

DG19970052E1

sh Search

China Will Charge Tuition at All of Its Universities

C.H.E. 5/16

BY JAMES HERTLING

HONG KONG
CHINA has leveled what was once a pillar of its crumbling cradle-to-grave welfare system—free university education.

Starting in September, students at all of China's 1,032 colleges and universities will pay an annual tuition fee, averaging about \$180.

Authorities approved a plan to charge students for some of the cost of their postsecondary education three years ago, although at that time only a small number of institutions were allowed to impose the fees. Since then, the number has steadily increased. Last year 664 institutions, more than half of the total, charged tuition.

SEEKING ACCOUNTABILITY

The goal of policy makers is to make institutions and their students more accountable as China tries to develop a market-driven economy. Universities are expected to compete for students by offering the most popular courses, which these days are mainly those in business and foreign languages. Students say that if they are being asked to foot the bill, they are more likely to try to make the most of their education.

"Of course the tuition reform is good. It gives students more freedom," said one Nanjing University senior. "They can choose their own job after graduation. This can arouse students' enthusiasm for study. And part of the tuition will be used to improve the quality of teaching."

In return for paying tuition, stu-

dents will be able to select their jobs. Previously, they received a free education, but the government assigned them to jobs for several years after graduation. Sometimes, students assigned to work in the hinterlands were stuck there for their entire lives, because of the rigid system that ties workers to their so-called work units.

The move to charge tuition is part of a larger overhaul of the country's economic, educational, and social policies.

China is trying to shrink the number and size of its state-run companies, many of which lose money, thus reducing its overall need for new graduates. At the same time, it has reduced the subsidies given to universities, forcing them to scramble to raise much of their own operating funds, often through various business ventures. Campus officials say the new tuition payments cover only about one-eighth of the cost of educating students.

Some students and critics note that adding to the cost of a college education will widen further the already yawning gap between rich and poor in a country that still calls itself Communist.

"There will be more poor students shut out of the gate of the university. They cannot afford such a high tuition," said one Nanjing junior. "This is unfair."

According to a report in *China Daily*, an official newspaper, the government plans to help students from poor families by offering them loans and subsidies. It also plans to develop work-study programs. ■

Handwritten marks at the bottom right of the page.