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Range of scientific interests: *comparative education; secondary education in the United States, the European Union, China; educational policy of the US, the EU and China; transformation and trends in education development in listed countries; comparative analysis in the provision of quality education, etc.*

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DOI 10.32405/2411-1317-2018-3-5-13

УДК 373.5 (510)

CHINA'S SCHOOL SYSTEM: CONTEMPORARY STATE AND LINES OF DEVELOPMENT

This article is intended to provide an overview of education in China today, including mechanisms the country uses to manage its education system, as well as current policies and reforms. It focuses on education in mainland China, and started with a brief overview into the quick facts about special administrative regions (Hong Kong, Macau) and Taiwan. Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao are connected not only by the geographic proximity of their territories, but also shared cultural and linguistic characteristics. According to National Bureau of Statistics of China, China has the largest education system in the world. With almost 260 million students and over 15 million teachers in about 514 000 schools, excluding graduate education institutions, China's education system is not only immense but diverse.

The article also highlights the main official documents, which regulate the functioning of the school system, such as education laws, the strategic plan for reform and development of education at all levels in China during 2010-2020, etc. The last one delineates national strategies, tasks and system reforms. It also describes education development mission. As to compulsory education development mission, it is: consolidating, enhancing nine-year compulsory education; promoting balanced development in compulsory education; lessening schoolwork burdens on primary, middle school students. In accordance with the Plan, the strategic goals to be attained by the year 2020 are to basically modernize education, bring a learning society into shape, and turn China into a country rich in human resources.

It is concluded that the organization of China's school system has moved from a highly centralized, national system to one that is much more decentralized. It has made the school system more equitable, producing better outcomes for a wider array of students. Strategies such as decentralizing education, stressing on quality assurance and accreditation, and developing various types of education institutions are paying off.

Key words: school system; organization; development; China.

What do we know about the largest education system in the world? A system that is educating 260 million young people and that employs 15 million of teachers? This article is intended to provide an overview of education in China today, including mechanisms the country uses to

manage its education system, as well as current policies and reforms. It focuses on education in mainland China, and started with a brief overview into the quick facts about special administrative regions (Hong Kong, Macau) and Taiwan, which has been under separate administration since 1949.

China (中国), officially the People's Republic of China (PRC), is a unitary one-party sovereign state in East Asia and the world's most populous country, with a population of over 1.4 billion [8]. The Encyclopædia Britannica lists China as world's third-largest country (after Russia and Canada) with a total area of approximately 9.6 million square kilometers [1]. Since the implementation of economic reform and opening policies in 1978, China has become one of the world's fastest-growing major economies. To manage the vast territory and huge population, China's Constitution provides for three levels of administration, excluding the central government: provincial level (省级行政区), county level (县级行政区) and township level (乡级行政区). However, two more levels have been inserted in actual implementation: the prefecture (地级行政区), under provinces; and the village (村级行政区), under townships [9]. As of 2017, China administers 33 provincial-level regions, 334 prefecture-level divisions, 2,862 county-level divisions, 41,034 township-level administrations, and 704,382 village-level subdivisions [3].

Of these, the provincial-level division is the highest level of classification or first-level divisions. Provincial-level divisions are directly administered by the central government. There are four kinds of provincial level divisions: province (省), municipality (直辖市), autonomous region (自治区) and special administered region – SARs (特别行政区).

Currently, there are 23 provinces, 4 municipalities, 5 autonomous regions, 2 special administered regions. Provincial-level governments have the right to exercise their own management policies within the purview of the law and under regulations imposed by the central government. Provincial-level administrative divisions can further be subdivided into county levels and township levels.

Provinces and municipalities have their own local governments. They elect delegates to the National People's Congress (NPC), which governs the administration of economic, social and cultural affairs. A municipality has the same political, economic and jurisdictional rights as a province. The four municipalities are: Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Chongqing.

The two autonomous regions are: Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Guangxi, Ningxia and Tibet. The autonomous regions, like provinces and municipalities, have their own local governments. The central government has granted the autonomous regions more legislative rights because they are home to large populations of minority ethnic groups.

