

# Suzhi Education and General Education in China

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Since the 1980s, *suzhi* has become a core word in contemporary China. *Suzhi* education as an education philosophy full of Chinese characteristics has been well known in China for generations. Particularly since 1995, culture-oriented quality education as an anchor and starting point of *suzhi* education implementation in universities, which integrates with general education and liberal education from Western concepts, triggered great changes in Chinese universities. This article aims to review the concepts of *suzhi* education, general education, and their practice in China.

**Design/Approach/Methods:** This study is based on historical developments of *suzhi* education and general education, research literature, and some typical practice cases.

**Findings:** The analysis finds that *suzhi* education and general education have consistent goals. Their connotations in China can be understood in three aspects: philosophy, education content, and cultivation mode. They caused three great practices in universities, including general education courses, extracurricular *suzhi* education activities, and reforms on talent cultivation modes.

**Originality/Value:** This article clarifies the localized understanding of *suzhi* education and general education in three aspects and outlines the overall reforms around *suzhi* education and general education in Chinese higher education.

## Keywords

Chinese higher education, general education, general education courses, *suzhi* education

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There are many related or similar concepts to general education in China. Some of them are very locally created, such as *suzhi* education, culture-oriented quality education, whole-person education, and all-round education, while others are borrowed from English terms, such as general education, liberal education, and so on. When the borrowed English terms were translated into Chinese, there were different Chinese characters owing to each individual translator's understandings, so *suzhi* education and general education are interpreted into different opinions; therefore, some of them are very easy to be confusing. This article clarifies *suzhi* education connotation of Chinese characteristics and the proper understanding of General education in Chinese universities.

### The concept of *suzhi* education in China

*Suzhi* and *suzhi* education have gradually been known to educators as a core term all over China. The word *suzhi* is a Chinese concept full of connotations, which is difficult to define in one English word. It was ever expounded by many Chinese scholars, such as Zhou (2000), Pan (1997), Wen (1997), and C. Zhang (1996) in their academic articles and books. In summary, *suzhi* of a person refers to the relatively stable quality structure, which is due to one's knowledge internalization, based on the inherent gifts and physiology and deeply influenced by their education experience and social environment. A person has some kind of *suzhi*, which means they have certain values, cultural cultivation, physical and psychological quality, wisdom, and abilities.

*Suzhi* education is the education that helps one to improve their comprehensive *suzhi* by long-time personality edifying, knowledge accumulating, ability training, practice, reflection, and internalization, and so on. As Whitehead (1950) said, "The ideal of a university is not so much knowledge, as power ... to convert the knowledge of a boy into the power of a man" (p. 49). Through *suzhi* education, one could have their own values, culture appreciation, physical and psychological quality, wisdom, and kinds of abilities such as independent thinking and judgment. The mission of *suzhi* education should instruct students not just knowledge, ability, and skills but also how to be good citizens, improving the comprehensive quality of all students. So *suzhi* education is a long-time education that runs through one's school days.

Then, in what background was *suzhi* education put forward? Why should China implement *suzhi* education? The former Premier Li Lanqing (2003) and former Vice Minister of the Ministry of Education (MOE) Zhou Yuanqing (2014) had given a definite discourse. *Suzhi* education was first raised in May 1985. Deng Xiaoping pointed out in the First National Conference in 1979 on Educational Work since China's Reform and Opening-up: "In China, the strength of our national power and the size of the economic development power more and more rely on the quality of laborers, the quantity and quality of intellectuals" (L. Li, 2003, p. 298). That means the aim of *suzhi* education is to improve the quality of the Chinese people.

