

 THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

Admissions Quotas in India and China: An Overview for Strategic Enrollment Management

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Strategy is planning about survival in a tough and competitive environment, and strategic enrollment management (SEM) is about higher education institutions exerting influence on student enrollment to generate tuition revenue. Although the global environment of the 21st century provides opportunities for improving enrollment from various parts of the world, it also presents challenges and tough competition. Therefore, overviews and analyses of enrollment strategies and admissions practices pursued by higher education in various parts of the world cannot only be helpful for SEM practitioners to improve their enrollment strategies, but they can also provide background on international students and academia and support SEM practitioners in gaining competitive advantage. Admissions quotas are one example of admissions practices implemented in many countries, the most notable among them being India and China, which have two of the largest higher education systems in the world. India uses admissions quotas as part of affirmative action policies, whereas China uses quotas to control and manage enrollment. An overview of these admissions quota systems being used for different strategic purposes can provide valuable insight to SEM leaders.

Strategic enrollment management (SEM) is defined in many ways. Bontrager (Hossler and Bontrager 2014, 5) described it as a coordinated set of concepts and processes for the fulfillment of institutional mission and

students' educational ambitions. Kalsbeek (Hossler and Bontrager 2014, 5), a leading scholar in the field, described it as a comprehensive approach to integrating all the university's programs, practices, policies, and

planning related to achieving optimal recruitment, retention, and graduation of students. Altogether, enrollment management can be described as an organizational concept and a systematic set of activities designed to enable educational institutions to exert more influence over their student enrollment and tuition revenue derived from that enrollment. The components and definitions of SEM share a common focus on the systematic integration of the functions of admissions, the relationship between tuition fees (pricing) and financial aid, and student retention. SEM functions are supported by research and inform institutional policies and practices (Hossler and Bontrager 2014, 5).

The word “strategic” in SEM specifies the strategy-oriented nature of SEM processes, and the word strategy retains roots in the Greek word *strategia*, which referred to the office of a military general. In this context, the strategy was something that took place around the highest management echelons, where top commanders developed strategic plans that dealt with the ability to move entire armies for victorious outcomes and enduring effects, as well as support men under command to accommodate unruly battlefield conditions. Similarly, ancient Chinese Taoist works also argued that leaders plan, consider problems, and prevent them (Andersen 2013, p2). Thus, activities related to strategy evolved from ancient military traditions and have been adopted in modern organizations and management structures where the strategy has assumed a more conventional meaning in plans related to organizational survival and competitive advantage in a dynamic environment (Andersen 2013, 2–8). This perspective implies that SEM performs the administrative function of devising sustainable enrollment strategies for higher education institutions operating in the dynamic and competitive global environment of the 21st century. The aim of these strategies is not only to meet the required number of admissions but also to retain those admissions for improved graduation rates and increased tuition revenues. Such strategies would need to accommodate the changing higher education needs of students and link those needs with institutional goals and strategies.

In this regard, an overview of admissions practices in higher education systems of different countries can be valuable for SEM leaders, as it provides insights not only into enrollment tactics but also into the background and prospects of international students. One such admissions practice is that of admissions quotas. Quotas can be described as a number set to place limitations and/or set expectations on the amount of something. Admissions quotas are used in higher education systems of many countries; two prime examples are India and China. These two Asian countries are the world’s most populous; together their total population accounts for about one third of the global human population, estimated at close to eight billion. The size of their higher education systems, as well as the number of international students from these two countries, correspond to their exceptionally large populations. In India, admissions quotas in higher education are part of broad and constitutionally-mandated affirmative action policies, collectively termed “reservations,” aimed at economic and social uplifting of historically discriminated and depressed populations of backward castes, tribes, and classes (Chauhan 2008, 3). In contrast, the Chinese higher education system and government authorities use admissions quotas as part of an enrollment plan, called *Zhaosheng Jihua* in Chinese, to control and manage enrollment in higher education institutions (Yu, *et al.* 2012, 28). The two approaches highlight the use of admissions quotas as a tactic to achieve varying strategic goals. This literature review will explore admissions quotas in Indian and Chinese higher education systems to assess their effectiveness in achieving strategic goals and uncover any potential use of admissions quotas in SEM.

Why Are Quotas Controversial?

Admissions quotas can be described as predeterminations of a specified number of admissions from a particular cohort or group of students coming from a certain background. In Europe and North America, there are at least two widely known strategic uses of admissions quotas:

- **Numerus Clausus:** Numerus clausus is a Latin term, which literally means restricted or closed number.

This term is used to describe quotas that are applied to restrict the number of educational places to a particular racial or ethnic group (Oxford English Dictionary 2022b). During the first half of 20th century, these quotas were used to limit admission of students from Jewish background, and the practice came to be known as Jewish Quota (Steinberg 1971).

■ **Affirmative Action:** Also known as positive discrimination, this refers to active measures taken by an employer, college, etc., to provide opportunities for members of minority groups, women, or other people regarded as having suffered from discrimination in the past (Oxford English Dictionary 2022a). In this scenario, admissions quotas are applied to improve or increase admission of cohorts that are deemed underrepresented in higher education. In the latter half of 20th century, the use of numerous quotas declined, and affirmative action quotas gained widespread attention.

Apart from these two uses, in Asia, admissions quotas are used to control and manage enrollment. This practice is common in China, which has the world's largest higher education system in terms of enrollment and number of HEIs (Yu, *et al.* 2012, 28). Since 1998, higher education in China has experienced massive growth, and the authorities use admissions quotas, which are part of an enrollment plan, (presumably) for uniform growth of enrollment and higher education across the country.

Affirmative action is a form of (social) justice that seeks to establish equality by using compensatory benefit to rectify past discrimination. There are normally two types of affirmative action programs, hard and soft. Hard programs explicitly prescribe quotas and timetables, while soft programs provide for outreach and training programs. The practice of giving preference to the disadvantaged in categories such as veterans, senior citizens, and the disabled has been widespread in all societies for many years without resistance and with near universal consent. However, the new order of affirmative action involves preference for entire minorities, races, ethnicities, classes, and genders, who are deemed

marginalized (due to past discrimination), implying that much larger sections of society require accommodation through costlier programs, and that has a radical impact on social structure (Gomez and Premdas 2012, 6). This suggests that affirmative action has an impact on social structures and, therefore, has a good potential for generating controversies and polarization. While proponents argue that it is social justice and beneficial for education, opponents call it reverse discrimination, reinforcing racial stereotypes, and promoting incompetence (Rubinstein 1985, 6–7). Affirmative action is typically applied to jobs and education, and in education hard affirmative action utilizes admissions quotas.

Regardless of the potential for affirmative action to generate controversies and polarization, it is pursued because the contemporary era is a period of diversity, equality, and human rights and principles related to these ideals that prevail in most countries worldwide. Thus, obtaining diversity has become a priority for enrollment managers. Among the different approaches to affirmative action, soft approaches may tend to be less controversial as compared to hard ones, which include quotas. Regardless, admissions quotas are used wherever needed, and one of the reasons behind that might lie in their effectiveness in attaining enrollment targets from the underserved populations. For example, Table 1 (on page 48) shows (racial) profiles of applicants by vestibular score percentile (overall score after three admissions cycles) in Brazil.

