

**中国书展**

CHINA - TRADITION & INNOVATION  
November 2008 Frankfurt am Main  
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Paramus, New Jersey, U.S.A.

EDUCATION IN CHINA SERIES

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# EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN CHINA

MING YANG



ZHEJIANG UNIVERSITY PRESS  
浙江大学出版社



**Homa & Sekey Books**  
Paramus, New Jersey, U.S.A.

**图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据**

中国教育体制——Educational System in China: 英文 /  
杨明著. —杭州: 浙江大学出版社, 2009.8  
(中国教育丛书)  
ISBN 978-7-308-06591-7

I. 中… II. 杨 III. 教育制度—中国—英文 IV.G522

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2009) 第 130798 号

Not for sale outside Mainland of China

此书仅限中国大陆地区销售

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中国教育体制

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责任编辑 吴伟伟

封面设计 俞亚彤

出版发行 浙江大学出版社

网址: <http://www.zjupress.com>

Homa & Sekey Books

网址: <http://www.homabooks.com>

排 版 杭州中大图文设计有限公司

印 刷 杭州富春印务有限公司

开 本 710mm×1000mm 1/16

印 张 20.75

字 数 518 千

版 印 次 2009 年 9 月第 1 版 2009 年 9 月第 1 次印刷

书 号 ISBN 978-7-308-06591-7 (浙江大学出版社)

ISBN 978-1-931907-56-9 (Homa & Sekey Books)

定 价 105.00 元

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浙江大学出版社发行部邮购电话 (0571)88925591

## Series Editors' Preface

Of all human activities education is among the highest and noblest. As a social factor, it has been seen as “an engine of social development”, “a purifier of human harmony” and “an expression of culture”. Without education, the prospects for humanity would be bleak and world prosperity might be a mere dream. Civilization, social development and personal advancement are continuous with education: they precede and follow it. Nations, families and individuals stake their hopes on education. Because of its special role at all levels of human progress, education has been given priority in all ages in countries the world over.

As a result, humanity has accumulated a wealth of positive experience and, in the world's long history, many intractable problems have been solved, setbacks have been tackled and challenges have been turned into opportunities. But we cannot rest on our laurels or stop addressing the present and the future. New challenges and problems have come as a consequence of the faster pace of change and expansion, which characterizes the new century. To promote steady and sustainable development and foster understanding among peoples in this increasingly global world of ours, we should never give up exploring new avenues and finding new opportunities. Education, as history shows, is perhaps the single best approach we can rely on to achieve our goals. With this background, mutual exchange and cooperation become all the more important.

China's rise in the recent past has benefited from educational development spanning a period of sixty years, beginning with the birth of the People's Republic of China. China has made considerable strides and achieved enviable goals in the field of education during often very difficult times. Now, with a population of about 1.3 billion, our country, which has the largest educational system in the world, is well on track in successfully achieving the “popularization of compulsory education” and the “massification of higher education”. Some of China's achievements may surprise us: a modern educational system is basically in place; vocational and technical educational policy tries to meet the demands of social and economic development; the internationalization of education has set out along a broad avenue; educational policies and legislation are being regularly improved, etc. At the same time, however, as a developing country, China is facing many hurdles and challenges in her task of further developing the educational system.



Education is part of China's overall development, and as such it requires her own efforts, wisdom and innovation in order to set up and manage a modern educational system able to respond to the unique challenges she faces. To sustain development, however, China needs to learn from the experiences, the achievements, the research and experimentation of other countries, without underestimating in the process her own achievements and characteristics. In a word, since educational in China development will necessarily have a Chinese character, while at the same time being an inseparable part of the global educational system, we can expect China to play the role of a good citizen in the global village.