*Suzhi* education was first implemented in primary and secondary schools in China in the 1980s. It mainly aimed at overcoming the shortcomings of examination-oriented education in basic education schools which were influenced deeply by *Gaokao* (the National College Entrance Examination). It emphasized that the basic education had to transfer from examination-oriented education to *suzhi* education in order to comprehensively improve the quality of citizens. In 1977, the Chinese government restarted the *Gaokao* system. Gradually, the scores of students gained in *Gaokao* each year had become the sole standard in recruiting new college students. It was also the most important factor in selecting talents in China. Since the students' future mainly depended on the only scores in each year's *Gaokao* system, the fierce competition led most schools and students to an overemphasis on higher scores of exams, rote in daily teaching and learning in basic education. The senior high schools were quite directly preparing students for colleges and universities by simply teaching them how to get high scores in various exams, but ignored the development of the students as the "whole-person" in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and personality. Therefore, *suzhi* education emerged aiming at changing such exam-based trends and fostering the comprehensive and personality development of all students.

The development history of *suzhi* education in Chinese higher education could be divided into three stages by 2000 and 2015.

### *Stage 1: Originating and popularizing before 2000*

Its main feature was strengthening culture-oriented quality education, by integrating humanity education with education of science and technology. Humanistic and social science lectures, art education activities, and so on, were put to use in second class.

In the 1990s, advocated by the MOE, culture-oriented quality education as an anchor and the starting point of *suzhi* education was implemented in Chinese universities. In 1995 and 1998, the Higher Education Department of MOE (1998) issued two documents, that is, *Notice on Starting Pilot Work for University Students Culture-Oriented Quality Education* and *Several Viewpoints on Strengthening University Students Culture-Oriented Quality Education*. The main purpose of culture-oriented quality education was to balance the narrow specialized education and dissolving the phenomenon of the overemphasis on the education of science and technology at college education but ignoring the education of humanities and arts. It is required that students in science and engineering learn more courses in humanity, history, philosophy, and art, while students in liberal arts learn some natural science courses.

Led by the MOE, Chinese universities quickly started to hold a large number of extracurricular activities, such as humanistic lectures and artistic performances, which were collectively known as second class in China. These education styles were the main practicing methods of culture-oriented quality education in the first stage, which was a remarkable feature of Chinese *suzhi* education.

The main reason is that it takes a long time to prepare general education courses while it is easier and more convenient to arrange extracurricular activities.

### **Stage 2: Reforming and exploring (2000–2015)**

Its main feature was culture-oriented quality education fading while general education popularizing gradually. Universities established general elective courses and explored general education talents-cultivating mode by launching reforming and experimental classes.

In 1999, the CPC Central Committee and State Council issued *The Decision of Deepening the Reform of Education and Promoting Suzhi Education Comprehensively* and held the national conference on educational work, in which it called for promoting *suzhi* education. This meant *suzhi* education had entered a new stage. All schools in China began to develop *suzhi* education in the education system.

In 2010, the Chinese government issued *Outline for China's National Plan for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020)* which affirmed *suzhi* education was the right developmental direction of Chinese education reform again. In 2011, the Chinese Association for *Suzhi* Education was established.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, the concept of general education from Western countries was borrowed by some researchers and administrators again owing to China's Reform and Opening-up Policy. Owing to the development of *suzhi* education and culture-oriented quality education, the general education concept was rapidly recognized by Chinese scholars and generally accepted by Chinese universities. Many universities learned from Harvard University, and MIT or other American universities then began to construct general education courses. Some top universities launched some experimental classes to practice general education cultivation mode, such as Yuanpei College of Peking University launched in 2001 and Fudan College of Fudan University launched in 2005 (Pang & Huan, 2015). General education seminars and exchanging activities spontaneously organized by universities increased during this stage.

### **Stage 3: Deepening and improving (since 2015)**

Its main feature was both *suzhi* education and general education transformed from superficial prosperity to profound-level reforming, which triggered reforming of talents-cultivating system in Chinese universities. In March 2016, *The 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China* was issued. It proposed that universities should implement a cultivation system combining general education and specialized education, and improve innovative talents training ability. This was the first appearance of the general education in Chinese government documents and the new cultivation system construction was referred to.