The likelihood of admission was 1 percent for applicants with test scores in less than ten percentiles, while the likelihood of admission was 42 percent for applicants with test scores in greater than 90 percentiles (Francis and Tanuri Pianto 2011, 5). The study of Francis and Tanuri-Pianto (2011, 10) conducted in Brazil concludes that race, socio-economic status, and gender pose substantial barriers to college attendance and achievement, and race-based quotas help promote equity to some extent.

Today admissions quotas are used as part of affirmative action programs in several countries; the more prominent examples include India, Brazil, and South Africa. In almost all the countries where they are used,

TABLE 1 ► Vestibular Score Percentile in Brazil, by Selected Demographics

	Share in Vestibular Score Percentile ¹ (%)					
	< 10	10–30	30–50	50–70	70–90	90+
Admission Rate (%)	0.7	1.9	6.2	14.9	28.5	42.0
Race/Skin Tone						
Branco (White)	34.4	34.5	35.0	39.7	41.2	43.6
Pardo (Brown, Mixed Race)	40.6	41.5	41.8	38.3	38.6	38.2
Preto (Black)	14.0	12.3	10.5	8.5	6.8	4.3
Indigenous	4.1	3.5	3.5	2.8	3.1	3.2
No Answer	0.9	0.9	0.7	0.7	0.4	0.7
Black Racial Identity	41.5	39.9	37.4	33.2	29.9	26.5
Female	53.3	51.5	50.8	47.0	43.7	38.3
Family Income (R\$)						
< 500	12.4	10.6	6.8	4.6	3.1	1.9
500–1,500	30.5	26.8	23.4	20.5	14.9	11.3
1,500–2,500	16.2	20.3	19.1	18.2	16.1	12.8
2,500–5,000	21.9	20.7	25.0	24.9	26.9	30.2
> 5,000	10.5	12.1	15.9	19.9	27.4	30.8
Do Not Know	8.5	9.5	9.9	11.9	11.6	13.1
Mother's Education						
Primary School Incomplete	20.5	17.6	13.9	11.0	5.4	3.8
Primary School Complete	10.5	9.1	7.7	6.6	4.7	3.3
Secondary School Complete	36.5	36.1	36.1	33.7	32.5	27.4
College	31.2	36.1	41.3	47.3	56.3	64.2
Do Not Know	1.3	1.1	1.0	1.4	1.1	1.2
Public Secondary School	51.8	46.4	39.3	34.8	23.4	18.8

¹ Vestibular score percentiles are defined using the admissions scores of all applicants (36,876) during the three admissions cycles following the implementation of quotas. With the exception of admission rate and gender, estimates are based on less than maximal sample sizes (more than 17,000) due to missing socioeconomic data.

Source: Francis and Tanuri-Pianto 2011, 6

admissions quotas generate controversies and result in polarization. For example, in Brazil, where ten years ago admissions quotas were expanded to all federal universities, the National Congress is now deliberating over whether and how to continue with the policy amidst a polarized political climate following recent presidential elections on October 30th (O'Sullivan 2022). Origins of the term “affirmative action” lie in the United States National Labor Relations (also known as Wagner) Act of 1935. This act was a federal law that gave workers the right to form and join unions, but later through Executive Order 10925, U.S. President John F. Kennedy linked the term with a policy meant to advance racial

equality that established the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. Afterwards, U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson cemented the connection with his own, more expansive, executive order. With an ongoing civil rights movement in those days, the term and related concepts took hold in education as well. Less than a month after the death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (in April 1968), Harvard's dean of admissions announced a commitment to enrolling a substantially higher number of black students than in the past (Hartocollis 2022). Thus, U.S. universities began to use admissions quotas favoring the underserved until 1977 when the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Bakke v. Regents*

of the University of California, declared admissions quotas based on race as unconstitutional while affirmative action was allowed (Rubinstein 1985, 9). This meant that U.S. universities could use soft affirmative action in their enrollment strategies but not hard approaches like admissions quotas. While the common objective of all affirmative action in the United States is integration, the controversy arises over what means should be used to accomplish the end (Rubinstein 1985, 27)

This article explores the practice of admissions quotas in India and China where quotas are used for affirmative action and management of enrollment, respectively. A study of these two scenarios in one place can help enrollment managers discover innovative ways for better management of admissions quotas in the pursuit of attaining diversity and avoiding controversy.

Admission to Higher Education in India

With nearly 22 million enrollees, the Indian higher education system enrolls the second highest number of students in the world (after China). Since the start of the 21st century, the growth in enrollment has remained at 7.7 percent, and policymakers expect India's higher education to continue to experience rapid growth. The number of higher education institutions has grown even more rapidly than enrollment, from six thousand during 1990–91 to forty-six thousand in 20 years. This growth is attributed to a shift toward private investment in higher education, with private institutions now representing 64 percent of all institutions and accounting for about 60 percent of enrollment (Daugherty, *et al.* 2013, 1). Universities are free to adapt their admissions policies and procedures, which could include past academic performance or academic tests; however, there are prescribed national- or state-level tests for professional courses such as engineering, management, medicine, dental, architecture, and pharmacy (among others), and often universities are required to admit students using these (Qamar, p51). The structure of higher education in India is based on the British model with relevant ministries, regulatory bodies, and public and private institutions of higher education. Eligibility for

admission in undergraduate programs requires twelve years of schooling in relevant subjects.

Country Profile

India is South Asia's largest country and currently the world's second most populous country, with more than 1.3 billion people in 2022. Its government is a constitutional republic (democracy) representing a highly diverse population composed of thousands of ethnic groups and hundreds of languages. Other countries considered part of South Asia include Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, and sometimes Afghanistan (due to factors such as the social and political influence of South Asian countries). Before August 1947, modern-day India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh were part of the British Empire ruled directly by the crown, called British Raj. The region is home to very ancient civilizations, the more famous among them being the Indus Valley Civilization, which flourished in areas of modern-day Pakistan somewhere from 3000 BCE to 1500 BCE.

History of Education

India has an exceptionally long history of education going back more than three thousand years, but the current education system prevailing in the country has roots in its colonial past. The current education structure of India has emerged from the complex intertwining of different educational traditions and systems that evolved at distinct phases of its long history. Multiple educational systems such as the Vedic and *Brahmanical* Sanskrit oral education tradition, the Buddhist and Jain tradition of education in *Samghas*, the *Madrassah* and *Maktab* education of Islamic tradition during medieval times, and the formal institutionalized secular education system introduced by the British continue to coexist. However when a new education tradition is practiced predominantly, the older systems become marginalized yet continue to exist in parallel. Understanding the social background is key to understanding education in India. Indian society is a vast and complex mixture of traditions and cultures with its highly diversified religions, languages, geography, castes, and

regions. Religion remained the driving force of education until modern times, and social norms relating to class, caste, and gender determined one's entitlement to education (Gayathri 2017, 87–88).

