

## 9. CONCLUSION: ON LEADERSHIP, RELATIONSHIPS (*GUANXI*) AND REPUTATION

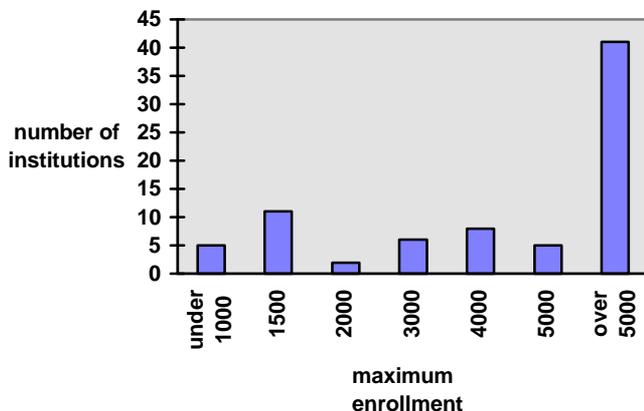
This concluding chapter will discuss the various themes that have played recurrently in the political economy at Shenzhen University from 1983-1996, and it will attempt to tie together the university's diverse elements. The book's inductive style of presentation has by necessity been data-rich. Analysis, of course, has been drawn out of the dense description of the institution, but the preceding chapters have to a large extent let the data speak for themselves. In the task of sifting through these data, many analytical nuggets have stayed behind. These may be grouped under two rubrics:

- importance of the *lingdao* and the rule of relationships
- form over substance: reputation over education

Before these subjects and SZU alternative futures are examined, however, a question relevant to case study analysis in general needs to be addressed: to what extent does SZU represent the typical Chinese university?

### ***How typical is SZU?***

This book has focused on the politics and finances of Shenzhen University in China's premier Shenzhen Special Economic Zone. Is the SEZ, as described in Chapter One, so special that its location renders SZU too unique to be of much relevance to Chinese tertiary education? The zone's uniqueness is beyond questioning. Drawing, as it does, most of its students from the SEZ, the university hence recruits young men and women who are quite different in many ways from their counterparts at other institutions of higher learning. SZU's students' families are richer, better educated and better integrated into the political system, the latter as indicated by CCP membership—50% of students' parents. Influenced by neighboring Hong Kong, Shenzhen is a special consumption zone. Members of the university community consume a lot of foreign-made products, not the least of which is news and information that come from abroad through the Hong Kong airwaves, unrestricted by the type of censorship that still occurs elsewhere in the People's Republic. While graduates of other Chinese universities talk about buying their very first color television, SZU's alumni purchase stock, real estate, and automobiles. They own mobile phones and take vacations to Thailand (cost: ¥3,000 for a 7-day package). Social mores and life attitudes in the SEZ are different. Many SZU alumni co-habitate before marriage, a practice more frowned

**Figure 9.1: Enrollment for comprehensive universities, 1995<sup>1</sup>**

upon in inland China. The SEZ's cost-of-living is China's highest, but so are SZU teachers' incomes. The greed of neo-capitalism—one of the horse-sized flies that has winged its way through the Open Door—is more pronounced in Shenzhen than anywhere in China. A set of business ethics has evolved that is quite different from those practiced in Western nations. Chinese salesmen earn less in salary and employer-paid bonuses than in commissions from the factories and vendors that they do business with. Civil servants often receive remuneration from members of the public who depend on bureaucratic chops. These practices, in Shenzhen and elsewhere in China, have evolved because state employee's salaries have been maintained at levels below those of similarly qualified *rencai* earn if they are self-employed or work for foreign companies. The general public does not perceive these practices as corrupt, except when exercised in excess (conspicuous consumption, extortion, etc.).

One way to address the issue of uniqueness/relevance is to accept the somewhat commonly held notion that the Shenzhen of today is the China of tomorrow. In other words, although the Shenzhen of the present is certainly more market-oriented than most of contemporary China, it also represents one of the nation's alternate futures. Modernization in China is expected to mean urbanization. The current 70-30 rural-urban split may reverse itself within the next century. Future modern China may well be dotted with many Shenzhens, and the universities of the future may well be influenced in ways similar to how Shenzhen has impacted SZU. Already, as indicated by Wei Feng's journalist accounts, universities in Beijing—as measured by faculty

disengagement, school-run enterprises, and student business ventures—appear to be at least as affected by the market economy as is SZU.

An assessment of the typicality of SZU involves elements other than the university's relationship with its environment. Rephrased, is SZU a typical Chinese university, if the external factors are controlled for? This question deserves an emphatic “no,” not because SZU lacks most of the features of other Chinese universities, but *because no single university in China is typical*. China's 1,054 publicly-funded institutions of higher education are a diverse lot. They are classified into 12 types, the largest of which—natural sciences and technology—accounts for 27%, followed by teacher training institutions (22%).<sup>2</sup> Only 78 universities (7%), including SZU, are defined by the SEdC as comprehensive. If there can be no “typical” university, can there at least be a typical comprehensive university? As indicated in Figure 9.1, over half of China's comprehensive universities are about twice the size of SZU. On the basis of size, therefore, SZU is typical of only a middle group of comprehensive universities that numbers no more than 14. These universities are, by and large, new universities just like SZU. Given national preferences towards the funding of large-scale projects in the natural sciences, small size and newness put SZU and similar institutions at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their comprehensive brethren. For one thing, larger universities have more solid research bases and are better able to weather cycles caused by funding delays or droughts, whereas almost from its inception, SZU experienced research funding aridity. This was a most serious problem at SZU, for lack of research funding partly accounted for faculty disengagement from scholarly pursuits in favor of income generation. From the early 1990s Shenzhen city began funding more research projects, and SZU itself began channeling more of the revenue it generated through its own enterprises and side-courses into research, but by then an anti-research ethos had set in. Whether this ethos can be corrected in the future remains to be seen.

