

The General Situation of Higher Education in China

With a population of 1.321 billion in 2007(Mainland China, not including Hong Kong SAR, Macau SAR and Taiwan), accounting for about 20% of the world's total population, China is the most populous developing country in the world. China also has the largest population in full time education in the world. The students enrolled in the different levels of schools (pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education) make up 18% of all students in the world.

I. The Basic System of China's Education

The Chinese education system includes the following parts: pre-school education for children under 6 years' old; nine-years compulsory education for 6 years old and above, including 6 years primary school and 3 years junior high school; senior high school education which is composed of four forms: three-year senior high schools, 3-4 years' specialized secondary, vocational schools and skilled-worker training; higher education including 2-3 years' vocational or junior college, 4 years undergraduate education, 2 to 3 years' graduate education and 3 years or more for a doctors degree as well as further vocational and adult education. China applies the following methods for controlling education standards: education-examination system, schooling-certification system, academic degree system (bachelor, master and doctor) and educational supervision and evaluation system. After more than 50 years of effort, China has established a preliminary education system with Chinese characteristics, and it has formed a diverse educational range from preschool to higher education, with equal stress placed on regular and vocational education, and formal and informal schooling. It aims at building towards the coexistence of class teaching and long-distance education.

II. The Developing Situation of China's Higher Education

China's education entered into a new phase: from a country with huge human resources to a country rich in human resources.

In 2009, there are all together 550,000 schools of various different levels and kinds. The total number of full-time teachers was 13,911,000. The total number of students who received formal education was 264,000,000, and that of informal education was 57,000,000. The popularization level of different kinds of education is rising gradually. The national gross entrance rate for preschool has risen to 55.86%. The net entrance rate for children of primary school-age is 99.4%. The gross entrance rate for junior high schools is 99.4%, and that for senior high schools is 79.2%, and that for higher education is 24.2%. Now the people's chance for education has been further increased, and the exploitation level of human resources is evidently rising. For students aged 15 years old or above the average further education level has been raised from less than 2 years in 1949 to about 8.9 years. There are more than 85,000,000 people as a whole, who have received higher education. Every year the newly added workforce has received at least 11.2 years of formal education, which is higher than average world level. The development of the Chinese education cause is of relatively high level compared to other developing countries.

Compulsory education is a foundation project, which is the core of regular education. It is the main point of the Chinese education development strategy to take various measures to guarantee school-age children and adolescents access to compulsory education. In 2000, China has reached the goal of popularizing the nine-year compulsory education system and carrying out its total literacy education program. In 2009, the coverage rate of nine-year compulsory education grew to 99%, and the illiteracy rate among young and middle-aged people has been reduced to 3.58%.

In 2007, there were 14,400 secondary vocational schools, with 21,787,000 enrolled students, which accounts for 47% of the total number of students enrolled in secondary schools. Meanwhile, tertiary vocational education accounts for half of the students taking part in higher education, which indicates its importance as a route to cultivating talents in applied technology and management. Moreover, the all-inclusive and commercialized vocational training is rising and flourishing.

The sustainable development of higher education is an important means to implement the strategy

of revitalizing the nation through science and education. The scale of higher education in China since the turn of the century has expanded notably; the gross entrance rate was up to 15% in 2002. It is marching toward the threshold of “the popularization” stage. In 2009, the national total of students taking part in higher education exceeded 29.79 million, which means that China has the largest number of trainees, graduate and undergraduate students in the world. All together there are 2305 regular institutes of higher education, including 1090 universities and colleges for undergraduates and 1215 tertiary vocational schools. There are 21,446,000 students attending institutes of higher education; 11,798,000 undergraduate students and 9,648,000 vocational school students. There are also 413 national adult institutes of higher education, and attending them are 5,414,000 adult undergraduates and two (-or-three) year full time adult college students. The total number of adult undergraduates is 2,257,000 and vocational schools account for 3,157,000 mature students. There are 795 graduate student training units in the whole country, with 1,404,900 graduate students at these schools, among which, there are 246,300 doctorate degree candidates and 1,158,600 master degree candidates.

In the past ten years, China has implemented “The 211 Project”(aimed at facing the 21st century and focusing on the construction of 100 first-class universities) and ”The 985 Project”(constructing world-class, high-level universities), and promoted high-level universities and the construction of key disciplines. Meanwhile, the country implemented a reform in teaching quality and specialized training for exceptional students. Teaching methods and means have been improved, and innovative training modes have been implemented. More studies have been carried out aimed at improving education. Undergraduate’s scientific research activities have been targeted to strengthen students’ work practice ability, creativity and employability, as well as encouraging students to become innovative. Continuous assessment of higher education institutions will guarantee that the educational teaching quality will improve constantly.

By combining disciplined and talented staff with a higher intake of talented students, centers of higher education have strengthened the building of their innovative base, and recorded significant achievements in the fields of grass roots innovation and high-tech research. The policies have become the basis for improvements in ground breaking high-tech research and transformed scientific and technical undertakings. Since entering the 21st century, the accumulative total of prizes obtained by the national institution of higher education, has accounted for more than 50% of the country’s whole National Prize for Natural Sciences, technological invention awards, progress prizes in science and technology; 63% of the national key laboratories and 36% of the national project research centers are located in the institutions of higher education, and most national laboratories of 10 pilot projects rely on the institutions of higher education. Institutions of higher education were issued 45,000 national patents in 2006, and there are 62 Scientific and Technological Parks maintained by national universities. Key technologies have been developed encouraging competitiveness, and a batch of high-tech industries with independent intellectual property rights have been established.

Having high quality teaching staff is very important for education development. It is a long historical tradition for Chinese to respect teachers and value education. Faculty construction and organization has progressed to a new level, and the social status of teachers has been improving in the last few years. In 2009, there were 1,295,200 full-time teachers in colleges and universities with the student-teacher ratio of 17.27 to 1.

China has actively embraced the life-long learning system, and all kinds of education and training schemes grow vigorously. In 2009, the number of students registered in all kinds of non-academic higher education was 2,894,600, and there were 5,317,000 trainees in that year.

The Chinese government implements policies regarding the combination of government and non-government organizations, bilateral and multilateral synergy, balanced strategies, guaranteeing emphasis on valuing practicality to push forward international educational cooperation and exchange to develop education in all aspects, in multiple areas and at higher level. China has established educational cooperation and exchange relationships with 184 countries and regions as well as international organizations, such as UNESCO. The government has also signed agreements for the international recognition of qualifications and degrees with 28 countries and regions.

Additionally the Chinese government adheres to carrying out a policy of supporting overseas study, encouraging returning students as well as allowing a free flow of outward bound students. From 1978 to the end of 2007, the total number of all overseas students, regardless of their level of education, was 1,211,700, and about 319,700 came back to China. Studying abroad has become an important channel to cultivate higher-level talents. The cooperation between China's universities and foreign world famous universities and scientific research institutions vigorously boosted scientific innovation and training in higher-level universities. At the same time, more and more foreign students from other countries came to China to study. In 2007, there were altogether 196,000 overseas students from 188 countries and regions that came to study in China.