Admission Quotas

Affirmative action and quotas in their present form are a result of constitutional and legal developments in India that started from the country's independence from the British Empire in August 1947. Quota system for minorities and the underserved in politics and administration was commonplace in the Indian subcontinent (which includes today's India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh) under colonial management of the British Empire (Jensenius 2015). At the time of independence in August 1947, India inherited an education system marked by large-scale inequalities based on region, religion, gender, and caste. Inequalities and discrimination were not limited to education alone and were commonplace in all sections of national life. The early leadership paid particular attention to disadvantaged sections of the society during constitution-making and included certain provisions aimed at promoting equality and social justice for citizens along with provisions for the protection of the educational and economic interests of disadvantaged groups. The constitution arranged the backward population groups into three categories of Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC), and the constitutional provisions enabled the government to pursue policies that came to be recognized as affirmative action. Among the affirmative action policies are quotas for SC, ST, and OBC in admission to higher education institutions as well as government jobs; these quotas are formally called “reservations.” The identification of, and allocation of a quota to each category is made upon recommendations of respective constitutional national commissions for each category (Chauhan 2008, 3–4). The current form and structure of these commissions is a result of legal and constitutional developments that started from 1947. In 1979, a Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Commission headed by B.P. Mandal—known as Mandal Commission—proposed a reservation

of 15 percent seats for SC, 7.5 percent for ST, and 27 percent for OBC. In 1990, the government implemented these recommendations, resulting in massive protests that ultimately led to resignation of the prime minister (Rao 2015, 1). Thereafter, in 1992 the Indian Supreme Court in its verdict on the *Indra Sawhney & Others vs. Union of India* case placed a maximum limit of 50 percent on quotas and noted a lack of permanent statutory body to examine complaints of over/under inclusions in backward population categories (Reddy 1992). Subsequent constitutional developments led to formation of three commissions called the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, and the National Commission for Backward Classes.

From 1947 to 2005, only the public/government-funded institutions of higher education were required to implement reservations of admission for specified categories of backward populations; however, a constitutional amendment made in 2005 has extended this requirement to private institutions of higher education as well (Government of India 2005). The categorization of backward population groups also influences the allocation of scholarships; for example, the Post-Matric Scholarship for Scheduled Caste Students is a central government scholarship for students belonging to the Scheduled Caste category and having a low household income (Government of India 2022).

In 2019, the 103rd amendment to the Indian constitution has defined a new category of Economically Weak Sections (EWS) in addition to three traditional categories and set an additional 10 percent admissions quota for this new category. This quota benefits low household income students seeking admission in HEIs. The quota was upheld by the Indian Supreme Court despite its violation of the 50 percent ceiling (The Times of India 2022). Thus, now the constitution has four categories of underserved, *i.e.* SC, ST, OBC, and EWS, and total quota allocation stands at 59.5 percent.

The Outcome of Admissions Quotas

Admissions quotas in India limit the competition to ingroup for students coming from identified disad-

vantaged groups seeking admission to higher education, thus it is comparable with admitting groups rather than individuals. Under the current scheme for reservation quotas, 49.5 percent of admissions are reserved for students from disadvantaged groups in the three mentioned categories (SC, ST, and OBC) and the remaining 50.5 percent are open merit. This, in a way, is comparable to what Mitchell Stevens (Mountford 2017, 42–43) describes as creating a class enrollment strategy for private selective institutions and the big three of the Ivy League schools (Harvard, Yale, and Princeton) in the United States. Creating a class strategy implies that the intake of admitted cohorts should have certain features, such as a certain number of athletes, those with special talents, a mix of racial and geographic backgrounds, and representation from other special interest groups for admissions. Nonetheless, in India, making a reservation of up to 49.5 percent admissions for the disadvantaged is not the choice of certain institutions but compulsory pursuance of national affirmative action policies. Since admissions quotas are part of the broader affirmative action policies, their effectiveness in meeting strategic goals is frequently tied with the overall effectiveness of affirmative action in India. The objective of overall affirmative action policies has evolved and changed over time. It was initially described as an end to certain discriminatory social customs and a means to increase the representation of disadvantaged groups in education and services. But more recently, the purpose of affirmative action is described as doing social justice by redressing past discriminations and uplifting the socio-economic conditions of the disadvantaged. Admissions quotas and overall reservation policies remain contentious and polarizing issues in India. An example of this is the massive student protest and self-immolations that took place when the government decided to implement a 49.5 percent reservation upon the rec-

TABLE 2 ➤ Growth of Higher Education in India, 1947–48 to 2014–15

Year	Number of Institutions			Enrollment (in Millions)
	Universities/ University Level Institution	Colleges	Total	
1947–48	20	496	516	0.2
1950–51	28	578	606	0.2
1960–61	45	1,819	1,864	0.6
1970–71	93	3,277	3,370	2.0
1980–81	123	4,738	4,861	2.8
1990–91	184	5,748	5,932	4.4
2000–01	266	11,146	11,412	8.8
2005–06	346	17,625	17,973	10.5
2006–07	367	18,064	18,431	11.2
2008–09	467	25,951	26,418	13.6
2010–11	611	31,324	31,935	14.6
2014–15	757	38,056	38,813	29.6

Source: Ramji 2017

ommendations of a constitutional commission in 1989 (Kaushik 2022). Entanglement between the admissions quotas and broader affirmative action makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of admissions quotas in the presumed strategic objective of improving enrollment from identified disadvantaged population groups in India. Table 2 shows the growth of enrollment in universities and colleges in India from 1947–48 to 2014–15 (Rami 2017, p.7).

Enrollment figures from 1947 up to 2015 show that enrollment increased from 200,000 in 1947–48 to 29.6 million in 2014–15, and the increase remained proportional to the increase in universities and colleges. However, these figures do not show the enrollment patterns of the three disadvantaged groups. Table 3 (on page 52) casts light on these trends from 1990–91 to 2002–03 (Prakash 2007, p.5).

Enrollment figures show a pattern of gradual increase in enrollments of SC and ST despite the presence of similar reservations throughout the period from 1990–91 to 2002–03. This suggests that admissions reserved for disadvantaged groups go unfilled to an extent.