Hong Kong located on the south coast of China, was a British colony since 1842 until the territory reverted to China in 1997. As a Special Administrative Region, the territory retains a large degree of political and economic autonomy, including its own education system. Macao also stands at the south coast of China located about 64 km west of Hong Kong. Macao's colonial history dates back to 1557 when it came under Portuguese administration. Macao reverted to Chinese administration in 1999 on a parallel model to Hong Kong as a Special Administrative Region. The special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macau are governed by the principle "one China, two systems". This principle guarantees autonomy to these regions while maintaining their place in a unified China. Thus Hong Kong operates under the jurisdiction of the Hong Kong Basic Law and Macau operates under the jurisdiction of the Macau Basic Law – constitutional documents approved by the NPC that preserve a high degree of governing autonomy in both regions.

Taiwan, an island located about 161 km off the southeast coast of Mainland China, was separated from Mainland China in 1895 by Japanese colonialism. In 1945 Taiwan reverted to China, but in 1949 separated again when the nationalist government in Mainland China was defeated by the communist forces and fled to Taiwan. Although Taiwan is widely regarded as

part of Mainland China, the two societies have operated separately since 1949. The Chinese government in Beijing has maintained that it has jurisdiction over Taiwan and its surrounding islets. The People's Republic of China claims the island of Taiwan, as "Taiwan Province" and has continued to propound a one-China policy, but actually the territory is controlled by the Republic of China (ROC, commonly called "Taiwan").

Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao are connected not only by the geographic proximity of their territories, but also shared cultural and linguistic characteristics. These different political histories have left legacies in the language policies of each place. Thus, while Chinese is the official language in all four states, English and Portuguese are official languages alongside Chinese in Hong Kong and Macao, respectively. In recent years, the political scenario within Greater China and within the world has changed. Mainland China is emerging to be a leader in world affairs and is attracting world attention. There is also increased collaboration among the four societies of Greater China, particularly after the return of sovereignty of Hong Kong and Macao to the Mainland, the greater openness of China to the world, and the relative easing of relations with Taiwan [4, p. 238].

According to National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2016, China has the largest education system in the world. With almost 260 million students and over 15 million teachers in about 514 000 schools [5], excluding graduate education institutions, China's education system is not only immense but diverse.

The educational system in China is a major vehicle for both inculcating values in and teaching needed skills to its people. Traditional Chinese culture attached great importance to education as a means of enhancing a person's worth and career. In the early 1950s the Chinese communists worked hard to increase the country's rate of literacy, an effort that won them considerable support from the population. By the end of that decade, however, the government could no longer provide jobs adequate to meet the expectations of those who had acquired some formal schooling. Other pressing priorities squeezed educational budgets, and the anti-intellectualism inherent in the more-radical mass campaign periods affected the status and quality of the educational effort. These conflicting pressures made educational policy a sensitive barometer of larger political trends and priorities. The shift to rapid and pragmatic economic development as the overriding national goal in the late 1970s quickly affected China's educational system.

In China, the education is divided into three categories: basic education (基础教育), higher education (高等教育), and adult education (成人教育). The Compulsory Education Law of stipulates that each child have nine years of formal education.

The traditional trend in Chinese education was toward fewer students and higher scholastic standards, resulting in a steeply hierarchical educational system. Greater enrolment at all levels, particularly outside the cities, is gradually reversing that trend. Primary-school enrolment is now virtually universal, and nearly all of those students receive some secondary education; about one-third of lower-secondary graduates enrol in upper-secondary schools. The number of university students is increasing rapidly, though it still constitutes only a small fraction of those receiving primary education. For the overwhelming majority of students, admission to a university since 1977 has been based on competitive nationwide examinations, and attendance at a university is usually paid for by the government. In return, a university student has had to accept the job provided by the state upon graduation. A growing number of university students are receiving training abroad, especially at the postgraduate level [2].

The system that developed in the 1950's of setting up "key" urban schools that were given the best teachers, equipment, and students was re-established in the late 1970s. The inherently elitist values of such a system put enormous pressure on secondary-school administrators to improve the rate at which their graduates passed tests for admission into universities. In addition, dozens of elite private schools have been established since the early 1990's in China's major cities [2].

