

Elements and Perspectives of Educational Accountability in China and Denmark

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0. Introduction

Different types of accountability systems may be found in education. For instance Anderson (2005) distinguishes between the following three main types, namely (1) detailed institutional regulation of educational activities and compliance to this; (2) acknowledgement of professional norms and adherence to these and (3) specification of expected results and evaluation of performance. For all three types a range of instruments to evaluate and to improve may be used. Accountability through performance has become more widespread in many contexts during recent years, but that does not mean that institutional regulation or even professional norms have disappeared. The three types coexist in different combinations.

In this paper we will discuss the evolution and current status of educational accountability in two nations, China and Denmark. In size, history and culture these are two very different nations, but both are influenced by global trends in educational thought and policy, including the focus on accountability.

Within national systems of education different types of accountability are generally associated with different sectors and studies focused on a single sector – for instance primary education – may miss important elements. In order to capture at least parts of this complex picture we will look at two sectors in each of the two national contexts: General school education (primary and secondary) and higher education.

1. Concepts of accountability

Accountability is about the request for responsibility or account-giving for that responsibility. Wagner (1989) proposed five elements of accountability:

- What level of accountability is to be provided (description, explanation, or justification)?
- Who is expected to provide the account?
- To who is the account owed?
- What is to be accounted for?
- What are the consequences of providing an account?

The ‘for what’ and ‘to whom’ questions may serve to elaborate Anderson’s three types of accountability mentioned above.

Table 1 Different types of accountability in education

Accountability type	What is accounted for	To who
compliance with regulations	adherence to legislation and official orders	bureaucracy and political system
adherence to professional norms	professional qualifications and control within professions	professional peers and political system
evaluation of results	outputs (e.g. completion rates; student achievement; employment)	bureaucracy, political system and general public

This elaboration of the three types may need a few comments. In the case of accountability through professional norms, we argue that what is accounted for is not the actual professional practice but rather the measures through which professional norms are upheld, like making sure that only people with the right qualifications are allowed access to work and having control mechanisms through which the profession itself corrects unsatisfactory practices. As to the question, who account is owed to we think that this always involves the political system, but that this is combined with other factors in different ways. Accountability through evaluation of results addresses the most complex combination of actors because information of outputs are generally made available to the general public, partly as a deliberate effort to inform and encourage public choice.

2. Education in China and in Denmark

2.1. China

Education in China is mainly a state-run system of public education, which is in the charge of Ministry of Education. It has been regarded by the state as a main institution providing manpower needed for economic development, and by the individuals as a main channel for expanding one’s life chances. Table 1 below shows an overview of the mainstream education in China (Zou, 2013, p. 23). Based on the different mechanisms of accountability it can be roughly divided into two sectors, i.e. the general school education (including both primary and secondary school education) and higher education. While there might be other mechanisms of accountability, the most notable ones are educational inspection and quality monitoring for general school sector, and undergraduate teaching evaluation, accreditation of professional programs and disciplinary ranking for higher education.

Table 2 Mainstream education in China

Education	Years	Typical Age	Students in 2010	Institutions in 2010
Primary school	6	6-11	99,407,000	257,400
Junior secondary school	3	12-14	52,793,300	54,900
High school	3	15-17	24,273,400	14,058
University or college	3 or 4	18-22	22,317,900	2,358

Note: This mainstream education refers to the education that is provided by the regular schools or institutions run by the state, which does not include the adult schools or institutions, occupational high schools, special education schools, non-state or private institutions, etc. The numbers of students and institutions in 2010 are from the Ministry of Education (2012a).

2.2. Denmark

Education in Denmark reflects the character of Danish society as well as the national political system and culture. Denmark is a small country without many natural resources, but located within the generally prosperous Western European sphere. During the 20th century Denmark has developed from an agricultural society to an industrial society, and then to a service and knowledge society. It has a political culture with strong emphasis on collaboration and pluralism, both in national and local matters. The historical background for this is that Denmark managed to complete the transformation from absolutism to representative democracy without major conflicts between social classes (Kaspersen 2013).