TABLE 3 ► Level-Wise Share of Girls, SCs,¹ and STs² in Total Enrollment in Higher Education in India, 1990–91 to 2002–03

Year	P.G. and Ph.D.	Grad	B.E.	B.Ed.	M.B.B.S.	Total
Total Enrollment (n)						
1970–71	136,825	1,363,060	88,494	48,893	78,244	1,715,516
1980–81	316,788	1,886,428	103,195	68,250	67,822	2,442,483
1990–91	387,684	3,285,776	241,368	92,217	84,393	4,091,438
2000–01	692,342	7,244,915	418,193	121,733	148,699	8,625,882
2002–03	847,947	8,884,812	708,843	118,593	208,465	10,768,660
Share of Girls' Enrollment (%)						
1970–71	25.8	24.4	1.0	37.3	22.4	23.8
1980–81	31.7	27.8	3.6	40.8	24.3	27.5
1990–91	32.2	34.7	10.9	44.2	34.3	33.2
2000–01	38.7	37.4	22.3	42.8	40.8	38.8
2002–03	42.3	42.0	22.6	52.0	41.6	40.1
Share of Enrollment SCs (%)						
1990–91	8.7	8.7	5.7	8.4	8.6	8.5
2000–01	10.1	9.6	8.7	12.3	9.6	9.7
2002–03	11.4	12.0	6.7	13.9	13.2	11.3
Share of Enrollment STs (%)						
1990–91	1.8	2.2	1.1	2.3	0.7	2.1
2000–01	2.8	3.0	3.3	5.3	3.6	3.0
2002–03	2.7	3.7	3.2	5.0	4.9	3.6

Source: Government of India 2006

¹ Scheduled Castes

² Scheduled Tribes

Moreover, the figures also show a higher enrollment trend for the disadvantaged in certain disciplines, such as Bed and MBBS, and lower enrollment in BE. This highlights the role of choice among the disadvantaged since the presence of similar reservations in entire national admissions tends to reduce the factor of competition. To common sense, reservations provide an impression that a substantial share of enrollment from the disadvantaged groups is attributable to admissions quotas. But exactly what difference admissions quotas make in enrollment from disadvantaged categories remains elusive since students' admissions decisions are affected by many factors, which also include campus environments and other affirmative action policies besides quotas. This assessment is especially important for a strategic analysis of using quotas to achieve strategic enrollment goals. The 2005

constitutional amendment extended reservations to private higher education institutions, and the enrollment trends of disadvantaged categories from that year provide an opportunity for making an idea about the role of admissions quotas in enrollment from the disadvantaged. Table 4 (on page 53) shows the gross enrollment ratio (GER) of the 18–23 age group from 2001–02 to 2012–13 (Rami 2017, 8–9).

These figures show a sudden increase of about 2 percent total GER of SC and ST starting from 2005–06, exactly the year of the constitutional amendment. The increase remains consistent in later years, reaching 21.1 percent by 2012–13. This growth appears radical because from 1947 to 2004–05, GER of disadvantaged categories barely reached 10 percent. The sudden upsurge in admissions from disadvantaged groups starting exactly

TABLE 4 ► Higher Education Enrollment Trends of Underserved Groups in India, Aged 18–23 Years Old

Year	All Categories			Scheduled Caste			Scheduled Tribes		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
2001–02	9.3	6.7	8.1	7.7	3.6	5.8	5.8	2.6	4.2
2002–03	10.3	7.5	9.0	8.0	3.7	6.0	5.6	2.4	4.0
2003–04	10.6	7.7	9.2	8.3	4.3	6.4	6.2	3.1	4.7
2004–05	11.6	8.2	10.0	8.1	5.2	6.7	6.3	3.5	4.9
2005–06	13.5	9.4	11.6	10.1	6.4	8.4	8.6	4.7	6.6
2006–07	14.5	10.0	12.4	11.5	6.9	9.4	9.5	5.5	7.5
2007–08	15.2	10.7	13.1	13.2	8.6	11.0	12.4	6.7	9.5
2008–09	15.8	11.4	13.7	12.5	8.3	10.5	11.6	6.7	9.2
2009–10	17.1	12.7	15.0	13.0	9.0	11.1	13.1	7.5	10.3
2010–11	20.8	17.9	19.4	14.6	12.3	13.5	12.9	9.5	11.2
2011–12	22.1	19.4	20.8	15.5	13.9	14.9	12.4	9.7	11.0
2012–13	22.3	19.8	21.1	16.0	14.2	15.1	12.4	9.7	11.0

Source: Ramji 2017

when the government extended quotas to admissions in private higher education institutions provides sufficient reason to link the upsurge with quotas. These trends also suggest: campus environment plays a role in admissions from backward classes; the environments of private institutions may be less discriminatory compared to public institutions; and as soon as quotas were extended to private institutions, the admissions of backward classes surged. Nonetheless, for strategic purposes, it must be pointed out that admissions quotas and affirmative action tend to generate controversy in almost any situation. The 2005 amendment in the Indian constitution did not go without massive student protests as well (Singh 2006).

Admission to Higher Education in China

The higher education system in China comprises approximately three thousand higher education institutions and approximately 48 million enrolled students (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China 2019). These figures make it the world's largest higher education system at present. College admissions in China take place through centralized processes via standardized tests called *gaokao*. The centralized process was estab-

lished in 1952 by the National Ministry of Education to address coordination issues. Before that, admissions processes were decentralized, and each college organized its admissions systems to admit students (Ashraf 2014, 1). The admissions process is administered by the National Ministry of Education. Each province has an admissions office responsible for maintaining candidate records and communicating and sending student profiles to institutions. Provincial Student Placement Offices assign high school graduates to college slots, conduct *gaokao* tests, rank students according to their scores, and communicate with institutions. Students are asked to report a list indicating their preferences among colleges, and college slots are assigned under a specific system according to students' test scores and preferences. The admissions process begins with an application that, depending on the province, is filed either before taking the *gaokao* test, before the result declaration of *gaokao*, or after receiving the result of *gaokao* tests (Ashraf 2014, 1).

Country Profile

China, officially the People's Republic of China (PRC), is the largest country in Asia and the world's most populous, with 1.4 billion people in 2022 (National Bureau of

Statistics of China 2022). China is a one-party state led by the Chinese Communist Party, which took the reins of the country under the leadership of Mao Zedong in 1947 after emerging victorious in a civil war with Republican forces under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek. Mao Zedong led PRC from 1949 until he died in 1976, and the country went through certain difficulties under his leadership. Initially, the country was allied with the Soviet Union and remained under significant Soviet influence, which shaped the structure of its government and economy, as well as higher education. However, by the 1960s the relationship between the Soviet Union and PRC started to deteriorate, and Soviet influence started to wane. In 1966, Chairman Mao announced a popular mobilization called Cultural Revolution. This movement affected the country on a large scale and disrupted higher education. After the death of Mao in 1976, the subsequent leadership of the PRC announced major reforms, which are described as a market economy with socialist characteristics. These reforms restructured higher education, reduced state control, and granted limited autonomy to institutions (Yu, *et al.* 2012, 30). In the 21st century, PRC has emerged as a major international power with an economy described as the second largest in the world after the United States.