At the same time, *suzhi* education was further emphasized and expanding. At the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2017 and the National Education Conference held in 2018, President Xi Jinping (Xi, 2017, 2018) emphasized that China must develop *suzhi* education, train socialist builders and successors with all-round development of morality, intelligence, physique, aesthetic, and labor. Along with the popularizing of Chinese higher education and change of external conditions of education, morality, aesthetics, labor, social responsibility, innovation spirit, and practicing ability all become the most important factors of *suzhi* education. Among these, ideological political courses, entrepreneurship education, and so on, were paid most attention by the Chinese central government.

Moreover, Shanghai and Zhejiang province pioneered experiments on reforming the *Gaokao* system in recent 5 years. In 2020, China will implement an entirely new *Gaokao* system, which brings significant opportunities to *suzhi* education. Comprehensive *suzhi* evaluation of students in senior high school will become a measurement in *Gaokao*. Universities will admit and classify students by general academic subjects rather than specific majors. General education will be more important for freshmen and sophomore students, while students could choose specific majors during sophomore or junior year. Through this reform, general education is strengthened, while traditional specialist cultivation mode and university management system are tremendously challenged.

In other words, *suzhi* education, culture-oriented quality education, and general education were mixed together and caused great changes in Chinese higher education. The main approaches included setting up elective general education courses, developing abundant extracurricular activities, paying more attention to the students' comprehensive qualities in specialized education. The ultimate goals were improving all the students' cultural tastes, aesthetic interests, and humanistic and scientific qualities.

Many scholars and administrators in education field such as Zhou (1996), S. Yang (2001), Q. Zhang (2003), Wang (2004), Hu (2004), and Pang (2015) explored the connotations, implications, and the practical ways of implementing *suzhi* education. They indicated a high-qualified talent should have harmony and unity in knowledge, abilities, and qualities. Knowledge teaching and ability cultivation only taught students "how to do," while *suzhi* education could help them "how to be." Culture-oriented quality education was a distinguished anchor of *suzhi* education (Zhou, 2000), and the general education curriculum is a very important way of implementing *suzhi* education.

### **The connotation of general education and its practice in China**

When was the starting point of general education in Chinese universities? There were many opinions about its origin in China. Huang (1993) thought the traditional Chinese culture like Confucianism, Taoism, Legalism, and other ancient philosophers held the concept of general

education. Feng (2004) sorted out the history of general education in modern Chinese universities from the late Qing Dynasty to the early years in the People's Republic of China. But we believed that although the concept of general education was borrowed from the Western countries, it was by chance very similar to the traditional Chinese education concepts that it had actually been put into practice twice in China.

The first time was from the late Qing Dynasty to the year 1952. The Chinese modern universities were modeled after Westerns at the end of the 19th century, aiming at learning the advanced science and technology for strengthening the national defense and developing the industry (Xiong, 1988). Before the 1950s, Chinese universities learned the idea about general education, especially from 1912 to 1949, some famous scholars, who were also presidents of universities, such as Yuanpei Cai in Peking University, Yiqi Mei in Tsinghua University, Kezhen Zhu in Zhejiang University, and so on, advocated general education (Feng, 2004). They not only advocated the idea of general education but actively carried it out in those universities. They believed that college education should "cultivate the students' whole-personality and balance moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic education" (Feng, 2004, pp. 100–110). They claimed that "general education is fundamental and essentials in the students' cultivation, while specialized education is superficial and latter part" (Feng, 2004, pp. 100–110). However, different from the history of Western universities and the tradition of humanism, modern Chinese universities paid too much attention to their instrumental values and were all committed to the nation's politics and economy from the beginning in modern China. Thus, specialized education was more popular, and the purpose of education was always dominated by "the Social Standard Theory."

