Call for Papers

Quantifying Education in 20th Century China:
Schools as Production Sites and Repositories of Statistics

16–17 July 2025, Erlangen (Germany)

Organizers: Prof. Dr. Andrea Bréard, Gus Tsz-kit Chan, Sijia Cheng

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Education has long been central to Chinese modernization, with educational statistics playing a pivotal role in policy decision making. Literacy rates, years of education, physical parameters of students, and enrollment of women and ethnic minorities were important performance metrics of the state. In China, one of the earliest instances of nationwide school statistics can be traced back to the late Qing period, when the Ministry of Education produced histograms estimating the number of politically educated citizens needed for a proposed constitutional monarchy. Although national education reports were suspended in 1916 at a central level, educational statistics were revitalized under the Guomindang government in tandem with its re-centralization of political authority. In the 2000s, as quantitative history gained popularity, data from the Republican period experienced a new "afterlife." Scholars addressed inconsistencies and gaps by developing revised estimates that restored and enhanced the legibility of old reports and surveys (Wang, van Leeuwen and Li). Recent database projects, such as the digitization of student registration cards and yearbooks of engineering students, enabled scholars to uncover patterns in the data (Lee-Campbell Group; Pelzer et al.).

Despite these advances, the history of quantification in Chinese education remains underexplored: the mechanisms through which data produced at school sites became quantified, standardized, used and reproduced lack comprehensive analysis, not to mention their circulation and representation in bureaucratic and public discourses. Some studies addressed the cultural changes in other Chinese institutions that undergird quantification in modern China (Lam; Lin). Meanwhile, the wealth of historical material about Chinese education (Ma and Lu) and the vibrant debates on its modernization suggests that viewing schools as sites of statistical production and repositories could offer valuable insights for both the history of quantification and quantitative history.

In light of this, sin-aps (Sinology–Algorithms, Prediction, and Statistics), a group of historians of China at FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg, generously supported by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and focusing on China's introduction of modern statistics, hosts a workshop on *Quantifying Education in 20th Century China: Schools as Production Sites and Repositories of Statistics* on July 16–17, 2025.

This workshop aims to explore schools as institutions central to the production, storage, and communication of population data. It seeks to bridge scholars using educational statistics with historians of statistics, bringing together postgraduate students and senior researchers from both social sciences and humanities. In this workshop, we define quantification as a way of knowing following a highly-structured procedure of measurement, counting, and calculation and consider schools as institutions that are primarily dedicated to the purpose of primary to higher education. Data that proliferated in the twentieth century mainly concerns:

- **Economics and Social Mobility**: occupations of students' parents, proportion of students from rural regions; wages of school employees, government spending on high and vocational education.

- **Education**: average duration of education, hours spent on different subjects, grades and other performance metrics.

- **Health and Hygiene**: students' height and weight over the years, diet and nutrition intake, attendance and conducts, frequency of sick leaves, other mental and physical attributes.

Perspectives on such quantitative data from the Chinese state and society are both considered in the workshop, including how the Chinese state apparatus collected, reorganized, and analyzed each category of data or used it for policymaking, and how the Chinese population perceived and accepted these data as knowledge.

We invite submissions of research papers on topics including, but not limited to:

- Educational and Social Mobility

- Categorization of Schools and Academies

- Student and Teacher Populations as Subjects of Data Collection

- Children Psychology, Tests, and Measurement of Intelligence

- Schools' Data in Bureaucratic and Popular Discourses

- Research and Surveys on Overseas Chinese Students

- Schools' Statistics as Disciplinary Instruments: Surveillance and Birth Control

With this workshop we aim to lay the foundation for publication of selected papers. The workshop is financially supported by funds from the Alexander von Humboldt Professorship (Prof. Dr. Andrea Bréard). International travel and accommodation costs for participants will be covered.

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Submission Guidelines and Timeline:

- Abstract appr. <u>500 words</u>

- Curriculum Vitae

- Language: <u>English</u>

- Submission Format: <u>PDF</u>

- Submission Deadline: <u>March 1st, 2025</u>

- Notification of Acceptance: <u>March 31st, 2025</u>

- Draft Paper Deadline: <u>July 1st, 2025</u>

Please send your submissions and any inquiries to:

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Works cited

Lam, Tong (2011). *A Passion for Facts: Social Surveys and the Construction of the Chinese Nation-State, 1900-1949*. University of California Press.

Liang, Chen. "China University Student Datasets (CUSD) 中国大学生数据库." Lee-Campbell Group. https://leecampbellgroup.blog/projects/china-university-student-dataset-cusd-project/

Lin, Yi-tang (2022). *Statistics and the Language of Global Health: Institutions and Experts in China, Taiwan, and the World, 1917-60*. Cambridge University Press.

Ma, Min, and Lu Hanwen (2017). "民国时期社会发展的计量研究与政府统计资料利用" (A Quantitative Study of Social Development in the Republic of China and Utilization of Government Statistics). In: 大数据与中国历史研究，第三辑 (Big Data and the Study of Chinese History), vol. 1, edited by Fu Haiyan 付海晏 and Xu Jian 徐剑, 3–33. Beijing: 社会科学文献出版社 (Social Sciences Academic Press).

Pelzer, Thorben, et al., eds. (2022). "Chinese Engineers Relational Database (CERD)." Geneva, Budapest: Zenodo. http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4075601

Wang, Meimei, Bas van Leeuwen, and Jieli Li (2021). *Education in China, ca. 1840–Present*. Leiden: Brill.