Apart from size and age, do other features limit the generalizability of the SZU case? Comparative statistics for measures concerning teachers and students, floor-area ratio, funding, research, library size, and other aspects of Chinese universities suggest that SZU soundly fits into Chinese tertiary education.<sup>3</sup> It is not an institution so unique as to be set out of the mainstream. SZU is wealthy but not the wealthiest (which is Shantou University). Aside from the fact that it charges the highest undergraduate tuition in China, it is not at the extreme for any of the measures for which data can be found. The students, as indicated by test score, appear to be above average. Faculty quality among members appears to be skewed, something based on when staff were hired. Since 1989 many staff were hired largely on the basis of

relationships; in the judgment of many students and teachers these new staff appear to be much less competent than the early recruits who won their positions over stiff competition. In terms of administration, the university's dual-track governance structure resembles those in most universities in China. Few university presidents serve concurrently as Party secretaries; the political function is separated out even at the *chu*-level. At SZU this structure permitted conflicts between Party and administration, but other Chinese universities with seasoned and relatively honest politicians seem to run on consensus. Rather than promoting conflict, the dual-structure provides for checks-and-balances. Drawing from the SZU case a general picture that suggests leaders at other Chinese university are greedy, self-serving autocrats would be improper.

How well a university runs involves a host of factors, with size and age being quite important. Large institutions may be less person-dependent than smaller institutions. Complexity resulting from size requires on-going systems; *lingdao* cannot become personally over-involved in micro-management; they don't have sufficient time to use *guanxiwang* to settle minor disputes. Factions and cliques may well exist, as they would at institutions in other countries, but it is unlikely they would play the dominant role they did in post-Tiananmen SZU. Nevertheless, the potential for abuse, given the absence of rule of law and the importance of social relationships in Chinese culture, exists. SZU's management history would not appear to be representative, but it draws attention to potential deficiencies and abuses that could occur in other universities. That another institution could experience the extent of abuses and deficiencies in management that occurred over many years at SZU, fortunately, seems unlikely.

The corruption and mal-administration that plagued SZU did not crop up overnight. They resulted in large part because no upper level monitored the university; even when problems became apparent, neither the city nor the province quickly intervened. The SEdC was even further removed. Thus, is SZU typical in regard to how it is overseen by the upper levels? About 70% of China's higher educational institutions are under the jurisdiction of local (provincial or municipal) authorities.<sup>4</sup> Although the central government, through the SEdC or a line ministry, is not directly responsible for running these schools, lower levels of government very much look to Beijing for guidance. Some guidance is formal, through guidelines, national tests (e.g., Band 4), textbook approval, and periodic accreditation. Much of the guidance, however, is informal, such as what occurs during inspection tours (SZU received visits from SEdC officials about six times a year). The SEdC's recommendation of Cai Delin to become SZU president is an exam-

ple of central level's informal help. Thus, the importance of central control rests in more than line of authority, something which would suggest that the SEdC's influence is not limited to the 35 institutions it directly manages. Through policies and personal relationships, the central government macro-manages Chinese tertiary institutions. Provincial authorities, therefore, exercise only limited control over the institutions under their jurisdiction. One of their prime functions is to carry out state mandates. In SZU's case, power was further split, as administrative control was vested by the State Council in the municipal government, which for many years had no full-time staff assigned to higher education supervision. Power over SZU was held by a single individual—a Shenzhen deputy mayor—and there was no bureaucracy to provide him support and to prevent his abuse of power. A situation of multiple parents developed; no single upper level bureau was in charge of SZU. Consequently, there was often little upper level accountability. Higher authorities intervened only in times of crisis or over periods of leadership succession. Interventions came slowly. Administrative deadlock during the Wei-Wu period and rampant corruption during the Cai Delin years were clearly evident for several years before the leaders were finally removed from office. These delays in changing leaders had a profound impact on the university, degrading student and staff morale, which in turn prompted their disengagement.

Thus, in terms of external decision-making SZU follows the typical multi-parent pattern found in most Chinese tertiary institutions. This pattern occurs in ministry-run institutions as well. Not specializing in education, ministries generally defer to the SEdC, to such a degree that educational researchers are beginning to advocate localization—taking institutions away from ministries and giving them to local government.<sup>5</sup> This is one component of the overall approach taken by China's education authorities: to increase the size of institutions through mergers and additional enrollment, to de-emphasize specialization in favor of comprehensive institutions, and to focus national resources on 100 key mega-universities, those under the 211 Plan. Since the mid-1990s central authorities have sent down the following set of preferences for universities: big over small, comprehensive over specialized, local control over central control. Over time, some institutions can be expected to broaden their scope of education (e.g., science institutions will offer more arts majors), but specialization will likely remain a major characteristic of the tertiary sector. In any case, there will be many deviations from the prescribed model, and Chinese tertiary will likely remain diversified.

Although there were hundreds of Chinese higher education institutions created in the early 1980s, the history of SZU remains unique. The data presented here on input and throughput, though unique to SZU, conform to general patterns around China. SZU's pedagogy, the approach taken to foreign things, and its governance more closely resemble elements at other Chinese institutions than those abroad. Politics in the period after Tiananmen has been more in keeping with the norm, although the high degree of factionalism and excessive political bickering was probably atypical; in this regard SZU serves as a negative exemplar for educational *danwei*.

The cycle of full integration of the CCP into the university, then splitting Party from administration, then reunification created turmoil. Luo's "innovation" of combining the CCP with administration was not something new in China. For a half century, the Party has controlled many aspects of Chinese society, with the CCP effectively becoming management. This permitted a high level of efficiency at SZU; no one was deemed important just because s/he was a Party member. Individuals were judged on their contribution to the university, not just their contribution to Party affairs. Replacing this system with dual tracks incurred great inefficiency. By the mid-1990s SZU had in excess of 100 staff who supposedly worked on Party matters, but who actually interfered in school management and administration. These cadres created work for themselves, but in the process they obstructed the day-to-day operations of the university. Given their interference, the sum of their contributions was probably nil. By 1995, with one staff for each four students, SZU had become a personnel-laden institution, exactly what national directives were trying to avoid. SZU did not resemble the stream-lined institution that had existed prior to Tiananmen.

In assessing SZU's typicality, the area of outputs poses more difficulty. Student underachievement is likely to exist elsewhere. The ebbs and flows in research output at SZU were caused by the same tides in the business sea that affect other universities. Still, although SZU might represent an extreme case, the catalysts of cellularism and *guanxiwang*, which were responsible for many of its ills, exist at other institutions. These factors are hypothesized to produce similar results, though perhaps not to the degree which they affected the SZU community.

In sum, SZU is not representative of the Chinese tertiary sector in *all* its elements, but there are *few* ingredients so unique to exclude the university from serving as an illustrative case.