Admission Quotas

Although post-Mao reforms restructured higher education, reduced state control of education, decentralized higher education, and provided institutions with a degree of independent governance, components of the previous structure and practices continued in a transformed manner. One of them is called *zhaosheng jihua*, or simply *jihua*, which is translated into English as enrollment plan or simply plan. *Jihua* includes quotas that were established under the previous system by the central government to meet the anticipated workforce needs of each industry, but after the decentralization of central planning, these quotas are still in use for controlling enrollment growth. Each year, before the commencement of the admissions process, the relevant central or provincial government, determines the supply of *tongzhao* places in higher education and as-

signs a quota to each institution. The institutions may suggest the number they would enroll, but the final decision rests with the government, and institutions are expected to meet the exact number of enrollments; in case of failure, the authority may reduce the quota of that institution in coming years. This quota applies to *tongzhao* enrollment of all institutions, including private ones (Yu, *et al.* 2012, 28). Unlike predetermined admissions quotas in India, however, the process of assigning quotas to the centralized admissions process in China is more dynamic. In India, quotas are determined for a longer term through recommendations of a constitutional commission, whereas in China quotas are routinely determined through a combination of precedent and preferences of institutions and local authorities.

The Outcome of Admission Quotas

According to Yu, *et al.* (2012, 28), the purpose of quotas in the enrollment plan is to control enrollment growth. In 1999, the government significantly increased university enrollment with a goal of increasing public participation in higher education from 9 percent to 15 percent by the year 2010. Nonetheless, unprecedented growth rates resulted in the achievement of target in the year 2002, eight years ahead of schedule (Yu, *et al.* 2012, 12–15). Institutions and provincial authorities prefer local students and assign more slots to residents of the local province. There are two categories of HEIs in terms of jurisdiction, central (*i.e.*, run by central government) and provincial (*i.e.*, run by provincial governments). In most central universities, the enrollment quota for residents may account for 30 percent of enrollments, while in most provincial institutions this figure may reach 50 percent (Yu, *et al.* 2012, 28). Since the distribution of higher education institutions is uneven across different provinces and regions, preference for residents is associated with regional disparities in access to higher education (*i.e.*, if a province has a small number of HEIs, then its residents would find it difficult to gain admission in HEIs located in other provinces). This regional imbalance has caused the minor phenomenon of *gaokao yimin*, or examination migration, where people move to regions with lower admissions requirements to improve

TABLE 5. Provinces by Region¹

Central	Eastern	Western
Anhui	Beijing	Chongqing
Heilongjiang	Fujian	Gansu
Henan	Guangdong	Guangxi
Hubei	Hainan	Guizhou
Hunan	Hebei	Inner Mongolia
Jiangxi	Jiangsu	Ningxia
Jilin	Liaoning	Qinghai
	Shandong	Shaanxi
	Shanghai	Shanxi
	Tianjin	Sichuan
	Zhejiang	Tibet
		Xinjiang
		Yunnan

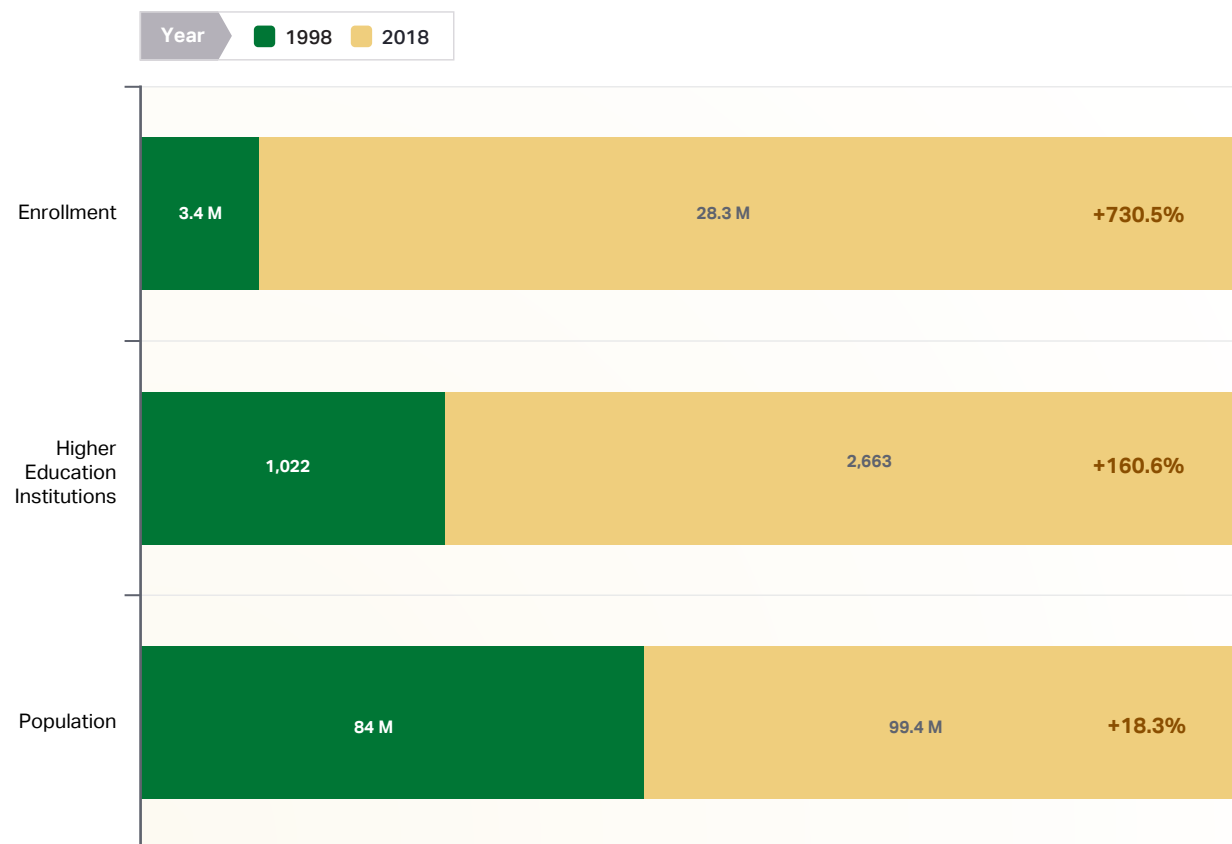
¹ Regions as defined in Yu, *et al.* (2012, 5) are used for the purposes of this article and do not directly reflect China's government-defined administrative/statistical regions.

their chances of access to higher education. Nonetheless, to what extent quotas (*i.e.*, preference for local students) affect the regional imbalance in access to higher educa-

tion is difficult to assess. The provinces are typically categorized into three regions (*see* Table 5).

Among these regions, the Eastern provinces are considered the most developed, while the Western provinces are the poorest (Yu, *et al.* 2012, 5). In 1999, the government announced a major expansion of higher education. Figure 1 shows national growth rates for population (age group 15–64), number of HEIs, and enrollment from the year 1998 to 2018 (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2019).

