", every student must have his own talent, and education is responsible for maximizing their advantages. Therefore, the discrimination against vocational schools must be rectified. Promoting a balanced education structure is a most urgent mission.

Besides, schools and parents should hold a rational and objective attitude towards education and competition. On no account should scores and degrees become the only standard of estimating whether the education is a success or not. What our society needs is the comprehensive talents with all-round abilities, not merely the academic scores. President Deng Xiaoping points out the goal of education as such: "Education should be toward modernization, toward world, and toward future." That is to say, educators and parents should never stop studying, keep updated with the trend of era, concentrate more on the scientific education orientation, and witness students' growth from diverse perspectives, in a peaceful way[16]. Only by facing the reality and absorbing more knowledge will they realize that students' growth should not be assessed only by scores.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we should stay alert of the harm of credentialism. Education, as the very foundation of our country, should return to the responsibilities of strengthening morality and fostering talents in all walks of life.

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