### **Lingdao and the rule of relationships**

As perceived by the campus community some SZU leaders were dragons (*long*), while others were worms (*chong*).<sup>6</sup> Regardless of how they were assessed, each *lingdao* at the *ting* and *chu* level profoundly influenced and almost single-handedly set the policy for his domain. The vice-presidents were even listed as the nominal heads of many sub-units, including the staff work-union, university *Journal*, Library, SZU Translation Company and Research Office. At times vice-presidents served concurrently as department heads. Although these vice-*ting* leaders delegated authority to the sub-leaders who actually ran sub-units on a daily basis, staff knew they could always appeal sub-leaders' decisions directly to the upper level. Relationships and relational networks were what ran SZU. In such a way, three or four men at any one time controlled the university. There were, of course, external and budgetary constraints on the leadership, but these were much less severe than at most other universities in China or elsewhere around the globe. Policy resulted from negotiations and discussions which involved only a few participants. Taking all this into account, credit and blame for the quality of Shenzhen University, therefore, must go to this handful of men.

The documentary history of SZU suggests that as the university aged, limited staff input was a major reason for the dearth of fresh ideas and new modes of thinking in policy conceptualization. Wei-Wu's initiatives were merely copies of systems that existed in other universities. Cai Delin's major policy initiatives were resurrections of systems that had been in effect prior to rectification. The new systems that had been created under Luo Zhengqi were never fully assessed. Despite their problems, they reappeared by 1995 in almost unchanged form, for there was no "fresh blood" among policy-makers to provide ideas on how to improve them. The changes in leadership in 1989 and 1992/3 brought in teams of recruits loyal to the new *lingdao*. During the transition periods, SZU's administrative backbone—its mid-level cadres and office workers—devoted much of their energy to building relationships with their new bosses. During that period, as the new leaders received on-the-job training and familiarized themselves with the university, SZU did not move forward in terms of educational policy. Teachers continued to teach poorly. From the beginning, SZU had a young, inexperienced teaching force, supplemented by a large number of "irregular" teachers. There was little mentoring. "Dragon" professors had been recruited from the start, but these scholars were assigned to administration or research. They did not teach much, nor did they mentor the younger staff. Many young, competent teachers, who had been hired in the early years, left SZU. Their

replacements, for the most part, were generally acknowledged by members of the university community to be less competent. Bad teaching and low quality scholarship were the consequences of university leaders' preference for a young, inexperienced low-ranked staff.

A core group of sub-leaders at the *chu* level ran departments and offices, negotiating policies with the school leaders. Their authority was less absolute than their superiors', and staff knew that their decisions could be appealed to the upper level. In most cases, sub-unit leaders maintained strong relationships with the president or Party secretary who appointed them; only staff who had stronger relationships with the *ting* level were successful in appeals to reverse decisions. In many cases, department heads held absolute power over their departments. Some departments ran more successfully than others. In the absence of participation by ordinary faculty members, successes and failures at the department level for the most part can be attributed to the individual leaders. These *chu*-level leaders were not accountable to the teachers they managed. They were accountable only to their superiors, and the absence of financial and educational operating systems meant they were not subjected to independent evaluation and monitoring. Many department heads remained in office for years after they ceased being effective. The removal of the corrupt Foreign Language leaders—although a delayed action—was nevertheless action; it was the exception, not the rule. Although the *ting*-level were aware of mismanagement after they heard complaints, they rarely made changes. The 1992 evaluation attempted to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of departments, but the evaluation relied on self-assessments completed by department heads. The results of the evaluation were never made public. According to one informant who peeked at these results, several departments which were perceived by the university community as problematic received high scores. Releasing these results would have cast doubt on the usefulness of the entire exercise and would have lowered the morale of staff who had spent so many hours on the exercise. In the view of school leaders, perhaps *no* evaluation was better than *methodologically bad* evaluation. (Or perhaps they just did not agree with the results.)

The degree of importance placed on leaders meant that strong leadership was necessary if the university were to develop in a way so that it could gain respect in Chinese higher education. But strong leadership was often not the case at SZU. Administration before 1989 can be characterized as "strong president in charge." The Wei-Wu team that succeeded Luo Zhengqi, however, was beset by conflict; there was a leadership gap during this period. Cai Delin, as both president and CCP secretary, was initially a strong leader.

But, in time, he began to lose the respect of the campus community, in large part due to the corruption that was perceived to characterize his administration. After 1989 the rule of relationships became paramount. Rather than enhancing administration, relationships abetted corruption. SZU did not have regulatory rule—the rule of law—to fall back on. A system of transparent elections for department heads might have produced sub-leaders accountable to rank-and-file teachers, but there is no assurance that the very existence of participation by staff in the running of the university would have produced better results. My Chinese colleagues who have often pointed out that Adolph Hitler was elected by the German people in a strange way seem to understand that democracy entails more than just elections. It is a system that protects the rights of dissenting minorities. Opposition—or even independent thinking that resulted in new ideas—was largely not tolerated at SZU after 1989. This partly accounted for why so many staff left the university. Several teachers who quit SZU in the early 1990s told me that their prime reason for departing was that SZU did not allow them “freedom of thought.” These teachers felt so constrained by the system that their thinking, not just speech, was adversely affected. The unwillingness of SZU *lingdao* (other than Luo Zhengqi) to give ordinary teachers the right to have a say in the running of their university no doubt caused many to disengage or even emigrate abroad. Alienation among university teachers is certainly not confined to SZU. In his discussion of the bitterness and pessimism of Beijing’s intellectuals, Perry Link notes that some academics there devoted “full attention to climbing the bureaucracy, making money, or emigrating to the West.”<sup>7</sup> Link’s informants explained that the *danwei* system makes workers feel like beneficiaries of the leadership, instead of vice-versa. The *lingdao* exercise a “personal authority” system that demands a great number of *ad hoc* decisions. Blurred borderlines of authority, coupled with the fact that punishments for mistakes can be great, means that decision-making is often slow and even routine decisions can be deferred to upper-levels. All this holds true for SZU.