Trends in the chart show that in the period from 1998 to 2018, the population (15–64 age group) grew by about 54 percent, while the number of HEIs grew by about 73 percent and enrollment in

**FIGURE 1 ► Growth Trends in Selected Categories, 1998 versus 2018**

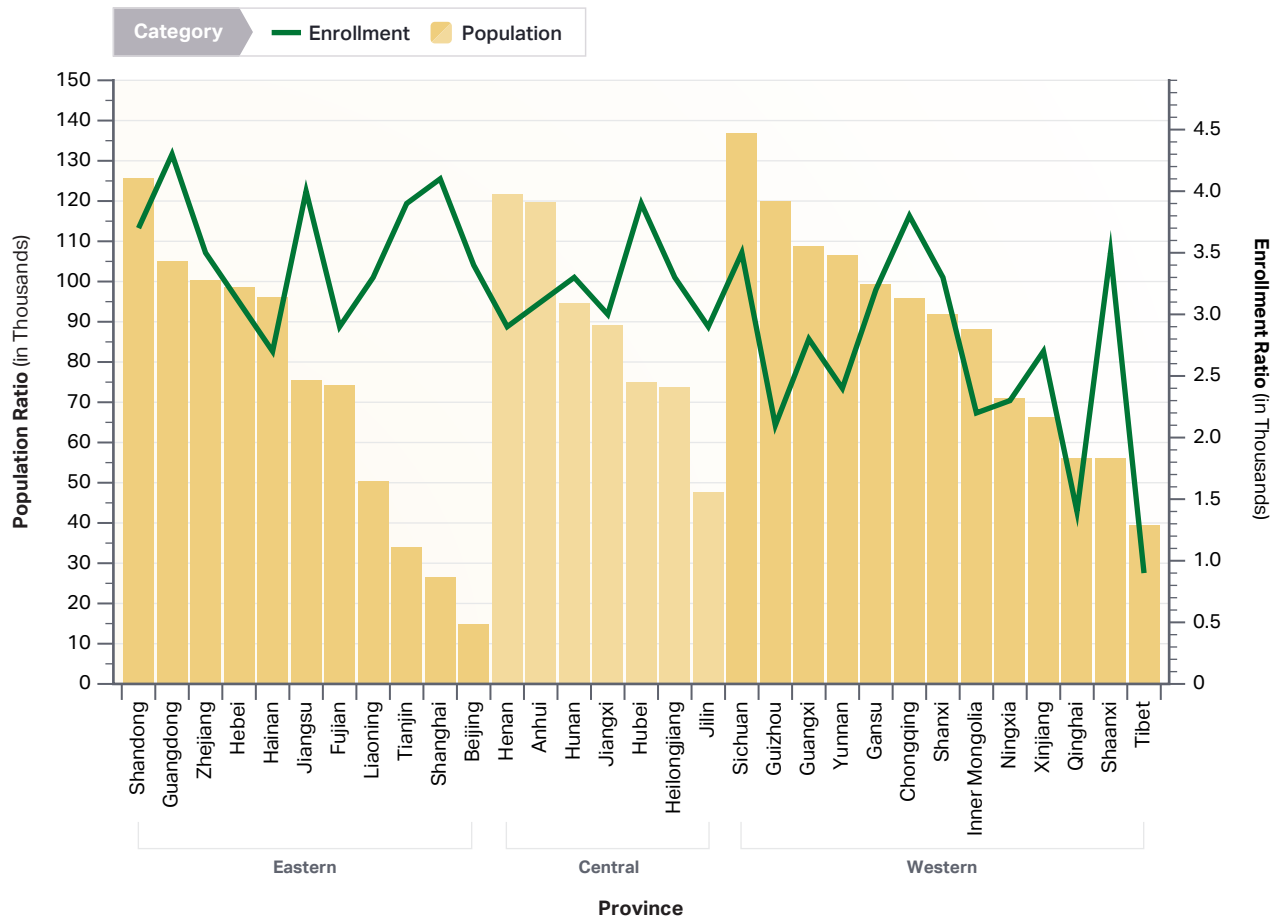


FIGURE 2 ► Population (15–64) and Enrollment to HEI Ratios, 1998

higher education grew by about 89 percent. This suggests that from 1998 to 2018, higher education grew significantly faster than the population. Figure 2 shows 1998 trends for population (15–64) and enrollment per HEI across provinces arranged in corresponding regions (National Bureau of Statistics of China 1999).

The population/HEI is obtained by dividing the population (15–64 age group) of a province by the number of HEIs in that province, thus a lower population/HEI trend indicates a higher number of HEIs in the relevant province. Enrollment/HEI is obtained by dividing the higher education enrollment in the province by the number of HEIs. The gap between population/HEI and enrollment/HEI trends indicates the enrollment capacity of the relevant province. The chart shows an incredible gap between population/HEI trend and enrollment/HEI in seven Eastern provinces, three Central

provinces, and one Western province in 1998, which indicates a higher capacity of enrollment in those provinces. However, at least two Central and four Western provinces show a trend of higher population/HEI and a lower enrollment/HEI, which indicates a higher load of enrollment on HEIs. Figure 3 (on page 58) shows the trends in 2018.

The trends give the impression that the gap observed in 1998 has been managed across regions. Preference for local students can be deduced from the trends of some Eastern and Central provinces where enrollment/HEI has become almost proportional to population/HEI. But still, at least one Eastern province of Guangdong and certain Western provinces, such as Tibet and Qinghai, show higher enrollment load on HEIs, as there is a trend of higher population/HEI and low enrollment/HEI. This suggests that admissions quotas of the enroll-

ment plan play a role in generating disparities in access to higher education, or access to top ranking HEIs located in wealthier regions; however, the massive expansion and growth has covered the disparities. Overall, the transition in trends seen in the above charts highlight that the Chinese enrollment plan, along with its quotas, remained effective in meeting the (presumed) strategic goal of uniform enrollment in higher education across the country during a period of massive and unprecedented growth.

Overview of Admissions Quotas and Their Potential Applications in SEM

This literature review highlights that in India and China, admissions quotas play two different strategic roles. In India, admissions quotas support affirmative action for underserved students, while in China, admissions quotas support the management of enrollment during massive growth. There is evidence for the effectiveness of quotas in both scenarios. Admissions quotas can be used for multiple purposes in enrollment strategies. In the case of India, admissions quotas are determined for the long term, while in China, quotas are routinely determined through a dynamic process. Nonetheless, admissions quotas tend to generate controversy, and this is more pronounced in India where they often result in polarization and massive protests. On the surface, this suggests that a dynamic process for the allocation of quotas is more feasible in present times. Further research into the dynamics of admissions quotas would be required to determine the effective and less controversial incorporation of quotas in SEM strategies. The following factors constitute important considerations for incorporating admissions quotas in enrollment strategies.

