

Research and Policy Development in Lifelong Learning in China

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1. The background of lifelong learning in China

(1) Lifelong learning is an important way to cope with the knowledge economy and the rapid development of science and technology.

In the transition from industrial economy to knowledge economy, people have to constantly learn and update their knowledge and abilities to meet the rapid development of scientific technology and social progress. The social development is pressing for a new education system and mechanism which is able to meet people's lifelong learning requirements.

(2) Lifelong learning is the need of human resource development to realize the Chinese ambition to become a human-resource-rich country

Since the founding of new China, especially since the reform and opening-up, education development in China has made tremendous historic achievements. Nine-year compulsory education has been basically universal throughout the country; higher learning has entered the historical development stage of popularity; vocational education, adult education and training have made great progress; the quality of labor and Professionals has been improved significantly. However, the quality of our labor force, skill level is still relatively low. Among 770 million employed persons in our country in 2007, only 18.3% received upper secondary and higher education, far below the average level of 69% hi developed countries, about 80% have received no more than 8 years of school education. The education attainment of our rural labor force is also comparatively low, among them, 50% have received a primary school or less than primary school education, 43% junior secondary school education, 4.8% upper secondary or vocational secondary school education, 0.2% college education.

One quantity and quality of all kinds of professional staff in our country are not quite accustomed to the requirements of economic and social development. Among the group of 98 million technical workers in our country, technicians and senior technicians account for only 4.3%, senior technical workers account for 18.3%, junior and primary-level technical workers 78%. The 17th National Congress of the Central Communist Party particularly puts forward that "give priority to education and turn China into a country rich in human resources". Among various factors that support continuous growth and development of future economy in China, compared with limited natural and material resources, rich human resources are our only comparative advantage to deal with international competition. Establishing a lifelong learning system and raising the comprehensive qualities and learning and renovating capacities of the whole nation are the fundamental guarantees for China to realize its modernization.

(3) Lifelong learning is a key factor in changing the economy growth mode and in shifting the industrial structure.

China is the traditional industrialized countries and has large population. The economic development mainly depends on change the mode of economy growth from the extensive pattern to intensive pattern. As the change, the shift and mobility of labor force between industry, occupation and jobs will continue to increase. In 2007, the employed labor force is approximately 750 million in China, which is 1.6 times of total number hi high-income countries in the world. According to the estimates of relevant experts, the proportion of the labor force in our primary industry——the agricultural labor force——will drop from 50% in 2002 to 25% in 2020, whereas the labor force of tertiary industry will rise from 27% in 2002 to 45% in 2020. The change in industry structure and the quickened urbanization (from 36.2% hi 2002 to 55% in 2020) will result hi the comparatively large-scale flow of labor force among different industries and different regions. For example, hi the future 15 years, there will be a shift concerning about 220 million agricultural labor forces, which is an average of 8 million to 12 million per year. This will be the process of the largest scale of population shift hi human history. All of these bring forward pressing

requirements and difficult and heavy tasks for raising the laborers' qualities, job-changing training as well as establishing the education system in response to this training.

(4) Lifelong learning is an important way to meet the diverse learning demands of citizens, and to build a harmonious society.

Now with China's economic development and raising standards of people's life, learning is considered not only as a necessity to make a living, but also considered by more and more people as an important way to improve the quality of lives and a way to enrich their cultural/spiritual lives. The Engel's coefficient of urban families in China has dropped from 57.5% in 1978 to 36.7% in 2005, hence preliminarily entering the stage of richness; the Engel's coefficient in rural families has dropped from 67.7% to 45.5%, hence reaching the stage of being well-off. After people's demands for clothing and food have been basically satisfied, the demands for education are rising rapidly. Further more, it is evident from our survey that the learning demands are no longer restricted in the traditional areas of school education and vocational training, but will be increasingly comprehensive, diversified and individualized. In addition, China's aging population has more than 140 million; the proportion of population over 64 will rise from 7.1% in 2000 to 9.0% in 2010 and 13% in 2020. It is a pressing requirement to meet the diverse learning demands of the Chinese citizens, including the elderly people, in order to promote the harmonious development of the society.