Mutual understanding is the precondition for international exchange and cooperation. However, up to now, foreigners have encountered many hurdles in trying to improve their knowledge of education in China. On the one hand, not many of them manage to achieve a working knowledge of the Chinese language and, on the other hand, there is an undeniable shortage of English literature taught in modern China. In order to help foreign friends and scholars know more about today's education in China, the *Zhejiang University Seeco Educational Research Centre*, which was established in 2007 to promote studies in the field of comparative education, has undertaken the task of producing the present *Education in China Series*. The various volumes endeavor to explain the context of education in China during the past sixty years, to introduce educational development in the present situation, to analyze the problems as they develop, and to look forward to the future of education in China in different areas, with each author offering his or her own original perspective. We hope that the series will help global society to better know the outline and features of modern education in China, that it will arouse interest in it, and will encourage readers to explore the legislation governing its development.

We are pleased to announce that the series has obtained the support of the General Administration of Press and Publication of the People's Republic of China, to whom we express our sincere gratitude. Many thanks are due to Zhejiang University Press and Homa & Sekey Books of U.S.A. for undertaking to publish the series. Finally, we would like to express sincere appreciation to the authors who compiled the books with true professionalism and selflessness, while handling busy schedules, and to all the friends and colleagues who have offered invaluable criticism, advice and encouragement.

Xiaozhou Xu & Carlo Socol  
Hangzhou, China

## Preface

The year 2009 is a special year for the People's Republic of China as she will warmly celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of a new China. So in 2009 it is beneficial to write a book on the contemporary educational system in China in order to make a systematic and in-depth analysis of educational transformation in China since 1949 and obtain lessons from experiences.

In the past 60 years the educational system in China has undergone profound transformation. In the period of 1949 – 1956, China emphasized the restructuring of its economy and education. The founding of the People's Republic of China was an epoch-making historical affair. During the celebrating ceremony of the establishment of the new China, Mao Zedong said that the Chinese people had finally stood up in the world. The Chinese government pursued the movement of learning from the Soviet Union with all the enthusiasm although China had once been characterized as imitation of the Western world in earlier decades. In a very short period of time the Chinese government reinstituted regular order in schools and rapidly facilitated educational expansion at all levels.

The period of 1957 – 1965 is marked by the complete construction of a socialist country. During the Great Leap Forward in 1958, the educational reform was regarded as part of a comprehensive strategy of mass mobilization for economic development. On 19 September, 1958, the Ministry of Education issued *Directives on Educational Undertakings* and launched the educational reform. During this period, the Chinese Communist Party's leadership on education was strengthened. Productive labor became part of the curriculum in every school at all levels. More specifically, a number of work-study schools were founded for the masses. Educational scale underwent great expansion.

The decade between 1966 and 1976 was perceived as a period when educational expansion slowed down. The enrollment of higher education institutions decreased. The number of vocational secondary schools also lessened.

From 1977 to 1991 China implemented the new policy of reform and opening up to the outside world. Educational reconstruction was given top priority. In the later 1970s, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, universalization of primary education was conducted in China, and during this period China learned from the



West, in search of a scientific and technical development model. In 1985, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party adopted the document *Decision on Reform of Educational System*, aiming at providing the mix of skills for a rapidly changing society; improving efficiency, quality and equity; and releasing resources required to develop and enhance education at all levels.

Since 1992 China has made great efforts to construct a socialist market economy. In February 1993, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council issued *Program for China's Educational Reform and Development*. The document set up goals of educational development such as popularizing nine-year compulsory education, increasing the enrollment of students in vocational schools, and building 100 key universities and key courses of studies. In order to fulfill these goals, reforms were initiated in the system of running schools, the system of management, the system of higher education, the system of students' entrance and graduation, and the system of financing of education. Moreover, teachers' professional development and increase in educational input was emphasized. In the late 1990s, examination-oriented education brought much more pressures on schools, teachers and students. In May 1999, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council issued *Decision on Deepening Educational Reform and Promoting Competency Education*. Competency education in schools at all levels was pursued with all efforts. Since 2001 the Ministry of Education has put forward to a new program on curriculum reform in primary schools and secondary schools. However, up till now China has encountered some problems and challenges in building new institutions required for educational expansion and reform.