The spectrum of political ideologies in Danish politics resembles other western nations, although the ideologies have adapted themselves to the historical and cultural context. The main divide in educational matters is between conservative and liberal forces on one hand, social democratic forces on the other. Danish education has developed through patterns of cooperation and conflict between these political interests. A unified public school ('folkeskole') covering the age span from 7 to 14 was introduced around year 1900, and in the 1970s mandatory schooling was extended to the age of 16. The political parties have always tried to reach consensus in matters concerning this part of the educational system, and reforms have generally not been radical. In upper secondary education (post-16 education) Denmark has retained a system of distinct sectors, with the general and academic schools (mainly the "gymnasium") preparing students for higher education, while technical schools, commercial schools and social and health schools offer vocational education. Most students complete a secondary education degree.

Danish higher education is organized in two sectors with each their types of education programmes. The university colleges run short-cycle programmes as well as medium-cycle profession bachelor programmes, for instance in teaching, nursing and social work. The universities run long-cycle academic programmes, mainly organized according to scientific disciplines but also with elements of professional training.

Table 3 Education in Denmark

Education	Years	Typical age	Students in 2010	Institutions in 2009
Unified public school	10	6-16	716.877	2.642
General secondary school	3	17-19	134.112	149
Vocational education	3-4	17-20	131.598	109
University or college	3-5	19-24	224.452	30

Based on statistics available at the Ministry of Education website and on Danish Ministry of Education (2009)

In Denmark, elements of new public management, including quality control initiatives in higher education programs, were introduced between 1982 and 1993, under liberal-conservative coalition governments. The first initiative was a modernization program for the public sector in 1983, which was followed by others. Some of the keywords in this modernization were decentralization of management responsibility, abolition of detailed formal regulation, governance through a combination of objectives and allocation of resources. Public choice and the establishment of quasi-markets in public services were also emphasized. Education was one of the areas where the modernization initiatives had a strong impact.

3. Accountability in school education in China

3.1. Educational inspection

Since the foundation of People's Republic of China in 1949, inspection has been used as an important mechanism of educational accountability. In 1949, the newly established Ministry of Education installed a department of inspection (National Inspectorate of Education, 2005). This department was mainly in charge of inspecting the implementation of state educational regulations and policies.

Soon after the Cultural Revolution, the recovery of the inspectorate system was put on agenda by the government (National Inspectorate of Education, 2005). At the national conference on general education in 1983, Ministry of Education initiated a 'Suggestions/Opinions for Establishing an Inspectorate System for General Education', which suggested to install an inspectorate into all administrative levels above county¹. In 1991, the minister of education issued a 'Temporary Regulations on Educational Inspection'.

In 1993, the state council released an 'Outline of Educational Reform and Development in China', which stipulated to construct quality criteria and indicators for all kinds of education, and to regularly inspect the educational quality of schools. In the same year, an 'Educational Inspection Office' was established under the National Committee of Education². In 2000, this ministerial office of educational

¹ The main government levels/divisions are the central government, the province, prefecture (or city), county, township, and village. There are also four cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Chongqing) which are under the direct jurisdiction of the central government and thus province equivalent.

² Ministry of Education in China was changed to National Committee of Education in 1985, and then was changed back as Ministry of Education in 1998.

inspection was renamed as National Inspectorate of Education. And a national system of educational inspection has gradually taken its shape with corresponding regulations and working procedures in both local and central administrations. And this is a four-level system of educational inspection, that of the central government, the province, the prefecture (or city), and the county (National Inspectorate of Education, 2005). According to the new National Regulations on Educational Inspection issued 2012 by the Chinese state council, educational inspection covers two elements (state council, 2012):

- Higher level government's inspection on lower level government's implementation in educational law, regulations and policies;
- Government's inspection on schools in their educational activities.

