EAST MEETS WEST:
how high-stakes national assessments are valued in different social and cultural contexts

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OUTLINE OF THE PRESENTATION

1. Introduction
2. One test, one purpose? Some theory
3. United Kingdom and the Netherlands: combined exam
4. Final exams in Asia: separate university entrance exams
5. Unified National Testing in post-Sovjet Eurasia
6. The case of east meets west: UNT and the split in 2017
7. How good can we select?
8. Conclusions and recommendations
INTRODUCTION
ONE TEST, ONE PURPOSE?

Two visions in theory of educational measurement:

• One test must have only one purpose
  experts who focus on educational measurement
  (e.g. Downing, Haladyna, 2004; 2011)

• One test can have multiple purposes
  experts who focus on educational assessment
  (e.g. Newton, 2017)
ARGUMENTS FOR MULTIPLE PURPOSES OF 1 TEST

• **Information perspective:** final exams provide information that is valuable for persons, institutions and society

• **Expertise perspective:** final exams are a reflection of social capital that arises from certain learning outcomes

• **Engagement perspective:** final exams are a kind of implicit ‘social contract’ that defines development of human capital

### SYSTEMS FOR FINAL EXAMINATIONS SECONDARY EDUCATION IN SOME OECD COUNTRIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 statewide exit exams only</th>
<th>2 statewide and school based exit exams</th>
<th>3 school based exit exams</th>
<th>4 no exit exams</th>
<th>5 federal states with diverse procedures</th>
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UK AND NETHERLANDS

Two purposes served by one central examination:

• Final qualification for secondary school certificate
• General entrance certification for higher education

• Universities may set additional criteria for admission
FINAL EXAMS IN ASIA: CHINA, JAPAN AND SOUTH-KOREA

Complete separation between school leaving qualifications and entrance certification for higher education:

• No national school leaving examinations
• Very high stakes entrance exams for limited places on universities (e.g. Gaokao (“Big Test”) in China)
UNIFIED NATIONAL TESTING IN POST-SOVJET EURASIA

Russian Federation:

• pilot of Unified State Exam from 2001
• Nationwide USE as combined secondary school-leaving exam and university entrance exam since 2009

Kazakhstan:

• Unified National Testing since 2004
• Combined school-leaving exam and university entrance exam
• 2009: first discussions about a ‘split UNT’

In both countries USE/UNT was implemented as an alternative for the old Soviet assessment system.

In both countries test results were used for more than the two main purposes: accountability; monitoring; system control
UNT: STRONG ELEMENTS

✓ More equal chances for all learners
✓ Exclusion of subjectivism in teacher judgment
✓ Removes social barriers for admission to university for students from low-income and low-educated families
✓ ‘Social elevator’ for rural residents because increase in social justice for school graduates from remote regions
✓ Increase in transparency

✓ Alignment of a qualifying assessment on a national level
✓ More precise measurement: score scale 50 (minimal pass) -125 instead of the old 1-5
UNT: WEAK ELEMENTS AND NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

✓ “Unified National Stress”

✓ Too much focus on memorisation and learning by heart

✓ Limited assessment due to closed format only

✓ Narrowing the curriculum

✓ Mismatch between what is assessed in UNT and what is needed in higher education

✓ High stakes stimulate cheating and corruption (still!!)
UNT: TIME FOR CHANGE

“IT is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change.”

Charles Darwin
Starting from 2017

Split UNT in two separate exams:

1: final examination for secondary school graduates

Five subjects on the basis of different forms of assessment: essays, written tests, oral examinations, computer based tests.

2: entrance exams for higher education applicants

Testing of numeracy and literacy, including higher order thinking skills

As well as examination by two core subjects.
HOW GOOD CAN WE SELECT?

Study result

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<th>False negatives</th>
<th>True positives</th>
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<td>True</td>
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<tr>
<td>False</td>
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Selection decision

Pass

Fail

Select

Reject
## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

<table>
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<th>SOCIAL CONTEXT</th>
<th>Although theory supports multiple purposes of UNT, the split seems the best choice in the Kazakhstani social and educational context</th>
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<td>CONTENT</td>
<td>Split alone is not enough: improve the validity and reliability of the subjects tests by including higher order thinking skills and more open question formats.</td>
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<td>QUALITY OF TEST</td>
<td>Reduce the ‘false negatives’ : develop entrance exams not for the gifted few but for the positioning of all human talents in the country.</td>
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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 2

Most comparison studies show that secondary education grades predict better than entrance exam scores.

➔ Reduce the stress on UNT as entrance exam by integrating some results of final school certification into the admission procedures.

“LEARN FROM THE WEST, BUT DO NOT COPY THEM!”