In the 1950s, Chinese universities learned from the Soviet Union System and set up the specialized talents cultivation mode in colleges and universities. From then on, general education had almost disappeared in China for 30 years. According to the central government's order, three strategies were carried out in the 1950s. And they affected Chinese education greatly in all aspects including the education philosophy, curriculum structure, organization structure, and so on.

The first strategy was the National College and University Adjustment. It was the reorganization of colleges, universities, and the departments along Soviet lines from 1952 to 1957. First, the Chinese government moved the same majors, similar specialties, and departments from several universities and put them into new colleges and universities. After being restructured, almost all the colleges and universities had a single category of disciplines. Only a few comprehensive universities were reserved. The number of colleges and universities of science and engineering had increased greatly, but the specialties of humanities and social sciences were severely weakened. For example, Tsinghua University was originally a comprehensive university. However, during the adjustment, its humanities disciplines were moved to Peking University. Then, it

became an engineering and technological institute. While Peking University became a university which only had programs in basic sciences and humanities, due to its medical, engineering, and agriculture faculties all moving out to other specialized colleges and universities.

The second strategy was that the government ordered all the colleges and universities to adopt the Soviet Model in the education system. So from the idea to the content, from teaching to learning, the concepts, and teaching methods of Chinese higher education were all reformed aiming at training specialists.

The third strategy was that the whole education system was highly centralized management. From the management of all the specialties in colleges and universities, the teaching plan, the teaching program, teaching materials, to the teaching process, they were all unified, leading to the overuniform mode of talents cultivation and lack of personality in students' development (Hao, et al., 2011, pp. 84–89, 100–117, 125).

Due to China's Reform and Opening-up Policy in 1978, the general education concept from the Western world came into some of the Chinese researchers' and administrators' visions again. It was the second time that general education was practiced in China. In 1988, W. Zhang (1988) wrote *General Education in Higher Education* as his doctoral dissertation. In 1989, D. Yang (1989, pp. 11–17) published his book *On General Education*. M. Li (1999) had ever unscrambled the connotation of Western general education in detail in 1999. Later on, some leaders of the Chinese universities recognized the general education concept in international conferences. By the end of the 20th century, conferences and seminars on general education and cultural quality education had been held many times, which gave the Chinese administrators good opportunities for studying general education (Hu, 2002). This fostered the broadcast of general education in China.

However, since the specialized education has been implemented for almost half a century, higher education in China has had the characteristics of over-narrow specialized education, such as extreme weakness in culture nourishing, overemphasis on utilitarianism, and overstrong unification in administration (Wen, 2002). Graduates under over-narrow specialized education not only possessed a narrow range of knowledge but also lacked the necessary creativity. They were much difficult in adapting to the changing world in work field. So when general education was introduced in China the second time at the end of the 20th century, it had been understood quite differently.

Since 2000, more and more universities used general education concept (instead of *suzhi* education) in two situations. Many universities began to use the words “general education courses” and set up general education elective courses that are borrowed from the general education distribution elective courses of American universities. Some top universities declared that the undergraduate cultivation mode will implement the specialized education mode with a wide of



knowledge based on general education. They launched some experimental classes to practice this mode. Chinese universities hope to overcome all drawbacks caused by the overspecialist education mode through general education. So the implementation of general education is not only setting up some courses in universities but also needs the complete revolution on education concepts, specialty settings, course designs, teaching methods, administration systems, and the way of talents cultivation.

Due to the unique situation and background, general education has become more localized in China. It is understood as an education idea; it has the same goals and similar philosophy as *suzhi* education. Sometimes this concept is considered equal to general education course. Sometimes it is regarded as a talent cultivation mode differing from specialized education.

### **Chinese *suzhi* education and general education practices**

In the last 20 or 30 years, *suzhi* education and general education have given rise to a big change in Chinese higher education. All the Chinese universities practiced *suzhi* education by setting up general education courses and developing extracurricular *suzhi* education activities; some universities have explored many reforms on talent cultivation modes (see Table 1).