It is somewhat ironic that the frequent changes in leadership did not bring more benefits to SZU. In both management and politics, new leaders enjoy honeymoon periods in which they can implement innovative policies.<sup>8</sup> Wei-Wu, however, met such an unreceptive audience among staff and students that their policies were probably doomed from the start. Even if they had been more personable, more moderate in their approach and more genuine in showing good intentions at improving the university, they would have probably met with no success. Their anti-student and anti-teacher attitudes further alienated a campus community which was already starting to disen-

gage from education. Cai Delin had the perfect opportunity for innovation. As an outsider, his arrival to SZU was welcomed. He spent a full year as vice-president familiarizing himself with school operations. But when he formally took office, he had little innovation to offer. His Ten Measures of Comprehensive Reform attempted to address quality of education issues, but they turned out to be more rhetoric than substance. Cai, himself, was a gifted orator who, even reading from the proverbial phone book, could captivate an audience. Foremost, he was a politician. He knew how to appease the masses. He increased salaries and bonuses. He built subsidized housing for staff. He put out policy brush-fires. But despite his 35 years in higher education, Cai had little understanding of how to translate rhetoric into better education. He lacked vision. His major attempt to improve teaching involved introducing audio-visual technology, hardly a giant step forward for SZU. Cai allowed pedagogy and curriculum to remain with departments, and these areas saw few positive advances except in a few select units. In an interview with me several weeks after he assumed the presidency, Cai explained his priorities. Settling the staff housing issue was his most important job, followed by improving teacher benefits and securing multiple channels of funding. In thirty minutes' of outlining his proposals, he never once mentioned issues of educational quality. His words indicated he was managing a *danwei*, but little in what he said suggested he was running an educational *danwei*. When queried, he mentioned the credit system as an illustration of progressive education, unaware that students took few courses outside their majors. Questioned why SZU did not have an academic vice-president or provost, Cai explained that SZU, as "a special zone university, a window university, and an experimental university" was not bound by the time-honored administrative structure used in inland universities. A *jiaowuzhang* with vice-presidential authority was not needed by such an innovative institution as SZU, according to Cai. At one point, city officials disagreed with this view. Apparently aware of some of SZU's problems in the area of academics, the city in 1993 did in fact force Cai to accept as academic vice-president a professor who had once headed SZU's AAO in the mid-1980s. This man had left SZU to head the Shenzhen Teachers College and when the municipal government removed him from that post, he was returned to SZU. Scheduled to retire in 1994, the new provost from the start was considered a lame duck and thus was not effective. After he retired, the provost post was not filled.

As a microcosm SZU provides a study in Chinese policy-making. For the nation as a whole, policy-making has been identified to conform to several different models.<sup>9</sup> The *policy tendency and rationality model* promotes

rational planning, in which clear goals are set for policy. After policy is executed, data are collected. These are examined so that evaluation can be undertaken. Feedback from the evaluation is then used, if necessary, to redefine the goals and amend policy. The *power model* focuses on position and the power of an individual or group to which individuals belong. “This model suggests that the evaluation of policies is largely a reflection of the perceptions of an individual leader or faction of supporters, their political beliefs, and their various strategies in the pursuit of political interests.”<sup>10</sup> A third model is the *bureaucratic model*, in which conflicts involve institutional interests rather than personal interests. The Luo administration subscribed to the first model, but as the university aged, policy-making probably better fit the third model. Evaluation through the use of indexes, as discussed in the previous chapter, did not serve rational planning. As a strong, secure leader, Luo Zhengqi did not fit the power model, although policy under him was a clear reflection of his perceptions. The post-Tiananmen leaders, characterized by in-fighting, clearly did fit the power model. Cai Delin is harder to place. His speeches indicate that he saw himself as a rational planner. But his administration was characterized by relationships, not systems. Unlike Luo or even Wei, Cai had neither a vision nor an understanding of educational policy. Cai’s policies were hand-me-downs from his predecessors. He was not a hands-on manager like Luo; he left substance and details largely to the professional staff, while he himself dealt with the political and relational aspects of policy-making. Thus, he did not fit the first model. Since personal interests overshadowed institutional interests, Cai cannot be placed into the bureaucratic model, either. His administration fits the power model, although with the patina of rational planning. The 1992 evaluation and 1995 accreditation are cases at point. These two efforts were formal exercises in planning, but substance-wise both was so fraught with methodological shortcomings that they poorly served the interests of rational planners. The 1992 evaluation—an exercise that took thousands of person hours—was never even mentioned in the yearbooks; this suggests just how useless it was. During no SZU administration did rational planning exist. Almost by definition, rational planning requires data. Data at SZU, however, were not collected systematically in ways that served analytical purposes. Data at SZU were political animals.

### ***Form over substance***

When I first arrived at SZU on a sultry September day in 1988, my welcome came in the form of a bilingual sign composed of raised characters and letters, on permanent display in the lobby of the administration building. The

sign instructed the university community to conform to a certain code of behavior, which was commonly known as the Ten Pleases.

Please speak mandarin.

Please wear the university badge.

Please pay attention to manners and dress neatly.

Please be thoughtful of others, act modestly and amiably, show respect for teachers and the elderly, and be considerate of women and children.

Please help to maintain order and do not disturb others while they are studying, working or resting.

Please pay attention to hygiene, and refrain from spitting and littering.

Please do not smoke in public places.

Please take care of public property and be thrifty in conducting your affairs.

Please maintain discipline. Do not be late for class or work. And do not leave ahead of time.

Please begin with yourself in observing the above from now on.

Knowing little about the university (or China) when I arrived, the Ten Pleases struck me as odd. Over time, however, as I started to understand and appreciate SZU culture, I began to notice such instructions everywhere; they seemed to fit into campus culture, if not in fact help define it. When I left SZU in 1994 to complete my dissertation in Hong Kong, I began to notice that Hong Kong University, which lacks many Chinese characteristics, provided its community with few easy-to-remember instructional by-the-number policies or guidelines. I felt like I had lost an old friend.

SZU leaders were fond of numbers (especially the number three). There were the Three Classrooms, the Three Selves, the Three First Rates, the Three Deepes, the Three Fixed [staffing items], Three Fixed [calisthenics items], the Three -izations, and the Three Ordered [things], as well as the library's Four Fullies, Cai Delin's Four Keys, Seven Stick To's, and the Ten Leads. Other numbered collections, borrowed from upper levels, were quite common on campus and have been mentioned in this book: the Two *Qi*, the Three Loves, the Three *Feng* (wind or atmospheres), the Three Good [student qualities], the Three Withouts, the CCP's Four Cardinal Principles, the Four Haves, the Four Modernizations, the Six Evils, and the SEZ's Seven Linkages.