And the inspection is about direct check and evaluation of school activities by specialized experts. The aspects to be inspected include (Ministry of Education, 2012b):

- Comprehensiveness of internal documents such as regulations, planning, employment of modern management mechanisms, etc.
- Efficiency in resource utility such as financial audit, use of infrastructure and facilities, staff development, etc.
- Enhancement of teaching quality such as sticking to national curriculum plan and disciplinary criteria, teaching innovation, etc.
- The development of the students such as moral traits, scientific traits, physical and psychological health, interest in study, aesthetic appreciation, practical skills, innovativeness, etc.

According to the inspection regulation, the inspection reports should be made public and serve as a basis of award and punishment of the inspected school and school leader. The inspected is also required to make improvement according to the inspection conclusions.

3.2. Quality monitoring

The result-based accountability in China, in the form of performance evaluation or quality monitoring, is rather new compared to educational inspection. It was launched with the establishment of a national center in 2007, i.e. the National Assessment of Education Quality as appears at its official website; but if literally translated from Chinese it is Ministerial Center for Quality Monitor in Primary and Secondary Education. And gradually there are also quality monitoring centers established at the provincial level. This initiation is regarded as a response to the overwhelmingly use of the entrance examination result as the main criterion for educational accountability (Li, 2010). The overuse of the promotion rate (the ratio of students who pass the entrance examination and gain access to the next stage education) in educational accountability was assumed to lead to 'education for examination'.

Thus this newly established quality monitoring/assessment is supposed to offer a more comprehensive and effective way of educational evaluation/accountability. Quality monitoring is about constantly watching and measuring the educational outcomes, which include (National Assessment of Educational Quality, n.d.):

- The students' moral traits and citizenship;
- The students' physical and psychological health;
- The students' academic achievement and learning ability;
- The students' artistic traits;
- The students' practical skills and innovativeness;
- Educational and social environments that influence students' development.

The aim of this quality monitoring is to learn about/diagnose the educational status (of a school or region) and the influencing factors, and to form the information basis for educational decision making. The assessment/monitoring results are to be reported to the central, provincial and county governments. This monitoring is targeted at the overall status, not individual student or school. And there is no ranking, no grading, no released score (National Assessment of Educational Quality, 2008).

Quality monitoring has now become an issue on the agenda of the National Inspectorate of Education according to its released agenda in 2013. And we can say that it is incorporated into the inspectorate system.

4. Accountability in school education in Denmark

Responsibility for the unified public school is located at two levels; the municipalities build, finance and staff schools, while the state decides the structure, the overall curriculum, the content of school-leaving examinations and also the qualifications needed for teachers.

4.1. Detailed regulation and local participation

Traditionally accountability has been a question of detailed regulation from the Ministry of Education, covering both the curriculum and the activities in schools. Fifty years ago handbooks for teachers consisted of several volumes of ministerial orders on all aspects of life in schools. Although this detailed regulation was in principle given up in the 1980s as part of the modernization of the public sector there has often been a trend to reintroduce rules, partly because there is much public and political awareness on the 'folkeskole'.

A particular aspect of accountability in general school education is accountability towards parents. This has mainly consisted in parent involvement in local school decision-making. In the years after the Second World War democratisation was an important agenda in many parts of society. In the 'folkeskole' the possibility of establishing formal teacher-parent committees was introduced, and in 1970 such committees were made mandatory for all schools. In the 1980s this was supplanted by school boards with more real influence on school management and with a formalized election procedure for the appointment of parent representatives. School boards signal a degree of local accountability towards parents, but not towards other local stakeholders (for instance secondary schools); and their role in school decision-making remains limited.

4.2. Accountability through assessment

Detailed regulation of general school education has in fact been reduced and more outcomes-oriented measures have been introduced. A major event was the 2006 school reform, which followed a period of intense public debate on the quality of schooling and teaching, sparked especially by disappointing Danish scores in the PISA surveys. The debate resulted in calls from many quarters for more evaluation and assessment, and this was incorporated in the school reform. The main measures were (Ministry of Education, Denmark, 2008):