#### ***Method 1: Common basic courses as formal *suzhi* education curriculum***

Offering general education courses is the main approach to implement *suzhi* education. Generally speaking, BA courses consist of three parts: common basic courses (including common required courses and elective courses in general education), discipline-based courses (also called discipline platform courses), and professional courses. The total BA credit is 140–180, which depends on different universities and disciplines.

Take an engineering major at BIT (Beijing Institute of Technology) as an example. The overall requirement for BA is 170 credits. It consists of three kinds of courses and the distribution is shown in Figure 1 (Zhong, 2016).

The common basic courses in Chinese universities, which usually take 25–40% of a BA's total credits, could be regarded as general education courses in American universities.

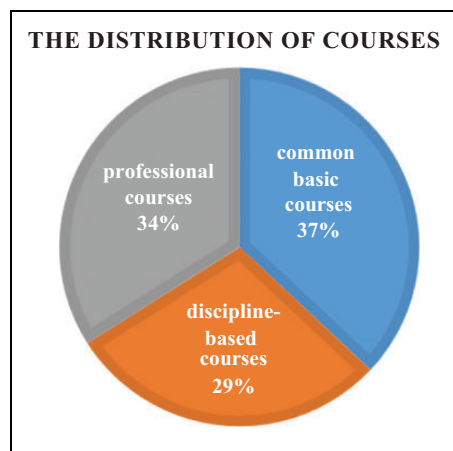
They are made up of four parts as follows:

1. Ideology and Politics Theories are equivalent to common core curriculum in American Universities. These include Morals, Ethics and Law, Principle of Marxism, Mao Zedong Thought and Theoretical System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, The Outlines of Modern Chinese History, and the Psychological Development of College Students. All undergraduates in all universities are required to study these common core courses. They are named as ideological and political education courses that are full of Chinese



**Table 1.** Content system of Chinese *suzhi* education in higher education.

<i>Suzhi</i> education methods	<i>Suzhi</i> education content	
Method 1: Common basic courses—formal <i>suzhi</i> education curriculum	Common required courses/credits <i>Total 54–60 credits</i>	Ideology and Politics Theories, 16 credits; English, 8 credits; Academic Writing, 2 credits; Computer, 2 credits; Physical Education, 2 credits; The Military Training, 2 credits; Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry for students in Sciences, 22 credits; and Chinese for students in Humanities, 6 credits
	General education elective courses	Launching dozens or hundreds of courses, which are divided into different categories. In different universities and different majors, undergraduate students are required to study different credits, ranging from 6 to 22 credits
Method 2: Informal courses—extracurricular activities	<i>Suzhi</i> education activities	Extracurricular lectures, reading activities, scientific competence, recreation, sports, and community services
	Social practice	Volunteer services, social investigations, and social practice
Method 3: The cultivation mode reforms	General education talents cultivation mode reform to balance specialized education, such as general education experimental colleges (class), residential college, or Chinese <i>Shuyuan</i> ...	

**Figure 1.** The distribution of courses of BIT Engineering Major.

characteristics. The central government of China and every university have paid more attention to them, aiming at fostering students' virtue through these courses. The teaching and learning approaches of the courses are changing from lecturing-oriented ones to diverse methods, such as reading the classic texts, conducting social surveys, holding seminars, and so on.

2. College English and Computer Fundamentals are required courses as basic skills for modern social communication to all students. Besides, students majoring in science and engineering are required to learn mathematics, physics, and chemistry, while students in Liberal Arts are required to learn College Chinese.
3. Military Training and Physical Education are required courses that focus on the training of students' physique and willpower.
4. General education elective courses, borrowed from American general education courses and their requirements, have been set up for strengthening *suzhi* education since the 1990s. After 20–30 years' development, there are dozens even 200 or 300 elective courses opened in each university every year, covering humanity, social science, and natural science. Most universities adopt distribution elective courses. Table 2 presents general education elective courses of five universities.