In order to understand educational reform and development in China more clearly, it is necessary to know how educational activities are conducted under institutional constraints. Institutional analysis is a very useful disciplinary approach in understanding educational systems. Institutions are human relationships that structure opportunity via constraints and enablement. A constraint on one person is an opportunity for another. Institutions enable individuals to do what they cannot do alone. They structure incentives and affect personal beliefs and preferences. Analysts are called upon to determine what kinds of institutions may be established and contribute to the current educational performance, and they may suggest institutional changes to educational policy-makers and citizens that can help achieve a particular educational performance.

The purpose of this book is to provide a better understanding of China's contemporary educational system in the last six decades.

There are ten chapters in this book. Except for chapter one in each chapter a

similar structure of description is provided, five sections are included in each chapter.

In the first section, the concept, kinds and functions of different systems are defined.

In the second section, the historical development of each concrete educational system is explored. The historical development of the educational system is classified into five stages. On 27 June, 1981, the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Congress of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party issued a very important document named the *“Resolutions on Some Historical Problems Facing the Central Committee of the Communist Party since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China”* (Editorial Board of *China’s Education Yearbook*, 1982). The document made a very authoritative classification of the stages of development in China. The period of 1949 – 1976 could be divided into three stages, namely, the stage of completing socialist restructuring (1949 – 1956), the stage of building a socialist country (1957 – 1966), the stage of the “Cultural Revolution” (1966 – 1976). The period from 1976 to 1977 was a short transitional period. The system and policies in the past were under critical scrutiny in this period. China has been implementing the policy of reform and opening up to the outside world effectively from 1978 to 2009. This period may be divided into two stages, one is the stage of building socialist commodity economy (1977 – 1991); and the other is the stage of building socialist market economy (1992 – 2009). The division criterion was based on the fact that in 1992 the 14th Congress of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party declared that China should establish socialist market economy hereafter. In each stage the basic context, process, main activities and progress of each educational system is reviewed in details.

In the third section, the current situation of each educational system is described so as to give complete information on what is going on in respective educational system.

In the fourth section, the problems facing China in each educational system are discussed.

In the fifth section, the relevant strategies and measures for resolution of these problems are put forward.

This book consists of ten chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the educational system. Chapters 2 and 3 review the external governance structure and internal governance structure in terms of macro-management of the educational system and micro-management of schools at various levels. Chapter 4 examines the system of educational provision. Running schools is the most important part in the operation of an educational system. Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate the entrance of





students and graduation of students. The admission of students is the prerequisite of educational activities. Chapter 7 explores the system of financing of education. Funds are the first and continuous driving force in educational expansion. Chapter 8 demonstrates the system of examination. The establishment of the system of examination aims at making sure whether schools and students have achieved definite goals set by the society at large. Chapters 9 and 10 examine the quality assurance process in primary and secondary schools as well as higher education institutions.

Many thanks to Professor Xiaozhou Xu, the dean of the College of Education in Zhejiang University for his creative ideas and effective guidance on this program. Thanks to Professor Zhengping Tian and Professor Guping Zhou, the former dean of the College of Education, for giving good advice about research on the history of educational development in China. Thanks to my colleagues Jianmin Gu and Xueping Wu for suggestion for writing. Thanks to Qiong Zhou who gave me critical review on the manuscript.

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# **1 A Brief Introduction to Educational System**

## **1.1 The Origins of Research on Educational System**

Systematic research on educational system is of relatively recent origin. In the initial stage of educational system analysis, people borrowed the relevant research methodology and techniques from other social sciences such as economics and sociology.

Since the early 1980s, when the market-oriented reform of educational system was introduced in the United States, the United Kingdom and other countries, the reform of educational system became a hotly debated issue across the world.

Although comparative research on capitalism and socialism began in the 1920s, and in 1938 Locke and Hought published an important book named *Comparative Research on Economy*, systematic research on economic systems was a new research area mainly established in the 1960s and the 1970s (Gregory & Stuart, 1980). Comparative research on economic systems aims at finding out how different economic systems have affected economic development in different countries. Research on economic systems focuses on the structures and functions of the economy. Borrowing the principles and methods of research on social and economic systems, some educational researchers have been doing research on educational systems since the late 1960s. As the great transformation from planning economy to market economy had been taken place in many countries, reform of educational systems had become a special research field in educational sciences in China since the late 1970s.

