

Shibao Guo
University of Alberta

Exploring Current Issues in Teacher Education in China

Teachers have had a long-honored standing in Chinese history. Yet the formal education of teachers is a relatively new development. This article reviews the historical development of teacher education in modern China and its current provisions. A number of issues pertaining to the preparation of teachers for both adults and children are examined. This article reveals that the teacher education system in China is inadequate and requires urgent remedial action. Among the issues discussed the most important are teachers' low political and social status and poor living conditions. Some tentative suggestions are made in the hope that these may help to effect changes in the system in China. Two sources of data are employed in conducting this research: literature and interviews.

Les enseignants occupent une place de marque dans l'histoire chinoise. Pourtant, la formation des enseignants y est un phénomène relativement récent. Cet article porte sur le développement historique de la formation d'enseignants dans la Chine moderne, notamment sur certaines questions relatives à la préparation de personnes qui enseigneront aux adultes et aux enfants. Les résultats de la recherche indiquent que le système de formation d'enseignants en Chine est inadéquat et que des mesures correctives doivent être entreprises dans les plus brefs délais. Parmi les questions qui sont évoquées, les plus importantes sont le statut politique et social peu élevé des enseignants et leurs conditions de vie médiocres. On propose quelques démarches préliminaires visant l'amélioration du système chinois. Cette recherche s'appuie sur deux sources de données : des ouvrages spécialisés et des entrevues.

Teachers have had a long-honored standing in Chinese history. According to Confucius, they were among the five categories of those most respected by society: the God of Heaven, the God of the Earth, the emperor, parents, and teachers (Zhou, 1988). As an educator and teacher Confucius was himself venerated as a sage by generations of Chinese people (Kuo, 1915). Yet despite the long and rich heritage of education in China, the formal education of teachers is a relatively modern development that emerged only at the beginning of the 20th century. At that time the national government developed special teacher education schools. Since then a well-developed and hierarchical teacher education system has evolved, although little has been written about it either in English or in Chinese. Recently I conducted an investigation in this field involving library research and interviews with 12 people in which a number of issues were identified. This article reports these findings prefaced by a review of contextual information, literature, and research methodology.

Shibao Guo is an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Policy Studies. He holds a master's degree in adult education from the University of Nottingham and a doctoral degree in educational studies from the University of British Columbia. His research interests include comparative and international education, adult education, citizenship and immigration, and multicultural and anti-racist education.

Contextual Information

Historical Development

In old China, formal education was for the elite class, and teaching was seen to be simply a matter of transferring knowledge. According to Wen (1989), the real development of teacher education began after the "new China" was established in 1949. He divides this development into three periods.

The first period, 1949 to 1965, laid the basic foundations for teacher education, not the least of which was a number of programs organized for the purpose of transforming "old" teachers into "new" by having them adopt socialist ideas. Institutions for various levels of teacher education were created for preservice and inservice teachers.

The second period, the Cultural Revolution, lasted from 1966 to 1976. Teacher education came to a standstill and almost collapsed. Teachers were criticized as *petit bourgeois*. Many qualified teachers were prevented from teaching or were sent to the countryside to be "reeducated" by preliterate peasants. A large number of new graduates from schools were recruited to replace them, and these new teachers by virtue of their inexperience contributed to an overall decline in the quality of Chinese education. Hence the problem of teacher shortage and quality became critical.

The third period followed the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, which also marked the end of the Cultural Revolution. This period was characterized by educational and social recovery. With Deng Xiaoping's rise to power in 1978, a number of new reforms were introduced. These reforms, generally characterized by an open-door policy, shifted the nation's focus from political struggle to economic reconstruction. The educational institutions were now required to produce an adequate work force to support the country's economic development. The transformation of the educational system, especially in the seriously affected area of teacher education, became a national priority.

Since Wen's book was published in 1989, many changes have taken place in China. China's open-door policy and economic development have shifted emphasis to the establishment of a socialist market economy (Li, 1999; Yang & Wu, 1999). The development of teacher education during this new era, which could be called the fourth period, has been characterized by remarkable progress in preparing a large number of qualified teachers and passing legislation to improve teacher education. On January 4, 2001, addressing the new teachers' qualification system in China, Chen (2000), then Minister of Education, summarized the achievements in teacher education over the past decade. She stated that in 1990, 74% of elementary schoolteachers, 46% of junior secondary schoolteachers, and 45% of senior secondary schoolteachers were qualified, which means they had received some form of formal teacher education. By 1999 the number of qualified teachers had increased to 96%, 86%, and 66% respectively. The progress was impressive. However, it is also clear that a large number of teachers are still not properly prepared.

In addition to improved qualifications, achievements were also evident in China's policies toward teachers. After teachers celebrated the first Teachers' Day in 1984, a Teachers' Law was passed in 1993 to protect their legal rights. After experimenting with the Teachers' Qualification Regulations in selected provinces, a new national system was set up in 2001 to certify qualified teach-

ers. According to the new regulations, only those with teaching certificates may teach. This is a major milestone in the history of teacher education in China. The new system should be instrumental in raising the general standard of teachers in the country. However, its effectiveness needs to be proven in practice.