### ***Method 2: Extracurricular activities as informal curriculum (Pang & Cheng, 2019)***

Extracurricular activity is the second characteristic of Chinese *suzhi* education. It can be called informal curriculum, which is beyond teaching plan and aims at guiding and organizing students to develop types of meaningful and attractive activities. Extracurricular activities as part of culture-oriented quality education developed promptly. They are usually organized by the Department of Student Affairs, Youth League Committee, and Culture-Oriented Quality Education Division. Styles of extracurricular activities include extracurricular lectures, recreation and sports, reading activities, community services, scientific competence, social practices, and campus cultural environment constructions.

Recently, many universities have formed their own activity brands. For example, Humanity Lectures opened in 1994 in Huazhong University of Science and Technology ever stroke a huge effect, which have been held more than 2,212 times by January 2018, attracting more than 500,000 students to join.<sup>2</sup> The series lectures Listening to Wisdom set by Beijing Institute of Technology attract more than 10,000 students to join every year. It is very helpful for improving students' comprehensive qualities and broadening their minds. Besides, Flowers in May is the most famous art activity founded by *Suzhi* Education Society in Chinese universities, which has become a China Central Television program. At the same time, Challenging Cup Extracurricular

**Table 2.** General education elective courses/credits of five Chinese universities (sorting out from the program for bachelors of universities).

Universities	General education elective courses/credits/categories
<p><i>Peking University</i><sup>a</sup> The total BA credit: Science, 132–138 credits; Liberal Arts, 140 credits</p>	<p>Undergraduate <i>Suzhi</i> Education General Elective Courses, 12 credits, 6 categories A. Math and Science; B. Social Science; C. Philosophy and Psychology; D. History; E. Language, Literature, Art and Aesthetics; and F. Social Lasting Development</p>
<p><i>Tsinghua University</i><sup>b</sup> The total BA credit: 140 credits</p>	<p>General Education Core Courses, 13 credits, 8 categories A. History and Culture; B. Linguistics and Literature; C. Philosophy and Life; D. Technology and Society; E. Contemporary China and World; F. Art and Aesthetics; G. Law, Economy and Management; and H. Science and Technology</p>
<p><i>Beijing Institute of Technology</i><sup>c</sup> The total BA credit: 170 credits</p>	<p>General Education Elective Courses, 8–12 credits General Education Course of Culture Cultivation, 6–8 credits, including: A. Philosophy and History; B. Literature and Art; C. Health and Society; D. Economy and Politics; E. Science and Technology; and F. Innovation and Entrepreneurship General Education Course of Practical Training, 2–4 credits, including: A. Artistic Practice; B. Technological Practice; and C. Cultural Practice</p>
<p><i>Zhejiang University</i><sup>d</sup> The total BA credit: 160 + 4 + 5 credits</p>	<p>General Education Elective Courses, 16.5 credits, including 9 categories: History and Culture, Literature and Art, Communication and Leading, Economy and Society, Science and Research, Technology and Design, General Education Practice, Freshman Seminar and Subjects Introduction</p>
<p><i>Fudan University</i><sup>e</sup> The total BA credit: 151 credits</p>	<p>General Education Core Courses, 8–12 credits, 7 categories: A. Classics of Literature and History and Cultural Heritage; B. Philosophical Wisdom and Critical Thinking; C. Civilization Dialogue and World Vision; D. Social Studies and Contemporary China; E. Scientific Exploration and Technological Innovation; F. Ecological Environment and Life Care; and G. Artistic Creation and Aesthetic Experience</p>