TABLE 1. CHINA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM ORGANISATION

	Age	Grade/Year (年级)	
Doctoral degree (博士研究生)- 3 years			
Master's degree (硕士研究生) - 2/3 years	25	7	
	24	6	
	23	5	
University (Bachelor's degree) (大学本科生) - 4/5 years	21	4	
	20	3	
High Vocational College (高等专科学校) - 3 years	19	2	
	18	1	
Vocational college(中等专科学校) - 2 years	17	12	
	16	11	
	15	10	
Senior secondary school (高中) - 3 years	14	9	Compulsory Education (义务教育)
	13	8	
	12	7	
Junior secondary school (初中) - 3 years	11	6	
	10	5	
	9	4	
	8	3	
	7	2	
Primary school (小学) - 6 years	6	1	
	5		
	4		
Pre-school and kindergarten (学前班和幼儿园)- 3 years	3		

The official language of education is Mandarin (putonghua), which is taught to all pupils at school. The written language has been standardized, and since 1949 has been written using simplified characters. Hong Kong still uses the original traditional characters and recognized minorities use their own language as the language of instruction. The content of all textbooks is still only prescribed in general terms by the national government.

The academic year runs from September until June and consists of two 20-week semesters.

Primary education (小学) lasts 6 years and is intended for children aged 6-12. Subsequently, pupils move on to the 3-year junior middle school (初中), which marks the end of compulsory education. After completing an entrance examination, pupils can choose between the 3-year senior middle school (高中) or a 3-year vocational programme (中专) at a vocational senior middle school (专科学校). Senior middle school concludes with what is called the *huikao* (会考) examination, which is taken in nine subjects: politics, Chinese, mathematics, a foreign language (often English, but may also be Japanese, Russian, French or German), physics, chemistry, biology, history and geography. Pupils also complete practical examinations in physics, chemistry, and biology and are assessed on their moral, ideological and political development. At the end of the general programme, pupils are awarded the senior middle school graduation certificate (普通高中毕业证书). At the end of the vocational programmes, pupils are awarded the vocational senior middle school graduation certificate (职业高中毕业证书).

China has set up an education system with government as the major investor and social partners as co-investors. In current stage, local government is playing a key role in compulsory educa-

tion, while central and provincial government are dominant in higher education. In occupational and adult education, social partners including industrial organizations, businesses and public institutions are playing a more and more important role [10; 6].

The Chinese education system has centralized structure and is supervised by the Ministry of Education (MOE) of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国教育部), which was called the State Education Commission (国家教委) from 1985 until 1998. The Ministry of Education is the agency of the State Council of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国国务院) that regulates all aspects of the educational system in mainland China, including compulsory basic education, vocational education, and tertiary education. Ministry of Education of PRC is the supreme education administration body in China, which is responsible for carrying out related laws, regulations, guidelines and policies of the central government; planning development of education sector; integrating and coordinating educational initiatives and programs nationwide; maneuvering and guiding education reform countrywide. The MOE certifies teachers, standardizes curriculum and textbooks, establishes standards, and monitors the entire education system in an effort to "modernize China through education" [11].

Managing and delivering primary and secondary education falls under the jurisdiction of counties authorities. The primary responsibility for higher education lies with provincial authorities. In recent years, the Ministry of Education has shifted from direct control to macro-level monitoring of the education system. It steers education reform via laws, plans, budget allocation, information services, policy guidance and administrative means.

All urban schools are financed by the state, while rural schools depend more heavily on their own financial resources. Official policy stresses scholastic achievement, with particular emphasis on the natural sciences. A significant effort is made to enhance vocational training opportunities for students who do not attend a university. The quality of education available in the cities generally has been higher than that in the countryside, although considerable effort has been made to increase enrollment in rural areas at all education levels.

With regard to education budget, financial allocation is still the major source, while multiple fund channels have been opened up. At present, fund needed by schools directly controlled by the central government comes from the central financial pool; schools controlled by local governments are supported by local finance; schools sponsored by township and villageship governments and by public institutions are mainly financed by the sponsor institutions and subsidized by local governments; funds needed by schools operated by social partners and celebrities are raised by the sponsors themselves (including collecting tuition from students and soliciting contributions). In addition to these sources, the central government is advocating work-study programs, aiming at improving the education conditions through premium services. [10].

The Chinese government holds the belief that education is the basis of national development and modernisation. In China, there are many laws and regulations in education. They are regarded as effective ways of steering and monitoring implementation across a large and complex system. The government uses laws and regulations to protect access to education, and to guarantee high-quality education. The Ministry of Education often drafts these laws, and submits them for approval by the National People's Congress. Once approved, the State Council enacts the law. Finally, the National People's Congress formalises local policies and implementation measures at the respective levels [6].