- The role of exams in the ‘folkeskole’ was strengthened, with exams in more school subjects and starting at an earlier age.
- A system of national tests was introduced. The main function of these was to allow the state to monitor the national levels of achievement, but they could to some extent also be used by teachers in giving feedback to students and parents.
- A specialised unit for school assessment and evaluation was established in the Ministry of Education. Associated with the unit was a national council of important actors from the school system (‘Skolerådet’). The tasks of the unit and the committee were produce regular reports on the quality of schooling and student achievement.
- As part of its work the national council commissions evaluation research on different aspects of the school system and teaching. This research is done by different actors, among them the Danish evaluation institute and some major private consultancies. The research results are documented by the Ministry of Education.
- An annual school quality report at the municipality level was introduced. The quality report should describe the municipality’s school system, the levels of achievement and steps taken by the municipality to uphold and improve quality.

4.3. Other elements

These measures still exist and constitute the main element of accountability related to the Danish primary and lower secondary education. However, a further element should be mentioned, that of teacher education. Teachers in the ‘folkeskole’ are educated in specialized programmes at university colleges. Reform of teacher education is often by governments as a way to assure the quality of teaching in schools. For instance a previous reform focused on improving teachers’ qualifications in key subjects like mathematics and language, while the most recent reform has a focus on improving teacher professionalism in a combination of subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and practical training.

A further dimension of school accountability is the provision of open and transparent information on educational institutions. This is regulated by a public order introduced in 2005, obliging all educational institutions to publish on their websites relevant information about their activities. The information includes educational programmes and curricula, mission statements, statistics on number of students, completion rates and achievement as well as results from evaluations of teaching. The Ministry of Education controls the implementation of this, but it is a type of accountability aimed directly at the general population.

5. Accountability in higher education in China

5.1 Undergraduate teaching evaluation on higher education institutions

Institutional evaluation as an accountability mechanism in Chinese higher education started soon after the Cultural Revolution. It was tried as early as in 1985. And in 1990 a specialized regulation on evaluation, 'Regulations on Evaluation of Regular Higher Education Institutions', was released by the government. However, the concern on quality assurance and accountability system in Chinese higher education hasn't been so highlighted until the 'big expansion' that began in 1999. In 2002 China started to develop a nation-wide formal evaluation system. A 'Plan for Undergraduate Teaching Evaluation in Regular Higher Education Institutions' was formulated by the Ministry of Education in the same year. The revision of this plan (Ministry of Education, 2004a) in 2004 served as the government's primary guidelines in the first round of undergraduate teaching evaluations. Based on the 'Action Plan of Education Innovation 2003–2007', all higher education institutions were required to undergo a quality evaluation every five years (Ministry of Education, 2004b). And a Higher Education Evaluation Center (HEEC) was established in 2004 to serve as the national coordinating body for the evaluation. Since then, the formal higher education evaluation system gradually took its shape.

The evaluation starts with institutional self-evaluation where a self-evaluation report is produced and submitted to the ministry. Then a group of academic peers conduct a site visit and review the institutional activities, which is at least partly based on the self-evaluation report. After the peer review, the feedback will be given to the institution and the evaluation results in the form of a grade of Excellent, Good, Acceptable, or Not Acceptable, will be released publicly on the website of the Higher Education Evaluation Center. And finally the institutions will produce an action plan for improvement. The primary indicators of the evaluation are (Ministry of Education, 2004a):

- Guiding ideas for running the university
- Teaching staff
- Teaching facilities and its usage
- Program construction and teaching innovation
- Teaching management
- Learning atmosphere
- Teaching outcome
- Special characteristics (of the institution in question)

5.2. Disciplinary ranking in higher education

While the focus of undergraduate teaching evaluation is the whole institution, the focus of disciplinary ranking is certain disciplines in the institution in question. Disciplinary ranking has been conducted by Ministerial Center for Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development since 2002. And there are 3 rounds of ranking until now. The primary focus is the quality of specific disciplines or programs, which resulted in league tables of institutions for each discipline. The participation is

voluntary for the institutions – any institution that is eligible to confer a postgraduate degree in certain discipline can choose to participate (or not to participate) in the ranking in that discipline. Except two ‘211 institutions’, all the key universities (the 211 and 985 institutions³) participated in the 2012 ranking (Chai, 2013). The primary indicators are the following aspects of certain discipline (China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Information, 2012):

- Faculty and resource
- Research level
- Student quality
- Disciplinary reputation.