## **1.2 Significance of the Reform of Educational System**

Educational system is the basic educational organization form in a country. Any social system has three dimensions, namely, material technological dimension, system dimension and ideological dimension.

Educational system reflects the basic relations in educational operation mechanism. Educational system determines the basic educational structure in a country.



Reform of the educational system is the institutional guarantee of educational development. Educational system may have great influences on educational outcomes.

The historical development of education in China has shown that scientific management of education is of great importance to the holistic development of education. A minor mistake in the macro-management of education may cause harm to educational undertaking. Educational development has both macro-aspects and micro-aspects. In China, there are some problems with the micro-aspects of educational development; but the main problems exist in the macro-aspects of educational development. If problems in the macro-aspects of educational development are not solved, the healthy reform and development of education cannot be guaranteed.

From 1985 on, it was decided that the educational system should be systematically reformed so as to establish a modern educational system. After two decades of exploration and practice, the reform of education has produced great achievements.

A comparative research on the educational system will be helpful in understanding how other countries formulate educational policies and guidelines and implement them and how educational development goals have been put forward and achieved. Reform on educational system reflects the different ways of solving educational problems. Educational system is an important variable for educational development. To find out how this kind of variable affects educational outcome is a difficult, yet challenging, task for educational researchers. The choice of educational systems and educational development strategies are factors affecting both educational input and educational output. Educational system may affect the coordination of education and economy as well as the fulfillment of social and economic functions of education.

The reform of educational system is the key element in educational reform. Educational development must be adapting to the economic, political and cultural development in a specific society. This adaptation process has two aspects. On the one hand, as a sub-system of the social system, educational system is restricted by economic, political and cultural development. Education is based on economic development. On the other hand, education must serve economic, political and cultural development. The reform of educational system aims at creating the necessary conditions for the reform of other educational elements, such as the reform of educational contents, educational methods and educational structures. Educational system should eventually help bring about good and rapid social and economic development.

The reform of the total educational system is a kind of systematic engineering. The piece by piece reform may play only a limited role in establishing a new system



adapted to social and economic development (Wan, 1992).

The reform of educational system is the key factor for educational reform. Reform of educational system can create the necessary conditions for other educational reforms. A good educational system is characterized by three features. A good educational system should adapt to the needs of political system, economic system, scientific system and cultural system. A good educational system should be an equitable system. A good educational system should bring about high efficiency and effectiveness.

### 1.3 The Concept of Educational System

What does a system mean? *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* gives five meanings to the concept of “system”: (1) a group of related parts working together; (2) an ordered set of ideas, methods, or ways of working; (3) a plan; (4) the body with its usual ways of working; (5) orderly methods (Procter, 1978). Educational system is a social system. It has both positive connotations and normative connotations. As far as social phenomenon is concerned, social system is made of a group of parts working together in society and is an orderly set of ways of working. So two important parts are included in a social system, one part is the organizational factors; the other part is institutional factors.

In the *Great Chinese Dictionary*, a system is defined as the total elements concerning the related parts, institutions and methods that pertain to the structural establishment, leaderships of different institutions, power and responsibilities in state institutions, enterprises and other public institutions. (Editorial Board of *Great Chinese Dictionary*, 1991).

Pan Maoyuan points out that a system consists of various institutions; among these institutions, administrative institutions are regarded as core institutions (Pan, 1995). Generally speaking, a system denotes the management power and task of concerned departments so that these departments can achieve great effectiveness.

Wang Jisheng considers that a system is a very broad concept. It denotes the institutions whereby rules, positions, functions, rights, obligations within an entity are specified (Wang, 2000).

Liu Haibo maintains that a system is the total institutions in terms of organizational elements and their relations (Liu, 1999). Here institution means rules.

The *Great Educational Dictionary* points out that various educational systems are the various institutions that pertain to the structural establishment and division of management power (Gu, 1990). It concerns with educational leadership, organizational structures and division of responsibilities among the social actors.