Identification of Target Groups

Admissions quotas are typically extended to some visible demographic group or special interest cases where the target is people with some special ability or skill (*e.g.*, sports). The cases of India and China reveal that there are at least two scenarios when admissions quotas are used extensively; these include affirmative action and

managing growth in enrollment and higher education. In the case of affirmative action, admissions quotas are implemented to benefit some underserved population deemed underrepresented in higher education due to past discrimination based on their gender, religion, race, or caste. More often, such populations are visible minorities; however, that may not always be the case. For example, in India the population falling in three categories of backward classes constitute the majority (52%) of the national population, according to the Mandal Commission report (Mandal 1980, 71–74). Among the three categories of backward classes in India, inclusion in two (*i.e.*, Scheduled Castes or SC and Scheduled Tribes or ST) is predetermined based on religious and/or social and biological characteristics (SC=Dalits or low caste Hindus, ST=Adivasis (local/indigenous) people). Inclusion in the third category of Other Backward Classes is made upon recommendations of a national commission that considers social and educational (not economic) attainment factors for inclusion in the category; thus, inclusion in this category is performed through a dynamic process. This shows there are at least two categories of characteristics to identify target groups for affirmative action: pre-existing and dynamic. Pre-existing characteristics may include race, gender, religion, and other more visible traits that are socially and/or biologically inherited, while dynamic characteristics may include social, educational, and economic backwardness. In line with multidimensional identity models (Reynolds and Pope 1991), combining the pre-existing and dynamic characteristics in a dynamic process to identify target groups for affirmative action quotas may be an effective way in this regard.

Apart from population traits, another reason that adds to the significance of using dynamic methods to identify target groups is that social and collective identities are subject to change and evolve over time. In India, this is observed in fission and fusion of castes (Hardgrave 1968). When a caste receives affirmative action benefits for some brief period, a section of that caste corners more benefits and starts to be identified as a separate class or sub-caste by their (ingroup) opponents who then demand separate quotas within

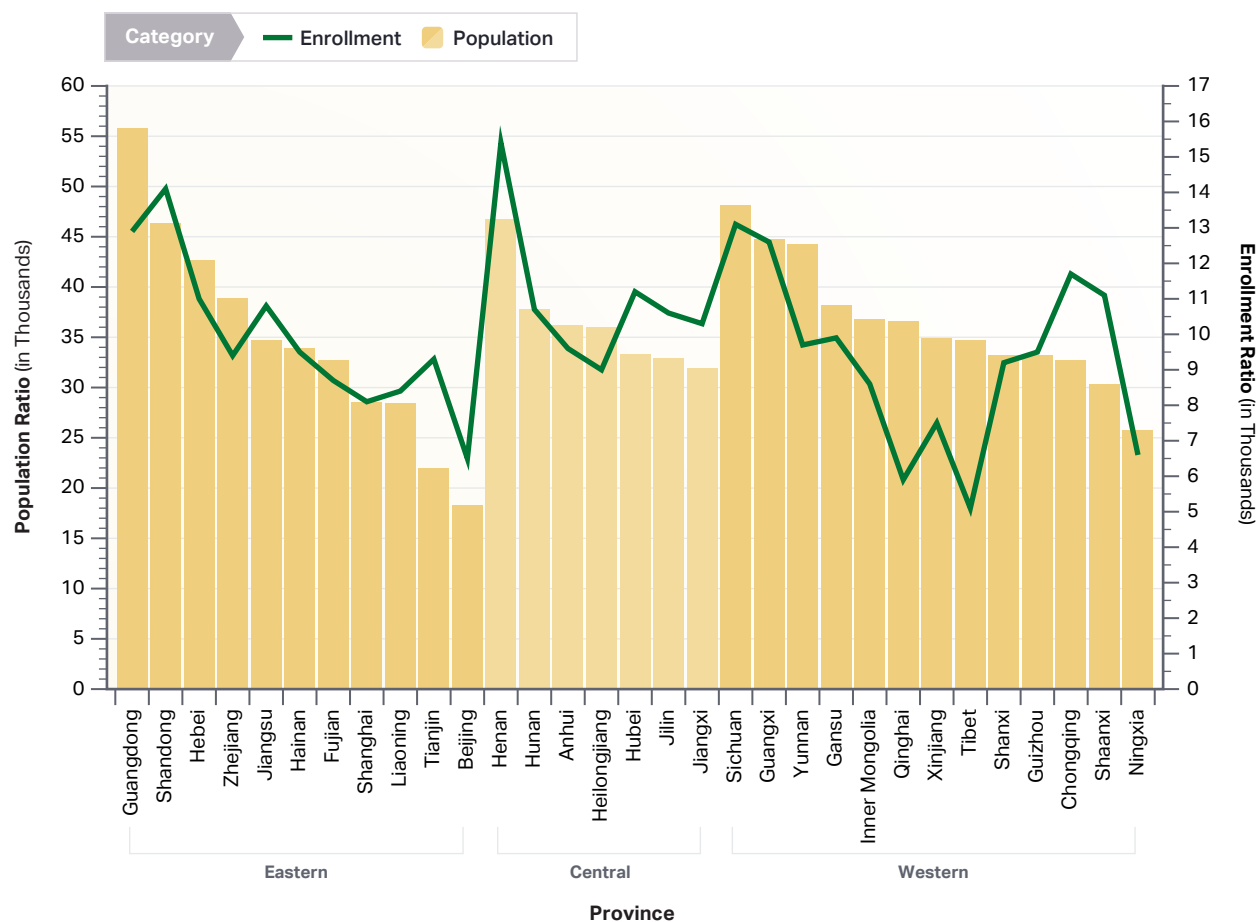


FIGURE 3 ► Population (15–64) and Enrollment to HEI Ratios, 2018

quota (de Zwart 2000, 11). Currently, the global human population has reached the highest level known, and technology and migration are bringing different populations and cultures close together. This has seemingly accelerated the rate of change in identities, although this may vary according to region/location. Even racial groups that were deemed biologically determined have started to change with a growing mixed-race population. Thus, the process for identifying target groups for admissions quotas may need to factor in the latest findings in identity theories and assess the rates at which identities change.

Admissions quotas are also applied on a location and regional/geographical basis, thereby indirectly targeting the population of that region. The case of China shows use of resident/non-resident quotas for the purpose of managing enrollment growth. Pakistan is another

example where admissions quotas are applied on a regional/geographic basis. Before August 1947, the region of modern-day Pakistan was part of British India. India and Pakistan share many aspects of culture, language, and management practices, and quota systems in both countries come from same colonial roots. Pakistan is a federation of four provinces, and its population is comprised of four (or five) large ethnic groups, each making up a majority population in at least one province that is named after that group (for example Punjab for Punjabis). Provisions for no discrimination in admissions to public/government-funded educational institutions were added to the current Pakistani constitution, but the provinces were allowed to make provisions for any socially or educationally backward classes (National Assembly of Pakistan 2012, 24). Among the provinces, the provincial government of Sindh has ad-

opted an admissions quota scheme based on ‘domicile’ (a kind of permanent residence certificate) in rural and urban categories. Like India, admissions quotas generate controversies in this province of Pakistan as well. There are not many studies about the objectives and effectiveness of these admissions quotas, but they serve to maintain the campus demographics of public/government-funded HEIs. For example, public universities in Karachi (the country’s largest city and capital of Sindh province) predominantly demonstrate demographics of that city as opposed to demographics of the province, and public universities in the rest of Sindh province (with a majority rural population) predominantly demonstrate demographics of the province. If these assumptions are accurate, then region-based admissions quotas in this province of Pakistan appear to serve a more management role as opposed to an affirmative action role. This will be the second case where region/location-based admissions quotas are used for control and management of enrollment.