Since 1986, Chinese government has promulgated such codes as "Law of Compulsory Education of the People's Republic of China", 1986 (中华人民共和国义务教育法), "Law of Protection over Juveniles of the People's Republic of China", 1991 (中华人民共和国未成年人保护法), "Teachers Law of the People's Republic of China", 1993 (中华人民共和国教师法), "Education Law of the People's Republic of China", 1995 (中华人民共和国教育法), "Law of Higher education of the People's Republic of China", 1998 (中华人民共和国高等教育法) and released more than ten sets of education administration regulations. The Chinese government sometimes supplements education laws with regulations. In 1995, for example, Regulations on the Qualifications of

Teachers was issued as a supplement to the “Teachers Law of the People’s Republic of China”. This regulation provided more details about acceptable types of teaching qualifications, prerequisites, exams and teaching credentials, which facilitated practical implementation. The Ministry of Education, within its jurisdiction, has issued more than 200 sets of administrative rules and regulations, significantly facilitating development of education of different natures [6].

China’s education system has undergone continuous reforms since the early 1980s. From expansion of access to promotion of quality education as a core value, the government regularly adjusts and advances education policy to make the system compatible with the country’s social and economic development, as well as new education needs and trends. Within the Ministry of Education, the Department of Development and Planning (发展规划司) is responsible for national educational development. In 2010, the department proposed the National Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) (国家中长期教育改革和发展规划纲要(2010—2020年)) [12]. This document is a strategic plan for reform and development of education at all levels in China during these years. It has become the most important guidance document in Chinese education. It delineates national strategies, tasks and system reforms.

In accordance with the Plan, the strategic goals to be attained by the year 2020 are to basically modernize education, bring a learning society into shape, and turn China into a country rich in human resources.

Compulsory education development mission is:

- Consolidating, enhancing nine-year compulsory education. Compulsory education should focus on cultivating the students’ moral conducts, stimulating their learning interests and improve their physical health, and help them foster fine habits. By 2020, compulsory education shall be universalized at a higher level, while teaching quality should be improved comprehensively. Progress made in universalizing compulsory education shall be consolidated. According to the requirements for urban and rural development, geographical layout of schools shall be well planned, and necessary teaching venues should be set up, so that students can attend schools near their homes. The task of ensuring equal compulsory education for children living with migrant worker parents in cities shall be ensured primarily by local governments and allotted mainly to public primary and middle schools. Necessary measures shall be made to ensure that school-age children do not have to drop out of school for financial difficulties, lack of access to schools, or poor academic performance. Basic national standards and a monitoring system for the quality of compulsory education shall be established. The national curriculum standards for compulsory education and teachers’ credentials also shall be applied strictly. Curricular and teaching method reforms shall be deepened, while small-class teaching shall be promoted. The schools shall offer all subjects required without omission.

- Promoting balanced development in compulsory education. Balanced development is a strategic mission for compulsory education. To achieve this goal, a mechanism to safeguard balanced compulsory education development should be set up and perfected. Schools with of weak teaching abilities should be strengthened, and no effort should be spared to improve teachers’ proficiency level. Quotas for enrolment in high quality senior middle schools and secondary vocational schools shall be distributed rationally among local junior middle schools. No elite schools and classes shall be installed in compulsory education. Efforts to bridge the education development gap between urban and rural areas shall be accelerated. A framework shall be brought forth to integrate urban and rural areas in compulsory education development, with preference given to rural areas in fiscal funding, school construction and teachers’ allocation.

- Lessening schoolwork burdens on primary, middle school students. Heavy schoolwork is harmful to the mental and physical well-being of youngsters and children. Textbook contents shall be readjusted and their degree of difficulty redesigned on a scientific footing. The ways and means to test and evaluate student performance and to appraise school operation shall be reformed. Schools can neither be ranked according to rate of students’ admission to higher schools, nor the enrolment indexes. Schools should reduce students’ schoolwork burdens so as to give students enough time to learn about the society, think deeply,

practice more, and do exercises and amuse themselves. It is imperative to improve teachers' professional quality, their teaching methods and efficiency, while cutting down on homework and classroom examinations. Students' interest in studies and hobbies should be nurtured. The curricula and syllabi should be followed strictly, and on no account should teaching hours and lessons' difficulty levels be increased. The scores of graded examinations and competitions of various kinds shall not be used to in school enrolment and advances to higher grades during compulsory education [12].

