

The Importance of the Multiple Candidates Re-examination in the Unified National Graduate Entrance Examination in Mainland China

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Abstract: Postgraduate education is a way to provide high-level innovative talents for the society, which has high requirements for graduate students' scientific research ability and practical ability. To speed up the construction of a big country of postgraduate education, strict and critical screening conditions and standards should be formulated when selecting postgraduate students. However, the criteria for re-examination in the Unified National Graduate Entrance Examination in mainland China may not be perfect at present. This article critically illustrates the importance of increasing the number of students participating in the re-examination from three points: the benefits of the multiple candidate system, the partially covered recommendation system, and the possible negative consequences of excessive planned admission, and attempts to analyze the implications of the current re-examination situation on higher education through a positive case and a negative case.

Keywords: Higher education, Graduate Entrance Examination, Multiple candidates system.

1. Introduction

The Unified National Graduate Entrance Examination (UNGEE) is a postgraduate entrance examination held by the Ministry of Education and admission institutions in mainland China. It includes a preliminary examination as well as a re-examination. The preliminary examination is a written test administered by the state to assess candidates' competence in academic knowledge, English, and politics. Each admission institution organizes the re-examination to look into candidates' experimental practice abilities, scientific and technical innovation abilities, logical thinking abilities, and language expression abilities through an interview or an interview plus written test (Ministry of Education, 2021; Zheng & Duan, 2015; Tang, 2018). Because candidates can only enter the re-examination if they pass the preliminary examination, almost all of them make great efforts to prepare for the preliminary examination. As a result, students who do not have an advantage in the preliminary examination's written test are excluded from the procedure. Instead, students who excel at rote learning but lack research skills have a greater possibility of being admitted to the re-examination. Graduate students are creative individuals whose research can provide a lot of new ideas and knowledge for society (Xiao & Mao, 2020). Therefore, more students should have the opportunity to show their comprehensive ability through the re-examination, allowing researchers to better identify students who are eligible for research and so improve the quality of graduate research accomplishments.

2. Cases and Viewpoints

2.1. A Case about Turning the Table in the Re-examination

On March 31, 2022, Peking Union Medical College accepted Chen Xin with 331 points in the preliminary examination instead of Han Lamei with 390 points in the same examination, which became one of the trending topics

on Sina Weibo. There are even rumors that Chen gained admission because his father is the director of the Academic Affairs Department of Ji'ning Medical College (the school where Chen studied as an undergraduate). However, the fact is that his parents are farmers. According to the algorithm of the total score, he can surpass Han's score if his re-examination score is 12 points higher. Moreover, his papers published as the first author during his undergraduate stage were included by SCI, and the impact factor is 6.58, which can add 6 points in the re-examination. Therefore, Chen received a total score of 78.53, which was greater than Yang's 77.96 (#Chen Xin#, 2022).

2.1. The Multiple Candidate Re-examination Reduces the Probability of Brain Drain

The multiple candidate re-examination system means that the number of people who take the re-examination is 1.2-1.5 times the number of people admitted to each major (Zhonggong Kaoyan, 2019). In addition to the paper mentioned in the case, two other papers in which Chen was a co-author and one paper in which he was the first author were published separately in SCI and A Guide to the Core Chinese Periodical (*běi dà hé xīn*) (#Chen Xin#, 2022). It is because the re-examination uses the multiple candidate system that Chen had the opportunity to show his research ability in the re-examination and was successfully admitted. However, in the case of one person to be recruited and two to enter the re-examination, if one person's preliminary examination score is higher than Chen's, Chen will not be eligible for the re-examination, and the tutor will not notice his talent this year. If Chen truly missed this year's re-examination, he has two options: one is to take the UNGEE next year, and the other one is to enter the workforce. The number of postgraduate candidates increases year by year, and the preliminary examination competition is undoubtedly becoming more severe (Li et al., 2007). Therefore, the first option may be unfavorable for entering the re-examination. As stated by Chen (2022, as cited in Kaoyan De Jiaomujun, 2022), "If I go

to school for one day, they (parents) will labour for one day”. To relieve his parents’ exhaustion, he may forego the option to retake the UNGEE and instead choose to work. Consequently, Chen will be unable to pursue further education, and the school and society may lose a scientific research genius. However, if more students are selected to enter the re-examination, such as by lowering the re-examination score line or checking the resumes of several students whose scores are below the score line, more talents suitable for research may be discovered.

2.2. The Partial Coverage of Recommendation System Denies Some Students’ Research Abilities

The Recommendation System is another way for Chinese students in the Mainland to be postgraduates in addition to participating in UNGEE (Zeng, 2019). Summer Camp or Pre Recommended Examination from Examination (yù tuī miǎn) in the Recommendation System is similar to the re-examination in the UNGEE, which assesses students’ comprehensive ability (Wu, 2018), so the Recommendation System may be more appropriate for Chen than the UNGEE. However, since there are only 366 schools with recommended places (Zeng, 2019), Ji’ning Medical College just does not have the qualifications to recommend its students exempt from the examination, so Chen can only participate in the UNGEE. Fortunately, he passed the preliminary examination. However, if he is not qualified for the re-examination, not only does he feel helpless, but his tutors and school leaders may also feel sorry that the school does not have the qualifications for recommendation and does not offer Master’s programmes. Therefore, since it is difficult to change the partial coverage of the recommendation system in a short period, increasing the number of people participating in the re-examination is vital for those students who may fail the inflexible examination but have the potential to conduct scientific research and innovation.

