

## **Assessing the Impact of College Enrollment Policy in China**

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### **Abstract**

In the late 1990s, China implemented one of the most important educational policies in recent years - college enrollment expansion. Since then, the overall college enrollment has been dramatically increased, from 1,080,000 in 1998 to 4,200,000 in 2004. The extent to which the incremental quota for college enrollment has been equally allocated across gender, ethnic and socioeconomic status and how much the overall inequality in access to college education has changed since the implementation of this policy remain open questions. College education provides valuable human capital that has long-lasting consequences for the life chances of individuals and the international competitiveness of the country. It is important to understand the impact of the new policy to the overall educational attainment of the population as a whole, as well as its impact on different subgroups as the policy may either equalize or intensify inequality among subgroups in China. We first use the county-level census data collected in 1990 and 2000 to examine the evolution of the inequality in access to college education over time, focusing on observing the potential effects of the college enrollment expansion policies on the inequality of access to college education across various subgroups. We investigate differences by gender, region, urbanicity, and ethnic origins. In the next stage of our research, we will use the 1% sample census data in 1990, 2000, and 2005 to examine the changes at individual level for different birth cohorts.

Our strategy is to first break the sample by birth cohorts, and compare the within-birth-cohort indices of the inequalities in college education across the interested subgroups (gender, ethnicity, etc.) among birth cohorts. This depicts the evolution of the inequality in access to some college education over time. Furthermore, by comparing each subgroup's share of the within-birth-cohort inequality index between cohorts who were about college age right before and after sharp changes in the college enrollment quota, we can estimate the effects of college enrollment expansion policy on this inequality across subgroups. The differential effects of such policies on different subgroups can also be estimated by the coefficients of the cohort-subgroup interactions in the regression of the individual college enrollment indicator on cohort dummies, subgroup dummies, the interactions of cohort and subgroups, and other available control variables in the data set. The policy effects are identified by the exogeneity of the policy changes, which cannot be manipulated by students and parents. We can also test for structural changes in the inequality in access to college education by comparing among birth cohorts, and see if the policy years represent "break points".

This project is among the first studies to use the latest China census data detailed at individual level to examine the impact of important changes in education policies on educational inequality at college level. Results from this project will add significant evidence to studies in the field usually with small-scale convenient sample or census data aggregated at the province/region level.