Local Chinese governments manage their development using a plan called the Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development. These plans are issued by the State Council. They are sometimes called Five-Year Guidelines instead of Five-Year Plans to distinguish China's socialist market economy from planned economy.

The development of education is always a part of the Five-Year Guideline, which always includes basic strategies for educational development. Following the release of the Five-Year Guideline, the Ministry of Education formulates the Five-Year Guideline for National Education Development in which it delineates educational development goals for the next five years. At the end of this period, progress is analysed and evaluated. The results of this evaluation, in addition to other inputs like the school-age population forecast and plans for major educational projects at the provincial levels, help officials formulate the next Five-Year Guideline. The current 13th Five-Year Guideline covers the period of 2016-2020.

Apart from the Five-Year Guideline, other comprehensive educational development and reform guidelines may also be published according to need. For instance, in 2004 the Ministry of Education and the Western Development Office of the State Council issued the 2004-2010 Education Development Plan of the Western Region (2004—2010年西部地区教育事业发展规划) to help develop education in China's relatively underdeveloped western regions.

In addition, officials set standards for various types of educational institutions in order to guarantee the quality of education. Most of the standards clearly state mandated requirements for infrastructure, teachers, staff, management and funding.

CONCLUSIONS. Education in China focuses on preparing students for the global job market. Chinese students are considered bright and exceptionally talented, and the education system has an important role to play with regard to this. China recognizes the important role of education in the modernization process. Over the past 30 years, the organization of China's school system has moved from a highly centralized, national system to one that is much more decentralized. Now, local governments are primarily responsible for the provision, administration, and funding of primary through upper secondary schools. This has resulted in a system that is highly inequitable across China, as rural areas have been unable to produce and allocate the same revenue as urban business centres, and consequently are sometimes unable even to pay their teachers. Otherwise, it has made the school system more equitable, producing better outcomes for a wider array of students. It has also meant that local governments, for example, can allocate funds in innovative ways. In addition to government funding, schools can also receive funding from private enterprises in the form of donations, or through school fees, without being classified as private schools. Strategies such as decentralizing education, stressing on quality assurance and accreditation, and developing various types of higher education institutions are paying off. China has advanced into the 21st century with confidence due to its well-educated and technically strong workers. The education system has played a huge role in accomplishing this.

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КИТАЙСЬКА ШКІЛЬНА СИСТЕМА: СУЧАСНИЙ СТАН ТА ШЛЯХИ РОЗВИТКУ

Статтю присвячено огляду системи шкільної освіти в Китаї на сучасному етапі, зокрема її організації, механізмам управління, напрямам розвитку. Автор зосереджується на шкільній системі освіти континентального Китаю, надає короткі відомості про Гонконг, Макао та Тайвань. У статті також висвітлюються основні офіційні документи, які регулюють функціонування шкільної системи, зокрема закони про освіту, стратегічний план реформування та розвитку освіти у Китаї на 2010-2020 рр. тощо. Зроблено висновок, що шкільна система освіти Китаю перейшла від національної, високоцентралізованої до децентралізованої, що уможливило зробити шкільну освіту більш рівноправною й дозволило покращити якість освіти та забезпечити кращі результати для великої кількості учнів.

Ключові слова: шкільна система освіти; організація; розвиток; КНР.

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КИТАЙСКАЯ ШКОЛЬНАЯ СИСТЕМА: СОВРЕМЕННОЕ ПОЛОЖЕНИЕ И ПУТИ РАЗВИТИЯ

Статья посвящена обзору системы школьного образования в Китае на современном этапе, в частности ее организации, механизмам управления, направлениям развития. Автор сосредотачивается на школьной системе образования континентального Китая, предоставляет краткие сведения о Гонконге, Макао и Тайване. В статье также освещаются основные официальные документы, регулирующие функционирование школьной системы, в частности законы об образовании, стратегический план реформирования и развития образования в Китае на 2010-2020 гг. и т.д. Сделан вывод, что школьная система образования Китая перешла от национальной, высокоцентрализованной к децентрализованной, что позволило сделать школьное образование более равноправным, улучшить качество образования и обеспечить лучшие результаты для большого количества учеников.

Ключевые слова: школьная система образования; организация; развитие; КНР.

