

Conception, Policies and Challenges Arising from Daily Life

——China's Elementary Education
since Reform and Opening up

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China's Experience on Elementary Education since the Reform and Opening up

Since the turn of the century, the issues related to education have been in the limelight of mass media.

the debate on education in Chinese media reflects the people's strong desire for fair education in the case of widening income gap, and demonstrated Chinese historical tradition of emphasis on education both by society and families

I. Achievements of Chinese elementary education before the reform and opening up

After Liberation, the enrolment rate for school-age children in China rose from less than 20% to about 95% (1976) ignoring the impact of the Political Campaigns.

In addition, the government conducted three large-scale campaigns to eliminate illiteracy, which had greatly decreased the illiteracy rate among young and middle-aged people.

II. The goal of universal access to primary education and the ways to realize it

In order to fundamentally eradicate the influence of “Study is Useless” caused by the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government decided to make primary education universal to all school-age children.

Principle of “Walking on Two Legs”:

government would play the main role to run primary schools, and encourage the initiatives of collective economy (composed of people’s communes and production brigades), relevant industrial enterprises and the individuals to raise money for running schools.

II. The goal of universal access to primary education and the ways to realize it

In 1978, the number of non-state-employed teachers was 4.645 million (most of them in rural schools), accounting for 55.3% of the total number of primary school teachers. their income and relevant means of subsistence according to the work-points as same as the members of people's communes.

According to incomplete statistics, by 2000, a total of 2.12 million non-state-employed teachers had been transferred to state-employed teachers, and wages of most rural teaches were paid by the government.

III. Impact of institutional transition on China's elementary education

After introducing the household contract responsibility system in the countryside, the collective economy quickly weakened, it could no longer provide enough money to run the rural schools, and the wages of non-state-employed teachers were always in arrears.

After decentralization of fiscal system of Chinese government, although the total amount of fund for elementary education allocated by Central Government to local governments was not reduced, the sum of money spent on elementary education was decreased.

IV. Rise and fall of the school-run enterprises in urban areas

At the beginning of 1983, when the elementary education faced financial difficulty, the Regulations on the Work- and-Study Program for Primary and Secondary Schools paved the way for urban primary and secondary schools to earn additional income.

Most schools only got a little money through running small shops, leasing classrooms and school campuses, etc. These activities destroyed the school environment and disrupted the normal teaching order, and was unanimously opposed by parents of the students.

V. Collecting township educational program surtax rescued the rural schools

At the end of 1984, under the unified arrangement of the State Council, the township governments began to collect educational program surtax from agricultural products and township enterprises so as to raise fund for the rural schools.

Township governments in China were evolved from the people's communes. They could get very limited educational input from high levels of the government, and the social fund-raising was quite irregular, educational program surtax had become the only reliable financial source to support the rural primary and secondary schools.

VI. Devolution of responsibility for elementary education and collection of local educational surtax

In 1985, the CPC Central Committee decided to delegate the responsibility of elementary education development to local governments. it would be beneficial to improve administrative efficiency of the government.

In 1986, the State Council empowered local governments above the administrative level of county to add a 2% educational surtax to all taxes except tobacco one, It was providing a new financial resource for elementary education beyond the approved basis of fiscal contract system on revenue and expenditure.

VII. The Hope Project has rendered assistance to poor children to finish schooling

On 30 October 1989, when the elementary education faced the shortage of fund in most regions, the Hope Project was formally initiated by Central Committee of Communist Youth League of China and sponsored by Chinese Youth Development Foundation.

Up to 30 October 2009, in past 20 years, the Hope Project given financial aid to 3.46 million students from rural families with financial difficulties and construction of 15,940 Hope Project primary schools.

VIII. Enabling education to take advantage of the swift economic development

At the beginning of 1993, a research report entrusted by the Political Bureau of CPC declared: “the government would gradually raise the ratio of China’s fiscal expenditure on education in total GDP to 4% by the end of this century.”

the ratio of 4% was regarded as a magic spell and would be mentioned in each annual session of the National People’s

Congress, it brought big pressure to the government to increase education budget. Due to the fast economic growth, this ratio has not yet been realized, but the shortage of elementary education funds has been alleviated.

IX. The upgrading of rural education provider and free compulsory education

In June 2001, the State Council made a decision that “the management system of local governments in charge of rural compulsory education should be implemented on county-based”, and since 2002, the rural teachers’ salaries were paid directly by county governments.

In spring 2007, the tuition and miscellaneous expenses for rural compulsory education were totally rescinded. On September 1, 2008, the tuition and miscellaneous expenses for urban compulsory education were also abolished. China fulfilled the target of 9-year free compulsory education.

X. Challenges posed by migration toward China's compulsory education system

After the mid-1990s, with China's swift development of urbanization, the number of migrants increased to 120 million, and the number of school-age children between 6 to 14 years old living with their migrant parents is no less than 6 million.

Although the central government ordered urban governments to guarantee the equal right of migrant children on compulsory education, some of them are still studying in schools run for farmer-workers' children with shabby teaching facilities.

Some concluding remarks

Over the past 30 years, China's elementary education has witnessed three major transformations.

- the provider of rural education was transferred from farmers to the government.
2. the financial resources of compulsory education transferred from multi-channel fund-raising to fiscal budget of the government.
3. the term of compulsory education transferred from 6-year to 9-year.

Some concluding remarks

Some new challenges we have to face:

1. the widening income gap has caused the dropout of school-age children from impoverished families.
2. the large-scale migration has resulted in the dropout of school-age children.
3. the diversified education resources and education quality have led to the selection of schools by students based on family's extra financial contributions.

Some concluding remarks

We believe that:

fairness in compulsory education will not only bring hope to poor families,

but also constitute the foundation for the healthy and sustainable development of China's economy and society.

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The end

Any criticism will be Welcomed