On the whole, documents from SZU were nothing if not well ordered and neatly outlined. Even transcribed speeches had a step-wise logic about them. Reports and articles were mostly well-written, regardless of whether they actually had substance. In fact, form seemed clearly more important than substance at SZU, and often documents—especially political documents—contained many empty words. The documents were like the proverbial meal

in an American Chinese restaurant that, although enjoyable during the eating, leaves one hungry a few hours afterwards. In my classes, students were often miffed over my remarks on their essays: “good delivery, little content.” Given the beauty of well-written Chinese, much reward is paid to style, even if what is said is not very important. Many Chinese journal articles in the social sciences are mere ponderings that often lack data and analysis. They read well, but say little.

Form-over-substance is a major theme that runs through the history of SZU. Image was paramount. Examples dealt with at length elsewhere include the credit system and foreign exchanges.<sup>11</sup> These and other so-called reforms provided positive images, but on close examination neither benefited the quality of overall education at SZU. One of the consequences of form-over-substance was that SZU leaders put more importance on reputation than education itself. To borrow from a Chinese idiom, educational issues at SZU received only “five minutes’ enthusiasm” (*wu fenzhong redu*, literally five minutes’ heat, as in blood rushing hot for five minutes during orgasm then cooling down). The 1995 accreditation, which SZU passed, was a case of form-over-substance. From the beginning, according to one informant, SZU could not possibly fail. One colleague commented: “How could China fail the only university in the country’s premier special economic zone? If SZU failed, the entire educational system would be suspect.” Knowing how difficult it would be to fail the evaluation, SZU’s leaders nevertheless did not let the accreditation process serve as a serious opportunity for exploring some of the educational issues raised in this book. Improving education was not what the accreditation was all about. Passing it was what it was about. The main concern became: was there any aspect of SZU’s performance that was so poor that the evaluators would be forced to fail the university? Thus, the biggest worry involved the random tests that students would be given. For the months leading up to the accreditation, students suspended their normal classes and concentrated on the subjects on which they could possibly be tested. To ensure passage, the university was told in advance exactly which students would be given which tests. These students passed. SZU passed the accreditation.

A discussion of Project 211 provides another instance of educational issues being overshadowed by concerns for reputation. In public announcements, both SZU leaders and city officials talked confidently about entering the 211 Project, a competition in which the SEdC would select 100 institutions to become China’s mega-universities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. SZU leaders convinced municipal authorities that SZU deserved the city’s support to try to get into the program. The university’s chief propagandist wrote an article

in the *Shenzhen Tequ Bao* which, after weighing the strengths and weaknesses of the university's application, concluded:<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, SZU is quite a distance away from 211, but 211 is not unreachable for SZU. As long as SZU does its best and the Shenzhen government fully supports it, it is absolutely possible for SZU to be included...

The author said that SZU's entry into 211 could be based on the fact it was among the advanced universities by Chinese domestic standards. It was also eligible, according to the author, because SZU was a *locally important* institution. In this category, universities did not have to be highly advanced, even by China's standards, "but locally they are of great importance and their teaching, research and ability to teach high ability *rencai* has improved and local governments support them." In other words, SZU deserved to enter 211 because of the status and reputation of the Shenzhen SEZ itself.

Project 211 was about reputation and money. Many higher education institutions in China have dreamed about entering 211, but few of these aspirations were further from reality than SZU's. Project 211 was an item on the university's hidden agenda. The 211 Program provided, successfully it turned out, a rationale for SZU's seeking more funds from the local government. Even the notion of having SZU just *considered* as a 211 candidate improved its reputation, placing it—for discussion purposes at least—in a fraternity of schools that included Beijing, Qinghua, Nanjing, Xiamen, and Zhongshan University. It is not surprising, therefore, that the discussions on SZU's 211 prospects gloss over the issues of educational quality that have been raised in this book. Commentary by SZU leaders and public relations personnel assumed that SZU provided first-rate education. The university's deficiencies, as mentioned briefly in the newspaper article, included: the lack of graduate programs, the absence of courses and labs that have received key designation by the state, lack of adequate material (laboratories, equipment, books), the absence of "domestically renown teachers" and "influential academic achievements." The article mentioned SZU's "irrational academic structure," but this ambiguous term was not explained. One would not expect a detailed analysis in a propaganda piece, the main purpose of which was to convince local leaders to give SZU more funds. Yet, this article was consistent with most university documents in the way it defined SZU's problems. It assumed that SZU produced good research, just that its research was not *recognized* as "influential academic achievements." It assumed SZU had good teachers, although not "renown" dragons. Because SZU lacked sufficient funding, its labs and courses could not be designated as key. Implied was that the labs and courses themselves were well utilized

and productive; the problem was merely one of status. In terms of graduate programs, it assumed that SZU had sufficient teachers and could attract qualified graduate students. According to this way of thinking, SZU lacked graduate programs only because the university had not been given upper level certification. Given certification, it would get good graduate students. The general picture that emerges from SZU documents and newspaper articles was that the university suffered from problems not of its own causing. It was discriminated against; the state refused to award it the right to train masters students. It refused to recognize the quality of its teachers, research output, labs and courses. The possibility that the upper level deemed SZU's quality to be low was never even considered as a possibility. In its own view, SZU was being treated unfairly by the system.

This argument brings up the issue of *élitism* and stratification, a common theme in Chinese higher education.<sup>13</sup> Over its century of existence, Chinese tertiary education has emphasized *élitism*, has continually rewarded the best, and has provided only limited funding for the others. The term *key* is omnipresent: key university, key courses, key labs, key scholars. A key university reinforces its reputation by procuring state-funded key research projects. The student body is judged largely by how well its students score on the college entrance examination. In terms of the percent of recruits who score above the threshold for provincial key universities, SZU peaked in 1989 and fell thereafter. Its research achievements pale when compared to those of 211 universities. Universities in China are largely specialized. It is unlikely that an institution like SZU can elevate its status as a comprehensive university. Given that “the haves” will receive increased funding through 211 while the “have-nots” will continue to be deprived, SZU has little opportunity to compete with the giants. In shaping the university, Luo Zhengqi did not attempt to compete with China's dragon universities. Instead, he helped build an institution that had unique features in terms of student management, notably the Three Classrooms and the Three Selves. Wei-Wu successfully destroyed these unique features. Rather than recapturing some of SZU's lost uniqueness, Cai Delin promoted SZU as an institution that should rank among China's *élite*. From the early 1990s, SZU attempted to play in the big leagues. It sought “dragons” with national recruitment advertisements. It lobbied for inclusion in Project 211. The public relations machine produced hundreds of news stories and features about SZU in media around the nation. Cai, like his predecessors, was not concerned with issues of educational quality. Reputation was his prime concern.