<sup>a</sup>See <http://www.dean.pku.edu.cn/userfiles/upload/download/201804242015094157.pdf>. <sup>b</sup>See [http://whsz.tsinghua.edu.cn/column/whszkc\\_xkyq](http://whsz.tsinghua.edu.cn/column/whszkc_xkyq). <sup>c</sup>Zhong (2016). <sup>d</sup>See <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/f13e1511326c1eb91a37f111f18583d049640ff0.html>. <sup>e</sup>See [http://www.jwc.fudan.edu.cn/\\_upload/article/files/33/a4/cacc7f2b4b8a985f9299c79c1949/862a1ae4-127e-411e-b515-4d3726a18065.pdf](http://www.jwc.fudan.edu.cn/_upload/article/files/33/a4/cacc7f2b4b8a985f9299c79c1949/862a1ae4-127e-411e-b515-4d3726a18065.pdf).

Scientific Competence for College Students, Humanity Knowledge Competence for College Students in Five Provinces of Eastern China (Cheng, 2015, pp. 290–300), and Humanity Social Science and Natural Science Competence for College Students in Jiangsu Province are famous activity brands (Ding, 2015).

### **Method 3: General education talents cultivation mode reform**

The third practice is the implementing of the cultivation mode which is called Specialized Education with a Wide Range of Knowledge, based on general education. Some universities established experimental colleges (classes) to consolidate general education mode like Yuanpei College in Peking University, Xu Teli College in Beijing Institute of Technology, and Boya College in Sun Yat-sen University. These colleges recruit dozens of students each year. They will receive more general education in the first 2 years to broaden their vision. Then they choose majors freely according to their interests and learn their specialties in the last 2 years. Some universities like Qiushi College in Zhejiang University, Fudan College in Fudan University, and Xi'an Jiaotong University established residential colleges (Chinese *Shuyuan*), aiming at helping the freshmen adapted to new life in the university and strengthening the communications of students from different specialties through dormitory life and activities. The purpose of all these reforms is to establish policies to support general education.

We have learned that the tension and conflict between liberal education college and specialized schools always exists because of the organizational reforms, which leads to uneven reforms in some universities. The operation of liberal education college still needs to adjust the traditional administration system.

## **Comparison and conclusion**

*Suzhi* education as a Chinese education philosophy is the strategic direction of education reform in China. General education as a borrowed Western education concept is strengthened in Chinese universities. The two concepts, which are both rooted in their own cultural tradition and context, have different names but the same ideas. General education has been localized in China and has a different meaning and connotation from the West.

First, *suzhi* education is rooted in Chinese traditional culture such as Confucian idea of cultivating a gentleman and it also derives from the same origin of the Marxist theory of people's overall development. General education originated from liberal education in ancient Greek. General education in the U.S. has multiple meanings. According to the Report of the Harvard Committee (1945), Report of Columbia University (Bell, 1966), and Report of Chicago University (1992, p. 395), general education in America has two aims. One is to cultivate shared values for democratic society and to cultivate citizens full of social responsibilities at the same time. Another

refers to general education contents to balance specialized education. Both are achieved mainly by the perfect general education curriculum system.

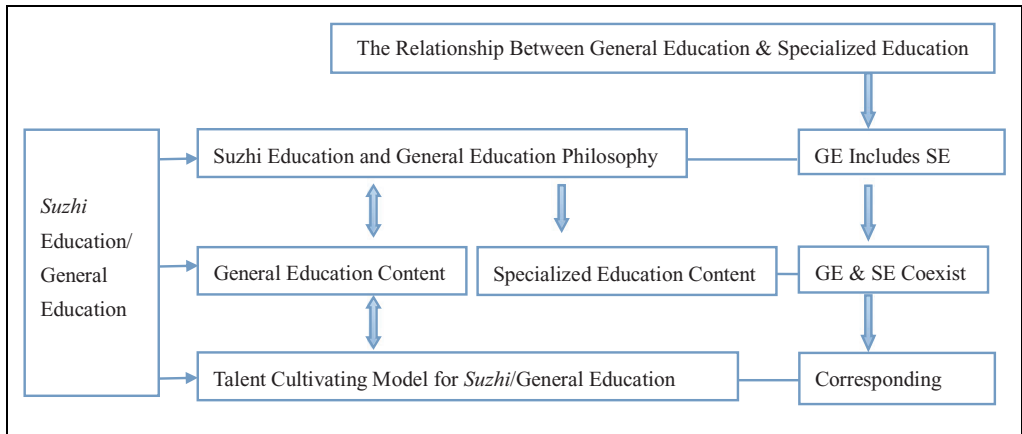
By comparison, we think that although the concepts of *suzhi* education (cultural quality education) and general education are different, their goals are the same, which concentrate on cultivating a whole-person and training comprehensive quality. Contents of these two educations are also similar, which encourage all students to learn humanity, social and natural science knowledge, and develop students' soft skills. But their practice paths, curriculum system, and education content have different characteristics.