2. Lifelong learning policy development in China

The thought of lifelong learning has been rooted within Chinese educational tradition, but it had not been developed into a modern educational idea or an education institution, due to the limits in history (elitist education system, for example). Only since 1990s, lifelong education concept and thoughts started to be adopted by Chinese policy documents. Lifelong education gradually became a fundamental guiding

principle of education reform and development in China. Some experience was gained gradually by the study and exploration during the educational practice.

In 1993, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council promulgated the Guidelines for China's Educational Reform and Development. The Guidelines put forward: "the adult education is a new type of educational system from traditional school education to lifelong education". The concept of "lifelong education" is formally brought forward in papers of Central Committee for the first time. In 1995, it is stipulated in education law of the People's Republic that "In order to adapt to socialist market economy and social progress, China pushes forward educational reform, promote harmonious development of various types of education at all levels, establish and improve lifelong education system." This is our first time the position and role of lifelong education in education system is clearly confirmed with the form of basic law. In 1999, Action Plan for Revitalizing 21st century Education point out: "lifelong learning system will be basically in place by 2010." During this period the idea of implementation lifelong education gradually formed and puts forward the concept and goals of lifelong education (learning). After "CPC Central Committee and State Council on deepening the reform of the comprehensive promotion of quality education decision", "Action Plan for Revitalizing 21st century Education" was promulgated in 1999, some specific policies and measures to building a lifelong learning system and a learning society were put forward in a series of policy and documents, such as "2003-2007 Action Plan for Revitalizing Education", "the Outline of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan for National Education Development", "the Outlines of National Professional Construction Plan from 2002 to 2005". These policies and measures fall mainly in the following areas:

(1) Reforming school education with the idea of lifelong education

School education plays a decisive role in forming personality and educating a person. In the process of establishing a lifelong learning system and forming a learning society, school education need to be further developed and reformed. During the last few decades, Chinese school education achieved some remarkable development, and

its scale has been expanded continually. Free 9-year-compulsory education had been achieved in both urban and rural area; higher education had entered the massification Stage, with gross enrollment rate exceeded 23.3% in 2008; vocational education is developing rapidly; education equality level is increasing. Apart from the scale expansion, educational idea, curriculum contents and teaching method, education institution, assessment and evaluation mechanisms and so on in school education were also reformed with the idea of lifelong learning. We think these reforms are forming the foundation of a lifelong learning system and the foundation of a learning society. Since 1990s, China began to implement "suzhi education" (essential-qualities education or competence-based education) reform. The reform focuses on cultivating students "sushi" (qualities) and competences in all aspects (moral, intellectual, physical and so on), emphasizes the abilities of self-learning and innovation.

In the basic education stage, *Basic Education Curriculum Reform Program (Trial)* was issued in 2001, launched the most extensive new basic education curriculum reform since the founding of new China. The new curriculum emphasizes more on students' development in all-aspects. Cultivating students' innovative and practice abilities are the core of the reform. Teaching methods are directed to change from mainly teaching textbook knowledge to cultivate students' creativity and practical ability, guide student active learning and form their own learning style; from rote learning to various student-centered flexible teaching methods. The exploration of examination reform and new student assessment methods were also carried out under the principle of paying more attention to student, to then* diversity and to their development. There is still huge amount of work to be done in this area hi the school education system, especially in basic education stage.

Higher education and vocational education are more open. Restriction on enrolling age had been removed and more flexible educational programs are being experimented.

(2) Developing continuing education and training

Continuing education play an important role in improving the citizen quality and the

level of knowledge and skills of employees, schools, adult colleges and universities, Radio and television university and self-study examination system play an very important role in continuing education, a wide coverage, multi-level continuing education and training network are being formed, vocational training financing mechanism has been gradually established that individual learner as the main body, the employer support, the government give the necessary funding. For three decades, adult secondary school graduates accumulated 18.77 million, adult higher education graduates accumulated more than 23.42 million, hi 2007, more than 1,200 colleges and universities provided correspondence, night universities and a variety of full-time classes for adults, the enrollment students increased to 4.61 million from 161 million in 1998, To the end of 2007* the enrollment students through the higher education self-study examination system accumulated more than 5,000 million, graduates reached more than 800 million. For nearly 30 years, farmers have received training through farmer vocational and technical secondary schools in rural areas totally reached 1.142744 billion. The workers participated in enterprises training are over 90 million every year, the overall teaming participation rate is 45% in 2007. By 2006,60 million employees have got variety of professional qualification certificates. In recent years, the state and several departments carried out a series of continuing education programs or projects to develop and strengthen the employee's vocational ability. Such as "professional and technical personnel knowledge update project", "rural labor transfer training 'Sunshine Project'", "highly skilled worker training project", "the National Teachers Education Network Alliance Program", "the rural teacher training program". From 2003 to the end of September 2007, farmers have accumulated 11.25 million who participated in rural labor transfer training project, and 9.68 million employed people transfer their occupation, the transfer employment rate reached more than 86%. These programs or projects implemented effectively promoted the development of lifelong learning in China.