In China, reputation means face, something that cannot be assessed in a quantitative manner. Interviews with members of the SZU community, how-

ever, suggested that Luo Zhengqi never lost face, even after he was fired. (In fact some say his firing gained him more face). Wei and Wu never had face. They were feared but few on campus outside their *guanxiwang* respected them. Cai Delin lost much of the face he had accumulated through networking after the publishing of the *China Spring* exposé. Sub-leaders were all the time in battles that resulted in face gain or loss. For example, the foreign language leaders who were indicted for corruption lost bountiful face. To keep face loss to a minimum, however, both were allowed to be off campus when *Document 121* was publicized.

SZU's leaders were greatly concerned with reputation. Visits by upper level leaders were always deemed important, despite the fact that they disrupted the university's normal operations and caused inordinate delays in policy-making. Yearbooks for various years each commenced with a photo display that began with pictures of high level leaders who visited campus that year. The highest ranking leader was always shown first, followed with usually smaller pictures of lower ranking leaders. The inscriptions made by visiting dignitaries were included in various volumes, including the pictorials issued to commemorate the third and tenth anniversaries. The supreme inscription was simply the university's name, which was penned on 12 May 1992 by Jiang Zemin, then General Secretary of the CCP Central Committee. The names of many universities have been inscribed by national *lingdao*.<sup>14</sup> In SZU's case Jiang's calligraphy was adopted everywhere, including on letterhead and publications; new school badges with Jiang's penmanship were issued to all students and teachers. At a time when SZU's reputation in the community was falling—it would bottom out in 1994—Jiang's inscription was hoped by SZU leaders to give the university much needed face. In fact, Jiang's SZU inscription was of little consequence as far as reputation mattered. Several murders, bad press, and perceived widespread corruption outweighed any good done by Mr. Jiang's four handwritten characters. One mid-level cadre joked that in 1992 the SZU leadership had put more time and effort into Jiang's penning the university's name and subsequent related events (sign building, sign dedication, stationery change, school badge issuance, etc.) than the total hours they had spent on curriculum matters. Statistics, if they were available, might well show the cadre's joke to be not far off the mark.

From the university's beginning, public relations was a major leader initiative. Jordan Pollack in his dissertation on SZU wrote:<sup>15</sup>

Shenzhen University in its early years was an institution given to promoting itself through advertisement media perceived by school leaders as contemporary and Western, qualities thought to be compelling. The administrators

seemed to favor especially the use of artful videotapes and glossy, colorful yearbooks. There were several reasons for this. To ensure its long-term viability as a sanctioned institution, the school above all needed an effective means of demonstrating to the broadest audience that it was functioning in political lockstep with the central government. It needed to supply convincing evidence that its operations conformed in principle, if not in actual practice, with State and Communist Party directives...

A videotape made by the Audio-visual Center in 1986 to commemorate the university's anniversary was entitled "Song of SZU." Like much of the SZU's promotional material at the time, the video presented Shenzhen's pioneering role in China's economic reforms and SZU's part in that role as a provider of *rencai*. The video portrayed the monumental undertaking of building a new university on a "windy wasteland covered with rocks and stones" and the dedication and determination of the university community to make SZU happen. Students were seen arriving by train, "proud" and "amazed" to find Party Secretary Luo Zhengqi on the station platform awaiting them. The university was depicted as an "unusual" institution, a "new, socialist-type university with Chinese characteristics," where "old rules and new regulations are no longer appropriate." The Three Selves were referred to as the foundation upon which student culture was built. The innovative and experimental nature of the university was highlighted, its defining features being diversification and flexibility. The video even commented on the scrapping of a national tradition—the mid-day rest period—known as *xiuxi*, replaced by working lunches. Eminent politicians who visited the campus were shown, consistent in transmitting the message that China "can only develop through reform and creativity." As described by Pollack, the "videotape finally closes with an inspirational summation, uttered in the deep, cadenced, sonorous voice of the male narrator to whom we have listened throughout:

'Our work has only just begun. We have merely sung the first verse in the song of Shenzhen University. Pioneers of SZU, our task is weighty and we still have far to go. Down the road ahead of us, however difficult our passage may be, lies a bright future. Surely we will accomplish our goal of making Shenzhen University a scientific oasis.'"<sup>16</sup>

After Tiananmen SZU established a CCP Propaganda Office as part of rectification, and the new leadership continued producing promotional materials. Authors, however, lacked the type of enthusiasm manifested in the video described above. Rank-and-file staff were pessimistic about SZU's future. The SZU Alumni Association severed ties with the university. Eventually it

ceased to exist altogether, and no leader at the university seemed to care. The post-4 June leaders were seen by members of the campus community as destroyers, not builders. Their agenda of rectification was not appreciated, and they themselves were seen as politically self-serving, lacking the commitment to the university that had been shared by the school's early pioneers. The glossy brochure published in September 1990 attempted to depict business as usual, with no mention of rectification. The inside front-cover contained not the inscriptions of dignitaries or the pictures of visiting upper level leaders but rather photos and calligraphy by SZU's own rectifiers. Wei Youhai and Wu Zewei, in separate photos, sat in business suits at their desks. No previous publication had depicted the university's own leaders in such a prominent position, and the publication's release prompted jokes and rude remarks around campus. Whereas Luo's image had been one of an energetic leader with his arm sleeves rolled up, Wei-Wu were seen as desk-bound paper-pushers, churning out ream upon ream of instructional documents to tell students and teachers how to live and behave, while they applied different standards of behavior to themselves.