Further research is required to link the use of region/location-based quotas with control and management of enrollment. Identifying target groups for affirmative action quotas based on region/location may not be a viable strategy because demographics of any location/region are subject to gradual change, and often these changes go unnoticed for a while. However, adding location/region as an additional attribute of an identified target group may add an element of control to affirmative action quotas.

Quota Allocation

In India, where admissions quotas are used for affirmative action, proportion/share of admissions reserved for three categories of backward classes is determined on the recommendations of national constitutional commissions, which consider the populations (from Census figures) of these groups in its calculations. Composing the commissions and proceeding with its recommendations is a top-level political process of central/federal government. The present day scheme of 49.5 percent reservation for backward classes was implemented in 1989 on the recommendations of the Mandal commis-

sion and has been in effect for 23 years. This means that quotas are determined for a longer time through a wearisome process. The implementation of 49.5 percent quotas was followed by massive protests and lawsuits against the incumbent government of that time (referred to as the 1990 Mandal Commission protests in popular media). Afterward, expansion of quotas to private HEIs in 2005–06 was also followed by massive protests and lawsuits (referred to as 2006 anti-reservation protests in popular media). This suggests that quota allocation causes polarization and is a potentially sensitive matter in India. Although reaction to admissions quota allocations depends on the culture and environment where they are implemented, it is still reasonable to assume that this can become a sensitive issue anywhere, and long-term determination of quotas may result in more controversies. Therefore, a more dynamic process that considers the political, social, economic, and technological (PEST) factors in determining admissions quota allocations, and conducts routine reviews, may be a more effective approach in this regard. In the case of China, where admissions quotas are used for control and management of enrollment, they are routinely revised based on precedent and current preferences. This suggests that a dynamic process for assessment of quota allocations may add a needed element of control to affirmative action quotas. Further research is needed to determine effective ways for quota allocation assessments.

Interestingly, there are no reports (up to now) of any massive reaction to the recent introduction of a category Economically Weak Sections (EWS) and an additional 10 percent admissions quota for this new category. The lack of major reaction to this highlights the significance of effective processes for identifying target groups and proper allocation of quotas. It also suggests that quotas determined to benefit some visible population group for a longer term tend to become more controversial, and entrenched, over time.

Mission, Vision, and Goals

Strategic management and planning involves strategies, goals, objectives, and action plans. This is perhaps the

most critical and challenging aspect of incorporating quotas in enrollment strategies because quotas are only tools, and their effectiveness in attaining goals without making controversies would depend on clear objectives and a successful strategy to achieve those objectives. The affirmative action and quotas in India appear to suffer from a lack of strategic objectives and direction. There are many recorded instances of differences between early (post-independence) Indian leadership over the issues of minorities and affirmative action. One such instance is the resignation letter of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who mentioned these differences as a reason for his dissatisfaction and resignation from cabinet (Ambedkar 2015). Dr. Ambedkar, himself from a low caste and a proponent of affirmative action, was head of the committee that drafted the constitution of India and came to be known as one of the founding fathers of the Indian constitution. This suggests that beside strategic considerations (of uplifting backward populations), political expediency may have played a good role in bringing about India's affirmative action and quotas. Understanding this political expediency requires a good understanding of social dynamics of Indian society, colonial era politics in India, and role of quotas in colonial era politics. Needless to say, 73 years since their actualization, the effectiveness of reservations (quotas) is still debated in India, and the practice causes polarization of society along with generating controversies. Not only have there been massive anti-reservation protests, but there have also been instances of violent clashes between the police and communities demanding their status be changed from one category of backward classes to another for more quotas (Reuters 2008). These side effects of affirmative action quotas highlight the critical role of strategic management, planning, and effective leadership for incorporation of quotas in enrollment strategies. Admissions quotas in China, however, appear to be part of an enrollment plan and, therefore, (presumably) not lacking strategic planning and management. Interestingly, enrollment in China was significantly lower before the start of expansion in 1998, and quotas may have played a role in keeping it low. But after the start of expansion, enrollment growth was uniform across the

country. This also highlights the role of strategic planning, management, and leadership when incorporating admissions quotas in enrollment strategies.

Limitations and Future Research

This literature review is a qualitative analysis of available literature relevant to the topic. There are a number of limitations of this study, which provide avenues for future research. One limitation is that it is performed without any other methods of qualitative research, such as interviews, or any firsthand experience in any capacity in the higher education of the countries that are the focus of this study, *i.e.*, India and China. Other qualitative research methods and/or firsthand experiences would be helpful in providing insights into the experiences of students and institutions about admissions quotas, and how higher education systems in these countries interact with the government and society that determine their enrollment priorities and shape their enrollment strategies.

Another limitation of this study is that it provides a macro-level overview of admissions quotas and the environment in which they are practiced. However, the structure of higher education and other micro-level factors—which include how higher education institutions implement admissions quotas in their admissions policies, marketing, social perceptions of quotas, and classroom composition due to quotas—are also critically important for an assessment of the impact of admissions quotas. Although there is plenty of literature available on the structure of higher education in India and China, research into other micro-level factors can prove to be challenging due to micro-level complexities of exceptionally large systems. In India, remarkably high diversity can add significantly to the challenge of research into micro-level factors.

Conclusion

SEM is an organizational concept and set of activities that integrate the functions of admissions, financial aid, and student retention to formulate research-based strategies that enable higher education institutions to exert more influence on enrollment and tuition revenue. This

is an amalgamation of strategic management and enrollment management, where strategic management is an organizational concept that describes strategy as related to plans for survival in a dynamic and competitive environment. In this regard, an overview of enrollment practices and tactics used by higher education systems around the world can provide valuable insights and enlightenment to SEM practitioners. One such practice is that of admissions quotas, which are practiced in India and China—two giant Asian countries representing almost a third of the global human population. Quotas can be described as setting limits or expectations on something. In India, admissions quotas are part of affirmative action policies aimed at benefiting the underserved population, whereas in China admissions quotas are part of the enrollment plan for managing enrollment growth. In both cases, there is evidence to support the effectiveness of admissions quotas in a strategic sense. In India, the increase in enrollment from disadvantaged groups

immediately after the extension of quotas to private higher education institutions provides evidence for the effectiveness of quotas in affirmative action, whereas in China, uniform distribution of enrollment during a period of massive and unprecedented growth provides evidence for the effectiveness of admissions quotas in management of enrollment. Nonetheless, quotas tend to generate controversy as they alter the distribution of resources. These two different uses reveal that admissions quotas can be used for different SEM objectives. Nonetheless, a country's political and social systems and the history of its higher education system determine the set of strategic choices that can be made. Therefore, a strategic analysis based on the PEST model would be required if admissions quotas are to be considered for incorporation in enrollment strategies. Moreover, further research would be required to discover other effective and non-controversial ways of incorporating admissions quotas in enrollment strategies.

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