Provision of Teacher Education in China

In reviewing current teacher education practices in China, five potential routes can be mapped: (a) preparation in universities (colleges or schools), (b) correspondence education, (c) broadcast radio and television education, (d) self-study examination, and (e) teaching and research.

The first provision plays an important part in teacher education in China. At this most prestigious level a number of formal educational programs are available. Teachers' universities or colleges offer four-year first-degree programs that prepare students to teach in senior secondary schools. Junior teachers' colleges provide two-year certificate programs for junior secondary schoolteachers. The entrance requirement for these programs is the successful completion of senior secondary school by the age of 19. Below these programs are secondary teachers' schools, which offer two- to three-year teacher education programs for those who wish to teach in elementary school or at the kindergarten level. Admission requires the successful completion of junior middle school, usually by the age of 16. The government plans to upgrade the secondary teachers' schools to colleges or eliminate some of them (Su, Hawkins, Huang, & Zhao, 2001). Finally, there are education colleges and teachers' training colleges that provide inservice teacher education programs. These offer both two-year and four-year programs. Those who enroll are expected to have completed their initial teacher education and to have some practical experience. With the exception of secondary teachers' schools for elementary grade teachers, which are considered part of the secondary professional training system, these programs are all considered part of the higher education system.

In addition to these conventional teacher education institutions are four other types of programs. Since the Northeast China Teachers' University began to offer correspondence courses for teachers in 1953, some 60 higher education teachers' institutions have followed suit; some secondary teachers' schools are also doing this. In addition, since the 1960s courses have been offered via radio and television. Large cities like Beijing and Shanghai have established television universities to provide higher education, and most of their students are secondary schoolteachers. Yet another type of provision is the teachers' self-study examination. As the name implies, teachers study independently and take national examinations at a particular time of the year. Once they have accumulated sufficient credits, they receive a certificate or degree. This is in fact an assessment procedure of teacher attainments rather than a provision of formal teacher education. Finally, there is teaching and research usually organized by teaching and research sections established under education departments at provincial, prefectural, and county levels. These help teachers to understand the teaching syllabi and textbooks and attempt to improve their teaching methods.

Few places in China prepare university, college, or adult teachers. Jiang and Lin (1988) identify four main areas or sources of adult educators: technicians and engineers, schoolteachers, people from other administrative areas, and teachers and administrators who have long engaged in vocational education. Where formal education for adult educators does exist, it seems to emphasize subject training rather than teaching skills, or it is likely to be about the teaching of young children.

The discussion above demonstrates that education in teachers' universities (colleges, schools) is the most important preservice training offered. Correspondence, broadcasting and television, and self-study education may be economically attractive, but they are not ideal. Teacher-learners mainly study by themselves. They are isolated and have no chance to exchange views and experiences with others. Although it is helpful for teachers to learn their subject content in this way, they are unlikely to improve their teaching skills from reading books at home. Teaching and research are held to be the more popular, direct, and practical type of education for teachers who are working. Thus although it seems that there are many provisions for teacher education, in fact only a couple of these options prove to have practical value for most educators.

An interesting development in the last few years has been the merging of postsecondary institutions in China under the auspices of a socialist market economy. Through the mergers the government aimed to reduce operating costs as well as to increase competition. During this process of restructuring, many smaller teacher education colleges or schools have become part of larger universities or colleges. Their unique positions as specialized teacher education institutions are thus endangered. They have also lost many of their special privileges. For example, teacher education institutions used to provide free tuition and subsidized living stipends to students as recruiting incentives. With the mergers, teacher education students are now treated the same as the rest of the student population. Teacher education programs now also charge tuition fees, and in some areas these fees are as high as those for other programs (Zhou, 2002). This change discourages many qualified potential teacher education students who would otherwise choose teachers' universities or colleges because financial assistance was provided. In the long run the recent changes will probably do more harm than good to professional preparation for teachers.

Research on Teacher Education in China

According to Li (1999), "China has much to improve both in quality and quantity" of research on teacher education (p. 190). He highlights three current issues. First, few are committed to research on teaching and teacher education because the topic is not as valued in assessment for academic promotion as is research in an academic's specialized area of study. Second, many of the few existing studies on teacher education are opinion papers that carry little weight compared with data-based studies. Finally, researchers rely heavily on survey results as the dominant source of information, and few people conduct qualitative studies. Significantly scarce is work that draws on teachers' real experiences or gives voice to those who work daily in the field.

Furthermore, literature reviews conducted for this study reveal that it is even more difficult to obtain literature in English about teacher education in

China. After reviewing a number of studies available in the English media (Li, 1999; Paine, 1990; Shen, 1994; Su et al., 2001; Wu & Chang, 1990; Zhang, 1995; Zhou, 2002), two bodies of literature were selected as most representative of teacher education in China: the Chinese Virtuoso Model of teaching and a study of the backgrounds and perspectives of Chinese teacher education students.