From mid-1989 through 1990 the university remained in an information black-out. The semi-weekly *News Brief* and quarterly *Shenda Tongxun* were each suspended for a period. Wei-Wu skipped the yearbook for 1989 and did not release the next annual, the composite *1989-1990 Yearbook*, until early 1991. (In fact, annual yearbooks were not issued during the 1992/93 transition either.) Years that were split by administrations were integrated into a single volume, with the first administration largely ignored. In such a way, yearbooks were intended to serve more as dynastic histories; data presentation was secondary. Upon rectification, several publications which had once served as forums for open discussion quickly became places only for expression of the administration's viewpoints. After his formal appointment, however, President Cai Delin permitted the editors to return their publications to what they had been under Luo. The university's glossy brochures for 1993 and 1994, however, continued to present pictures of the *lingdao* and their self-congratulatory calligraphic messages.

The 1989-1990 information black-out abetted rumor and gossip, features that had not characterized SZU under Luo. An old joke in China goes: if you want the news, don't read the newspaper—ask granny instead. The state-controlled press in China has over the last half century served as a vehicle for propaganda, giving out a bounty of interpretation with very limited factual support, dispensing the latter to the public on a need-to-know basis. In the absence of factual data provided through authorized channels, people have resorted to informal channels, as personified by the grandmother who

sits in the street and seems to know everything about everybody. SZU suffered from a situation in the early 1990s when members of the community were not sure about the direction of the leadership. Rumors provided the major way of getting information. By definition, a rumor is a “specific (or topical) proposition for belief, passed along from person to person, usually by word of mouth, without secure standards of evidence being present.”<sup>17</sup> In general, rumors require two basic conditions: the theme of the story must have some importance to the speaker and listener; second, the true facts must be shrouded in some kind of ambiguity.<sup>18</sup> From 1989 ambiguity became a major characteristic of SZU policy. Conflicts between Wei and Wu led to indecision on the appointment of sub-leaders as well as confusion over policy direction. Leadership transition were ripe times for rumor: who would be new *lingdao*, would this or that department head retain his/her title, which of the predecessors’ policies would be revoked, and was there enough time to rush decision through under an old policy? No issue saw rumors fly so furiously as did campus crime. Rumors on suicides, murders, and maiming (the result of student hazing) took on a wild-fire intensity and speed. For skeptics, the reliability of rumors was finally substantiated in spring 1993. The rumor mill had circulated news on two campus murders. When these were finally reported in the press, about a dozen murders, rapes and suicides that had allegedly occurred in the early 1990s became accepted folklore; accounts of these tales never appeared in newspapers, but there was not much doubt about their authenticity. One tale, in fact, was relayed to me by a student who reported seeing the dead body of a rape victim. Even a more forthright and transparent administration might not have been able to squash SZU’s rumor mill—it seemed to acquire a life of its own by 1991—because the campus provided such an abundance of material on which rumors could be based. Corruption was so rampant that virtually no tale was too tall to be believed. The *lingdao* were reputed to have stashed away millions of yuan. The university’s own financial reporting fails to detail expenditures for large amounts of school income. Based on SZU’s published financial records, the theft of ¥10-20 million in the period from mid-1989 to mid-1996 is certainly possible.

The anonymous letter is a phenomenon closely related to rumor. During the Cai Delin administration, SZU was beset by a constant flow of unsigned statements. One departmental secretary in an engineering department reported to me about receiving two anonymous letters addressed to the department’s Party secretary. The letters, rather vicious in content, concerned issues involving persons in the Foreign Language Department. These letters did not directly concern the engineering department; they were *ad hominem*

attacks and counter-attacks on FLD individuals, and they discussed that department's continuing internal political and managerial strife. Letters like these were common at SZU in the mid-1990s, with perhaps as many as a dozen being circulated around the campus at any given time. Most were contained within individual departments, but the authors of the FLD letters circulated them rather indiscriminately, once even posting them up in a public lavatory.

Why were anonymous letters such a common vehicle of communication? By the mid-1990s SZU had become an institution in which dissent and minority views were not tolerated. Free discussions in which staff could openly question the wisdom of policies—educational policies not just political policies—did not occur. Staff who expressed minority views found themselves ostracized from the majority. The idea of the university as a place for free and open discussion of intellectual ideas was severely circumscribed at SZU. Consequently, staff expressed their views usually only in private, only among their closest friends. Some went public, but anonymously. The article in *China Spring* that heralded Cai's downfall was the most extreme manifestation of anonymity. This article reads very much like the last resort of a concerned and frustrated member of the SZU community who was grieving over the university's decline (the pen name implies sadness). The article mirrors an attitude commonly found among SZU staff: that the post-Tiananmen leaders were almost wholly responsible for the university's state of affairs. As this book suggests, however, SZU's decline was caused by many factors, only one of which was managerial incompetence or corruption. Even under the best of leaders, certain negative influences would still have affected SZU. Educational disengagement was caused by factors that lay largely outside the control of SZU's leaders. Teachers felt the need to supplement their relatively meager salaries (before 1994 pay rises). Students disengaged from education primarily because they found the pedagogy uninspiring and the curriculum irrelevant. These stubborn persistences relate to the Shenzhen environment and to phenomena in Chinese education. Such factors were not under the leaders' control. SZU seems to have been more negatively influenced by these environmental factors than other Chinese universities, but research in this regard is wanting.

### ***Multiple realities***

SZU placed much importance on reputation. There was a general absence of transparency; rumors served as the main conduits for the dissemination of information. These elements conflated to encourage *lingdao* to present facts

in ways that best served their purposes. They were often stingy with the truth. Leaders after 1989 seldom presented an honest picture of the university's problems. Most ignored even rather obvious deficiencies, each confident in the knowledge that he could retire with a sizable nest-egg before matters got too far out of control.

Sometimes representations of reality were blatantly false. The year-books are full of misrepresentations (and perhaps deliberate fabrications) of data. One striking example involves SZU's 1995 accreditation. Vice-president Zhang Bigong, who rose to prominence in rectification as head of the Propaganda Office, was in charge of accreditation preparation. Zhang, whose field of scholarship had been classical Chinese, excelled at propaganda, not data analysis. As vice-president, he was assigned a job for which he was not well suited (Fortunately for Zhang, the SEdC inspection team chose not to examine SZU's data presentation with care). One minor example serves to illustrate. In making a case for the selectivity of graduate study, Zhang argued that SZU should strive to enter the élite of graduate schools. Using U.S. data for comparative purposes, Zhang said that only 156 American universities have the right to award Ph.D.s.<sup>19</sup> The true figure was 473.<sup>20</sup> Presentation of inaccurate data, which occurred too often to be attributed to mere carelessness, was especially alarming here, as it came from the very man who was in charge of collecting all the data for the 1995 accreditation exercise. Many of these data appear to be inaccurate. It is not surprising, therefore, that some campus observers, aware of sanctioned prevarications, viewed the accreditation as "high farce" with "much movement, but no real action."