Second, China and the U.S. have different university education concepts, which led to different systematic curricula structures and practicing characteristics. The U.S. has an excellent liberal education tradition and highly values general education. Its undergraduate course structure is *general education courses + major courses + elective courses*. The freshmen and sophomore students mainly study general education courses and choose or change their majors freely after that. General education courses play a significant role and take a large proportion during undergraduate education stage. Chinese universities adopted the Soviet education mode since the 1950s, which paid much attention to specialized education, aiming at cultivating specialists. The undergraduate course structure was *common basic courses + discipline basis courses + professional courses*. From the 1950s to the 1980s, there were hardly any general courses. Both common basic courses and discipline basic courses provided the foundation for latter specialized studies. After implementing *suzhi* education since the 1990s, Chinese universities supplemented general education elective courses, whose quality was not satisfying yet. Currently, ideological political courses and second class are playing a key role and become distinct characteristic features of *suzhi* education.

Third, because Chinese higher education was deeply influenced by specialist training and the Soviet model, *suzhi* education and general education are facing many difficulties in changing education ideas, reforming the teaching concepts and its methods, changing administrative systems, and organizing the new systems. We know that there always exists a fierce debate between individual-oriented educational goal and society-oriented educational goal. The most important issue for Chinese universities is to transfer the education aims from society-oriented to individual-oriented, to change the process of education to the individual-oriented and student-centered process and set up *suzhi* education and general education mode through the organizational adjustment and the system reform.

Therefore, according to the context, we believe that the connotations of *suzhi* education and general education in China can be understood in three aspects (see Figure 2).

1. *Suzhi* education is an educational idea which aims at cultivating a whole person with specialized skills. From this aspect, *suzhi* contains general education and specialized



**Figure 2.** Three levels of *suzhi*/general education (SE/GE).

education. *Suzhi* education should lead undergraduate education, not just as the supplement of specialized education. General education should be dedicate to solving the problems in higher institutions by stopping offering the fractures of knowledge, expanding the narrow minds of the students, improving their limited horizons, and correcting the extreme utilitarianism in higher education, which were caused by overspecialized education in the last century.

2. General education refers to the part of education contents, which means the general education courses and informal courses like extracurricular activities. Universities should offer both general and major courses. General education courses should integrate the knowledge of humanity, social science, and natural science in order to broaden the students' minds, develop their whole personality and soft skills, and help them make a solid foundation of specialties.
3. *Suzhi* education and general education can also be a kind of talent cultivation mode. It is not a standard cultivation model, but it emphasizes on building a system to guarantee general education to achieve its goals. From the institutional arrangement aspect, general education talents cultivation mode is quite different from specialized education talents cultivation mode. It requires the necessary reforms from the education concept, curriculum systems, course contents, and teaching methods to the supporting system, in order to meet the objectives of general education (Pang, 2009).

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## Notes

1. See <http://case.bit.edu.cn/fkqk/fkjj/index.htm>.
2. See <https://baike.baidu.com/item/华中科技大学人文讲座/4211315?fr=aladdin>.

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