The ranking result is publicly available (officially on the website of China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Information run by the Center, and also reproduced by other major Chinese websites such as China Education Online, Sina and qq.com).

5.3. Program accreditation in engineering and medicine

Recent development in accountability in Chinese higher education also includes the adaptation of accreditation system in professional fields such as engineering (since 2006) and medicine (since 2008). Since the accreditation in these two fields is similar to each other, the following discussion will mainly take the first started engineering education accreditation as an example.

Ministry of Education established an expert committee to take charge of the accreditation of engineering education in 2006. Based on the experience of trial accreditation, the ‘National Trial Measures for Engineering Education Accreditation’ was released by the Ministry in 2007, which stipulates how the accreditation should be implemented. The accreditation covers six stages (Ministry of Education, 2007):

- Application (accreditation is voluntary to institutions and they should first apply for accreditation);
- Self-evaluation and submission of self-evaluation report to the committee;
- Check and approval of the self-evaluation report by the committee according to the ‘Standard for Accreditation of Engineering Programs’;
- Site visit by expert group delegated by the committee;
- Discussion and accreditation conclusion made by the committee;
- Maintenance of the accreditation status (the accredited institution should report to the committee every year or every two years).

The 2011 version of the ‘Standard for Accreditation of Engineering Programs’ consists of both general and program-specific criteria (see the following table).

The conclusion of this engineering education accreditation could be ‘pass, valid for six years’, ‘pass, valid for 3 years’ or ‘non-pass’. And this result will be release by Ministry of Education on its website.

³ Project 211 and Project 985 are two key university projects initiated by the Chinese government. Institutions admitted in these two projects are mostly well-reputed and are prioritized in financial and other resource support by the government.

For medical education, there is the ‘Standard for Undergraduate Medication Education’ on which the accreditation is based. And the accreditation result is ‘accredited’, ‘conditional accredited’ or ‘not accredited’.

Table 4 Standard for Accreditation of Engineering Programs in China

type	Criteria	Specification
General criteria	Program goal	Program setting
		Graduate competences
	Curriculum system	Curriculum plan
		Practical training
		Thesis (design) for graduation
	Faculty	Faculty structure
		Faculty development
	Facilitating conditions	Teaching finance
		Teaching facilities
		Information resource
		Industrial collaboration
	Student	Student source
		Employment
		Student supervision
	Management	Teaching policy and regulation
		Process control and feedback
Quality evaluation	Internal evaluation	
	Social/external evaluation	
	Continuing improvement	
Program-specific criteria	According to specific programs	

6. Accountability in higher education in Denmark

Accountability in higher education has traditionally consisted of some political regulation combined with a strong element of collegiate governance and peer assessment. Government allotted funds and decided on a system of disciplines and degrees. Quality teaching was assumed to be assured by the excellent knowledge of university professors, and decisions on the practical arrangement of educational programmes and teaching was left to the academics in the different disciplines. In the 1970s legislation introduced a strong element of participatory democracy in Danish universities; this meant increased accountability towards students, but not towards government or other stakeholders.

6.1. Evaluation centre for higher education

The move towards modernization of the public sector gradually changed this situation. In 1992, after years of debate, the Ministry of Education established the Evaluation Centre for Higher Education. Its task was to evaluate all Danish higher education programs. The Evaluation Centre was an independent institution affiliated with the Ministry of Education. The institutions of higher education were obliged to cooperate

on evaluating their education programs, but the centre did not have authority to initiate evaluations on its own. This authority was placed in the Ministry of Education, and the policy was to evaluate all long-term further educations at least every 5 years; usually not entire institutions, but rather programs within a certain discipline and all institutions that offered the relevant programs. For instance one of the first programmes evaluated was history, which existed in five institutions. The evaluations strongly resembled comparisons of practice at the different universities (Rasmussen 1997).