(3) To actively promote community education, learning organization, learning city construction

Community education is educational activities or community residents using a variety|

of educational resources in a certain region. Community education could meet the diverse learning needs of community residents, and is an important way to achieve lifelong education and the establishment of learning society. Since 2000, China carried out community education experiment. By 2007, community education experimental zone at national level has 114, covering all provinces except Tibet, autonomous regions and municipalities. Experimental zone of community education at provincial level has more than 300. About 25.61 million community residents have participated in training in 65 national experimental zone, accounting for 50.3% of community residents in 2007. Three level community education management system was formed at district, street and neighborhood committees level. Various learning platforms such as citizen education schools, community education and teaming centers, community colleges were built that promote community integration and sharing of community educational resources. Many cities set up the goal to develop community education and build learning city, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Hangzhou, Ningbo, Nanjing, Suzhou and so on. A series of policies and measures to build learning city were issued. Fujian Province promulgated the "Regulations to promote life-long education", This is the first local law on lifelong learning. Beijing issued "Decision on vigorously promote the building of learning city," Shanghai issued a "guidance for promoting the building of learning society ". those city have done much explore in leading management system, resource integration, innovation on education and training methods and content, education, training, network building, guarantee mechanisms and so on.

(4) Make full use of modern information technology, strenuously develop modern distance education

The development of modern distance education provide more choice and more convenient, flexible learning ways for the majority of learners, but also an important guarantee of lifelong education system building in China. With the development of educational technology, radio, television and Internet courses and other means were integrated used to meet the learning needs of all members of society, the establishment of Internet, digital satellite network, radio and television network,

distance learning, teaching management platform. For three decades, graduates from Radio and Television University had nearly 7 million. In 2007, the enrollment students of higher academic education of Radio and Television University reached nearly 300 million; students registered in Networking College of University more were 110 million. China is building Web-based Education Digital Learning Resource Center, the modern distance education network covering urban and rural areas and educational information technology service support system, through those facility people have more lifelong learning opportunities and could learn at any time and place. "Shanghai lifelong learning network" has been built at the beginning of this year. This network could provide learning, management, statistics, query, interactive and other multi-functional in one of the online learning platform.

(5) Explore the establishment of lifelong education system that various types of education could connection and integration each other

Overall, lifelong learning opportunities and resources are abundant, but various types of education and learning self-contained and self-enclosed, lack of effective communication, integration and cohesion. Lifelong education system needs to reconstruct a new educational system which is internal consistency, relevance and sustainability, so that schools and various educational institutions as well as the majority of learners could fully develop the potential. Through the joint, integrating and sharing among various types of education, various forms of education and educational resources meet the various needs of lifelong learning. By now, the exploration build life-long learning system is still in the initial stage, those attempts are partial, fragmented and lack of the overall design and institutional arrangements at national level. The legal basis, policies, and rules are not clear, some positive exploration in building lifelong education system at local government are mainly hi the following areas: (1) The link between general education and vocational education, a certain percentage of graduates from higher vocational education could enter undergraduate education, graduates of secondary vocational school could enter higher vocational education in the same program. (2) Credit transfer between different educational institutions. Radio and Television University is exploring to recognize

credit the students obtain from other institution in some region. Through school-enterprise cooperation, TVU recognize credits of corporate enterprise training. By curriculum-based authentication, Recognition credit from different levels and types of education, such as the credits from secondary school, college, undergraduate education could transfer at multi-level. (3) Transfer of formal, non-formal and informal learning outcome. National qualifications, skills certificates (such as computers, English language level certificate, etc.) could replace part of the credits, or Exempt part of exam or course of degree education programs in some institutions. Through cooperation between university or college and enterprises, program is designed by both sides together so mat the credits could transfer between training and academic education. Skill level certificate of rural workers could be the reference of secondary vocational admission. Some institutions cooperate with enterprises offer college program, the employee's prior learning and experience could be Recognize and transfer credits or Exempt part of exam or course in some country.