2.3. A Case about the Number of Reexamines Less than that Admitted

In 2022, Yunnan University planned to enrol 13 students in its Master of Folklore programme, while only 7 students entered the re-examination, and all of them were admitted (Graduate School of Yunnan University, 2021; Graduate School of Yunnan University, 2022b). The reason for this result is that students entering the re-examination must meet not only the total score requirement but also the requirements in Politics, English, and major courses. Students who fail to satisfy the standards in any subject cannot participate in the re-examination (Ministry of Education, 2022).

2.4. Excessive Planned Admission Has Negative Impacts on Some Admitted Students’ Academic Achievements and Psychology

According to the preceding case, students’ admission result is not determined by their score ranking but by whether they meet the re-examination standard (60 points) (Graduate School of Yunnan University, 2022a), implying that they have little competition in the re-examination. Some schools may even lower the requirements for evaluating students’ research, invention, thinking, language expression, and other qualities to ensure the number of the enrollment. As a result, this form

may have an adverse impact on the university’s graduate research achievements or the psychology of students who are not suitable for research. Specifically, in terms of research outcomes, most postgraduates who postpone graduation are unqualified for their Master’s thesis due to the strict thesis evaluation system (Shanghai University, 2021, as cited in Daoshi Chacha, 2021), and the fundamental reason is that students lack research or thinking abilities. Psychologically, postgraduate students’ depression levels are higher than those of other persons their age due to their distinctive high stress and uncertainty. In addition, academic pressures such as research and graduation pressure are the reasons for most postgraduate students’ psychological crisis (Dyrbye et al., 2006; Song et al., 2019). For those students who have not experienced comprehensive ability competition, they are more likely to suffer negative feelings such as inferiority, anxiety, tension, or other bad psychological emotions (Kang et al., 2022).

3. Education Implications on the Current Situation of Re-examination

On the one hand, education tends to be exam-oriented. Because the process of re-examination can only be entered after passing the preliminary examination, undergraduate education, examination tutoring institutions, and students pay special attention to the preliminary examination. For teachers in universities, since a course has only 36 or 48 hour-long sessions, they tend to transfer all of the knowledge contained in the course by spending most of the time in the lecture (Xu et al., 2017), which does not cultivate students’ comprehensive ability as much. Furthermore, the all-around development practices outside the classroom, such as association activities, debate competitions, social research, and subject research, are not mandatory. Only students who love or want to obtain achievements through these practices will participate. For examination tutorial institutions, for students to pass the preliminary examination, they teach them how to finish each sort of question to achieve high points rather than teaching them how to understand knowledge. For students, it is because of the requirements of a single subject line in the preliminary examination that they will pay special attention to their weak subjects when preparing for the examination. But some subjects, such as English, may not be possible to measure students’ real application ability through a written test. Politics, as a subject included in almost all examinations in mainland China, may not be judged that students’ political literacy is not enough because their scores are one or two points lower than the score line. The most important factor in choosing who can become a graduate student is who has the ability to research and innovate (Yang et al., 2022), rather than allowing some “students who can only do multiple-choice questions and fill in the blanks” to enter the re-examination, which wastes a minimal number of places. However, this does not mean that the standard of a single subject line is totally unnecessary. Taking English as an example, if a student’s English is very poor yet he is admitted with excellent research abilities, he will have serious obstacles when reading English literature. Even if he can use translation software, it is insufficiently accurate, which will have an adverse impact on his research to a certain extent. Therefore, the single subject line also has its own advantages, which can encourage students to pay attention to English and Politics. But for postgraduate students, the most crucial thing

is to have professional academic qualities.

On the other hand, multiple candidate re-examinations allow graduate schools to select students with stronger comprehensive abilities. The ratio of the number of planned admissions to the number of people entering the re-examination is 1:1.2-1.5, which can indeed ensure a competitive relationship between students. However, education departments and schools may ignore or pay no attention to the fact that the number of people entering the re-examination in some schools is lower than the number of planned admissions, resulting in a poor source of postgraduate students than other schools. Although there are also cases where fewer people are admitted than planned. For example, Beijing Union Medical College's Major of Immunology planned to recruit four students in 2022, but only one was admitted (Jiaoyu Tecan, 2022). In the macro-environment, the multiple candidate re-examination system has not been strictly covered and implemented at present.

4. Conclusion

The preliminary examination often focuses on cognitive criteria such as students' knowledge in this field mastered (Sun & Ju, 2012), while the re-examination can check whether students are suitable for research and have the potential to innovate. It plays a key role in identifying the best and assuring quality in cultivating top-notch innovative and practical compound talents (Song, 2012; Guo, 2022). Although many schools' re-examination scores account for just 30% - 40% of the total, the preliminary examination score needs to be converted into 100 scores with 500 or 300 as the full score, and then converted according to the proportion of 60% - 70% and added it to the converted re-examination score to get the total score. Therefore, this shows that the Ministry of Education has not denied the status of the re-examination. Then, with the expansion of undergraduate enrollment and the severe employment situation (Chen et al., 2020), the Ministry of Education or graduate schools can provide more opportunities for students to participate in the re-examination, allowing more students to stand on the stage to show their experimental practice, scientific and technological innovation, logical thinking and other abilities, as well as give mentors more options, making society focus on the importance of improving students' comprehensive quality, and preventing Chen Xin from being rumored because he was admitted with a low score in the preliminary examination and saying "If my family were not destitute, how could I prove my innocence" which is worth pondering.

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