Evaluations usually comprised three elements; (1) a self-evaluation of by each education program; (2) user surveys of students, graduates and employers; (3) visits to the educational institutions usually conducted by the evaluation steering group. It was initially unclear how the results of the evaluation centre's investigation would be used. Could they lead to closings of programs and if so what would the decision making process look like? Did the educational institutions have a responsibility to follow up on the conclusions and recommendations in the evaluations? The Ministry of Education gradually introduced standard procedures that committed the educational institutions to follow up on the evaluations and report to the ministry.

In 1999 when the evaluation centre was completing the first round of recurrent evaluations, it was renamed the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) and its new task was to conduct equality assessment and quality improvement in the entire Danish educational system. The main methods from the evaluation centre model continued to be used, but recurrent evaluations were replaced by a spot check principle.

6.2. Introduction of accreditation

More than a decade later a new system of accountability was introduced: accreditation. In the United States accreditation procedures have played a large role in higher education for a long time. But although the American university system is often regarded as a model in Europe, the interest in accreditation has been limited. However, during the 1990s a strong interest in introducing systems for accreditation of higher education programs manifested itself in many European countries. The pioneers were Central and Eastern European countries, and Hungary introduced the first system in 1993. One reason for this may have been that after the collapse of the old regimes many universities hoped to ensure their autonomy via independent evaluation and recognition of study programs.

In Denmark accreditation was introduced in connection with new legislation on universities and other higher education. In the university act of 2004 and in the equivalent legislation for other higher education one objective was to strengthen the educational institutions' administrative and economic autonomy. The establishment of new education programs was one of the problematic issues in this context. Denmark has a long tradition for central control of this area, and decisions to create and cancel education programs have rested mainly with the civil servants in the relevant ministry. The introduction of an accreditation system for higher education can be seen as a strategy to move these conflict-prone decisions out of the ministerial bureaucracy without giving up the centralized decision making competence.

The Danish act on accreditation of institutions for higher education was passed in March 2007. The act requires that all higher education programs in Denmark must be accredited. New education programs must be accredited before they are launched. Accreditation must be separate for all institutional localities before a program is offered. Existing programs must be accredited regularly.

According to the act, an accreditation council consisting of a limited number of ministry-appointed experts would be established. Units would be established outside the ministries to handle analytical and administrative procedures in connection with accreditation. For the higher education programs at the university colleges the task was placed with EVA (the Danish Evaluation Institute), which already had extensive experience with evaluation and higher education. For university education a new unit called ACE Denmark was established.

The procedures of accreditation in many ways follow the model developed by the evaluation centre in the 1990s. For each accreditation an expert panel follows the work, participates in visits to institutions and is responsible for the conclusions of the accreditation report. The practical work is conducted by the staff at ACE Denmark and EVA. The institutions whose study programs are up for accreditation prepare detailed applications after standard templates based on the accreditation criteria. The applications are assessed by the evaluation staff and by the steering group. Based on this and the results from the visit a report is prepared and the conclusion is a recommendation for accreditation or non-accreditation. The report is the basis of the accreditation council's decision (ACE Denmark 2012).

One of the criteria for accreditation is that institutions undertake regular evaluation of their teaching. This almost always takes the form of questionnaires filled by students and summarized by evaluation units in the institutions. The use of such evaluations had grown during the 1990s, and in 2005 their role was strengthened by the public order on open and transparent information mentioned earlier. According to this order results from teaching evaluations was part of the information that educational institutions should publish on their websites. .

6.3. Accountability and normalization

All in all, accountability in Danish higher education is a present dominated by the accreditation model, which can be characterized as quality assurance according to standard procedures; mainly external, with limited internal elements; mainly summative and with application of multiple approaches, including the academic, the administrative and the user-oriented.