In addition, the lifelong learning research carried out vigorously, the committee for lifelong education research under Chinese society of educational development strategy established in 2006. The committee hold learning city, community-building conference every year and formed its own research. Miss Kerning Hao took charge of a research project which conducted a systematic and comprehensive research on lifelong learning in china. The research result have been edited and published three books which are *Towards a learning society*, *Classic References of Lifelong Education* and *Collections of Reports of International Lifelong Education Forum*. Together with international organizations, we have held twice International Forum about Lifelong learning.

3. perspective of developing lifelong learning policy in China

After 10 years of practice, China has made some progress, and accumulated valuable experience in promoting the development of lifelong learning and foundation for initially building lifelong learning system and learning society. But according to idea of lifelong learning, there are still many problems. The development and reform of

school education do not meet the requirements of establishing a lifelong learning system and learning society. The on-the-job training, job-changing training and post-school continuing education for employees are comparatively weak and could not meet people's various demands. Reasonable and effective connection have not been established among various types of education within school education system, especially between regular schools and vocational school as well as school education system and social education system. The level of educational resources sharing is not high. To promote the development of lifelong learning hi China, we can take the following policy:

(1) Establish and Improve Public Administration Institutions that Fit a Lifelong Learning System and a Learning Society

Change government functions, bring government's role into full play hi the establishment of a learning society and to improve government's efficiency and quality of public administration and services. Attach great importance to and give full play to the role of the whole of society and all kinds of educational institutions hi the establishment of a learning society in non-compulsory education stage, non-regular education, non-formal education and various kinds of training. We should strengthen the government's overall planning and coordination of relevant functional departments, to change and overcome such wasteful and inefficient issues as scattered resources and redundant construction, and to establish an inter-departmental and effective lifelong learning coordination mechanism.

(2) Integrate and Open up all Kinds of Educational Resources

We should mobilization and integration of all kinds of educational resource, active measures should be taken to break the barriers and the closure of educational resources hi different departments so that all learners can make use of all the public resources, the utilization of limited education resources will be improved, and the supply of learning resources to the whole society will be increased. Through this.

legislation of lifelong learning, the obligation to open up various public education, learning and training resources and facilities for free or low-cost should be clearly stipulated from the legal perspective. Enhance openness of schools, give a full play to potentials of school educational resources, and provide more learning opportunities for social members and more flexible and convenient learning pathway.

(3) "Vigorously Promote the Construction of IT Application in Education to build the national public service platform for lifelong learning

China should construct a nationwide lifelong learning support network covering urban and rural areas by integration information infrastructure such as satellite, radio & television and Internet. Through the network, people could access high-quality educational resources without the constraints of time and space and more convenient, flexible, personalized, interactive learning services. The national digital resource center for lifelong learning should be build by integration of various educational resources, especially high-quality educational resources. We will set a cooperating and share platform for all types of educational institutions, to provide a abundant learning courses and content for people members and share high-quality educational resources Sharing. Establishment digital life-long learning of public service platform will provide learning resources as well as information inquiry, learning account management, learning records and other services for learners.

(4) Establish Systems of Education and Training Investment and Learning Support to meet the People's Lifelong Learning Needs

A reasonable cost-sharing funding system for lifelong learning should be established including government, enterprise and individuals. We should continue optimizing the distribution structure of education budget in different levels and different kinds of education. An incentive mechanism of social investment in education should be set up to improve the input of different social departments, organizations and enterprises in education and training. Public counting education resources give priority to

disadvantaged groups, particularly the unemployed, low-income people, migrant workers, labor in poor region, and disabilities people. "Continuing education and training vouchers" should be established.

(5) The establishment of lifelong education system all forms of education could connection and communication

The establishment of evaluation index system the quality of lifelong learning and evaluation, certification and transfer systems of learning outcomes. Carry out the experimentation of a "credit bank" "individual learning accounts" and "lifelong learning card" measures to provide more learning opportunities and better services for people.