From its start, SZU existed in a dimension of multiple realities. If the state plan called for admitting X number of new students, SZU officials knew they could get away with enrolling another 20%. (They were not concerned that increasing numbers meant falling scores). Over-admission is a common practice in China; there is little accountability and no penalties. But SZU department heads, with a blind eye from AAO, then admitted even more students through various channels, including a back door that could be opened by *guanxi* or lucre. Admissions at SZU, therefore, had three realities: the state plan, the permitted enrollment, and the subterfuge. Budgeting experienced a similar situation. SZU's Education Fund budget represented formality. Its income came from the municipal purse. Another budget included funds from tuition payments, including those from lower-scoring self-paying students. Both of these budgets were subject to annual audits by the Shenzhen government. A third budget—the school fund—took in revenue from SZU-affiliated enterprises as well as remittances from academic de-

partments which ran side-businesses and training classes. This third budget was not subject to municipal audit, and figures were not reported to upper levels. When university leaders complained to Shenzhen officials about SZU's being underfinanced, they conveniently failed to disclose the amount of income from the third budget. Of course, only if all budgets are accounted for can an accurate picture of school finances emerge. The budgets individually present different realities.

In budgeting, department heads took their lead from the upper level for guidance on how to deceive and misreport. Departments were allocated funds from the university, and these made up the department's budget. Accounts were subject to audit by the Finance Office. Each department was expected to keep a set of books that reflected income that came from side-businesses. Based on these figures, departments remitted funds to the university. Departments generally under-reported their income, and they routinely kept one set of books for the university and another for their own faculty members. The under-reported income went for staff bonuses. The leaders of the Foreign Language Department went a step further. They under-reported income to their own faculty and kept a third set of books, which were not subject to departmental accounting. As such, the leaders committed the ultimate sin: stealing from their own teachers. It is unknown to what extent this type of embezzlement occurred in other departments, but such graft probably existed to a certain degree, given the autonomy of the *lingdao* over handling finances and their reluctance to share financial information with others or to report it in a transparent manner.

Multiple realities existed elsewhere. The 1995 accreditation process is highly suspect because the SEdC inspection team chose to ignore many of the university's problems. The self-evaluation report was not scrutinized with vigor, lest a severe examination would raise too many questions. Under no condition was SZU to fail accreditation. Staff of the SEdC took various steps to ensure SZU passed, including informing SZU staff which students would be taking which tests. The SEdC chose not to investigate the highly touted "club system" of the Physical Education department, in which students receive PE credit for self-reported exercise with any of SZU's sports clubs. If the SEdC had looked more closely, it would have learned that very few upperclassmen and women participated in sports, their reporting to the contrary. They merely obtained chops on the appropriate forms (The same thing happened in students' social investigation). Several students interviewed did not even know which PE clubs they were assigned to, as this was arranged by their class monitor. All in all, by mid-1996, when Cai Delin was forced to retire, the reality gap between the SZU which its leaders

praised and the real institution that existed had widened to such an extent that reality had become observer-dependent. The SZU seen by the leadership was clearly not the university observed by most members of the campus community. The latter, not the former, is the one presented in the present volume.

This book has argued that leadership was a crucial element in both SZU's development and its decline. Would the problems that beset the university after Luo Zhengqi's removal in 1989 have occurred if Luo had remained in office? That question, of course, can never be answered for certain. SZU's deterioration began under Luo. Financial pressures on teachers were beginning to cause their disengagement from education; a lower quality of entering students as measured by test scores was appearing because secondary students were beginning to choose key schools over SZU. (The abolition of job assignments meant that Shenzhen residents who studied outside Guangdong would be allowed to return to work and live in the SEZ). Moreover, an increase in *guanxi* and corruption started appearing with Luo at the helm. Cellularism was already taking root while he was in charge. Would Luo have noticed these problems? Unlike the situation facing his successors, Luo's attention would not have likely been diverted to political matters, given that the CCP and the administration were unified and running smoothly under him. Not distracted by politics, it is, therefore, quite possible that Luo could have devoted his considerable talent and energy to addressing SZU's problems which this book has identified. Whether Luo would have solved these problems is quite another matter. But at least, I am fairly certain, he would have tried.

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1. Source: *1995 China Educational Statistics Yearbook*, p. 16.
  2. *Ibid.*
  3. Comparative statistics are also found in Agelasto, *Educational Disengagement*, 1998.
  4. Jurisdiction is as follows, for 1,054 institutions: SEdC, 35 institutions; 61 central ministries, 323; provinces, 696. Data from Department of Planning, SEdC, 1995, cited in Min, "Major strategic issues," 1997, p. 4.
  5. See e.g., Shao, "Reform on Chinese higher education management system," 1997. The author, who works as researcher with the Education, Science, Culture and Public Health Committee of the NPC, suggests changing the current 3:7 state/local jurisdiction ratio to 1:9 or 2:8.
  6. These terms are homonyms; interchanging them provides a humorous pun.
  7. Link, *Evening Chats in Beijing*, 1992, pp. 62-3.
  8. For politics, see Bunce, *Do New Leaders Make a Difference*, 1981.
  9. Min, *Elite Politics in China*, 1991, pp. 11-24.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
11. See Agelasto, *Educational Disengagement*, 1998.
12. Yang, "How far is SZU away from the 211 Project?," 1995.
13. See Agelasto and Adamson, *Higher Education in Post-Mao China*, 1998.
14. E.g., Hefei University of Technology, Hohai University, Central China Normal University by Deng Xiaoping; China Agricultural University and East China Shipbuilding Institute by Jiang Zemin.
15. Pollack, *Civilizing Chinese*, 1997, p. 140. The following paragraphs are based on information from Pollack's dissertation.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
17. Allport & Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor*, 1947, p. ix.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
19. Zhang Bigong, "Do a good job to receive the accreditation and guarantee passing, strive for good performance, 22 March," *1995 Yearbook*, p. 22.
20. U.S. Department of Education, *1992-1993 Digest of Education Statistics*, 1995, p. 276.