This form of accountability implies normalization. With inspiration from Michel Foucault's analyses of the correlation between knowledge procedures and exercise of power (Foucault 1980), we can see how the evaluation and accreditation systems with their standardized procedures, standard set of criteria and emphasis on detailed documentation may serve as tools to adapt higher education programs to a common set of norms for higher education, a 'standard model'. An example is the qualification framework for higher education, defined by the Danish state based on common EU policy, which will be incorporated in study programs for all higher education. The use of the qualification framework has been decided politically; but its principles and

concepts are fairly open and not without contradiction. In principle, it is up to the institutions of higher education to implement the qualification framework; but in reality it is governed by the accreditation system. It is a standard element in accreditation applications that the institutions describe how the study programs fulfil the principles of the qualification frameworks, and study programs must be appended to the applications. Regardless of the extent of control with the submitted study programs, the procedure itself forces institutions to adapt to the principles and concepts of the qualification framework with a minimum of criticism and resistance.

7. Comparison and discussion

Although china and Denmark are very different in terms of size, history and culture, educational policy in the two countries is marked by an increasing concern with accountability, and there are considerable similarities in the types of accountability pursued.

For much of the post-war period educational accountability in both China and Denmark mainly consisted in detailed regulation of institutions and practices. An element of professional accountability was also present, especially in higher education and perhaps somewhat more in Denmark than in China. During the last two decades accountability through evaluation of results has been taken up and has gradually become dominant. Detailed regulation and professional norms have not disappeared, but they are used more selectively and redefined as means to secure output.

In general school education China seems to have had a stronger tradition of inspection procedures than Denmark, while Denmark has started to focus on results earlier than china. However, the reforms implemented in both countries during the last 10-15 years are not so different from each other. Both involve documentation of activities and achievements to be documented and supervised at local and central levels. And in both countries there is a trend towards accountability through evaluation of outputs. But the fact that general school education has to provide schooling for all children sets limits for the dominance that this type of accountability can achieve. It must be combined with both regulations and professionalism. An interesting question is how the role of professional accountability in general school education is developing in the two countries. For now, we do not have sufficient material to answer this.

The role of accountability has always been stronger in general school education than in higher education, historically because schooling was one of the ways states shaped and controlled their citizens, politically because citizens are also parents who concern themselves with the opportunities of their children. However, in recent decades the demand for accountability in higher education has increased dramatically in much of the world. This is also evidenced in Denmark and China, where several accountability systems have been devised and implemented. But there are some differences in the types of accountability pursued in the two countries. Denmark introduced a systematic and model of evaluation in the 1990s, a model that subjected all higher education programs to comprehensive inspection at regular intervals. After some years the model was given up, but when accreditation was introduced a decade later many of the same evaluation procedures were used. In accordance with the principles of new public management accreditation presupposes that higher education institutions are

independent actors who apply for recognition of 'their' study programs. In China models of quality assurance in higher education were developed some years later than in Denmark, but have been implemented quickly in the new millennium. Undergraduate teaching evaluation was the first model implemented and it has recently been supplemented with accreditation of study programs in selected fields. The main difference between the two countries is that China also operates a system of disciplinary rankings, where institutions are ranked in the main disciplines according to research output, student quality, reputation and other features. Compared to evaluation of higher education institutions, accreditation and disciplinary ranking is more result-oriented than direct regulation. That such a system has not yet been introduced in Denmark (although it has been discussed) can be seen as result of a reservation towards elitism and an emphasis on consensus in Danish culture.

Especially in higher education China has a more complex system of accountability with different elements running in parallel (detailed regulation, result driven, professional norms). This partly reflects the fact that China is a much larger and more complex society, but it can also be seen as result of the fact that China is undergoing dynamic social change, while Denmark evolves fairly steadily along a path based on the Nordic welfare state model.

Denmark and China both move towards output-driven types of quality assurance and implement models (like teaching evaluation and accreditation in higher education) that strongly resemble each other. This shows that they participate in a global regime of policy development, enacted partly through international organizations like the OECD but also through all types of contacts and negotiations between governments and other important actors. Diagnoses of problems, policy objectives and recipes for success are circulated, co-developed and adopted in different national contexts. This does not mean, however, that practices become identical. A seemingly identical model of accountability like accreditation may work and impact differently in a Danish and a Chinese context.

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