The Chinese Virtuoso Model of Teaching

The Chinese Virtuoso Model of teaching is a term first coined by Paine (1990) to describe teacher education in China. It is one of the major ethnographic studies on this topic. Paine argues that in the Virtuoso Model, the teacher resembles a musician. She or he performs for the whole class, and the students become the audience. The focus in teaching is on performance, and the goal is to produce an outstanding and virtuoso performance.

According to the Virtuoso Model, the central aim of teaching is to provide knowledge for students. The textbook is the source of knowledge, and the teacher, as the presenter of that knowledge, stands center stage in transmitting the knowledge. First, the virtuoso teacher must be an expert in his or her field. Second, his or her overall character and affective skills are important. Paine commends the efforts of Chinese teachers to balance the "teaching of books" and the "educating of persons" (p. 71), the importance of knowledge, and also the role of the personal, humanistic qualities of aesthetics, affection, and commitment. She also argues that the Virtuoso Model fosters collegial relations and peer support. However, she points out that the orientation of this model is conservative and that its practice is to reproduce both teachers' styles and students' knowledge. It is teacher-centered, and both student teachers and students in schools are treated passively. Because the model focuses too much on the importance of performance, it ignores the possibilities for interaction and does not value individual differences.

Teacher Education Students: Their Background and Perspectives

Zhou (2002) argues that teachers are responsible for the quality of education, and so it is crucial to recruit the most talented students into teacher education programs. On the contrary, research (Su et al., 2001) shows that teacher education students in China come from less privileged backgrounds in terms of socioeconomic status and academic preparation. According to Su et al., many Chinese student teachers enter teacher education programs reluctantly, "often as a result of lower test scores on the college entrance examination or because of practical financial and economic considerations" (p. 620). The same authors also point out that scholarships and special financial assistance in teacher education institutions are important factors to consider for students from poor, rural, and minority areas. Furthermore, the study reveals that the overwhelming majority of Chinese student teachers do not intend to commit to teaching as a lifelong career. The low status and poor benefits of the teaching profession are reported as primary reasons for leaving teaching. Su et al. finally point out that the lack of passion and commitment to teaching is worrisome and that it should be a critical issue in Chinese teacher education reform.

The above-mentioned literature highlights some significant issues facing teacher education in China, particularly those studies about the model used in

teacher education and the background of teacher education students. However, few studies have explored issues related to the design of programs in teacher education or the treatment of teachers in China. Furthermore, the earlier studies focused solely on preparation of teachers in elementary and secondary schools, and issues faced by teachers in adult and higher education were ignored. The current study was designed to fill the gap in these areas.

Research Methodology

Data Collection

In July 2001 Beijing won the bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games, and in December the same year China officially entered the World Trade Organization. These two milestone events will open a new era for China. They will undoubtedly place China on the international stage "as a respected member of the world community" (Smith, 2001, p. A1). On the other hand, these events also put pressure on China to effect further reform to its teacher education system in order to prepare its citizens for success in this new era of global presence and recognition. It is hoped that findings from this research will shed light on this reform.

The primary purpose of this research was to explore current issues in teacher education for elementary and secondary schools in China. The central guiding question of the study was: What are the major issues facing teacher educators in education colleges in China with respect to the inservice preparation of teachers? As teacher educators in education colleges are teachers of adults, the preparation of these instructors for teaching adults was also examined. To address the overall question, a number of subthemes were explored including formal preparation of adult educators; the difference between teaching adults and children; the design of programs for teacher education; China's treatment of teachers; and more generally, the improvement of teacher education in China.

Two sources of data were employed for this research: library research and interviews. The literature review and document analysis for this study drew on print materials in both English and Chinese, including book chapters, journal articles, and newspaper reports. As stated above, one difficulty encountered in this portion of the research was lack of information on teacher education in China in either language.

Second, semistructured interviews were conducted with 12 teachers: 10 Chinese and two British. The Chinese interviewees were from education colleges in China, and their work was to provide inservice teacher education for practicing elementary and secondary schoolteachers. Their students had received initial teacher education from teachers' schools or colleges, and most had had two years of teaching experience before they were enrolled in the education colleges. These interviewees were teachers of adult students. At the time of the interviews they were visiting scholars at a British university and had been in the United Kingdom for five months. Of the 12 interviewees, seven were men and five were women. The Chinese interviewees taught a variety of subjects in China: specifically, the sample included three English teachers, two physics teachers, two biology teachers, one chemistry teacher, one mathematics teacher, and one computer teacher. Most ranged in age from the mid-30s to the mid-40s. Most were lecturers with five to 10 years of teaching

experience. Chinese interviewees came from eight provinces and cities, and two were from Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Regions. The two British interviewees were observers of the Chinese scene. Each had taught English for two years at a teachers' university in China. They had substantial experience of at least one teacher education institution in China. As relative cultural outsiders, their insights were used to bring additional perspective to what was gleaned from the study's Chinese respondents.

All 12 interviews were audiotaped. Each lasted from 30 minutes to one hour. The 10 interviews with the Chinese respondents were conducted in Mandarin Chinese as this was their language of choice and greatest fluency. Each interview was first transcribed verbatim in Chinese, and I then translated it into English. As I hold a BA in English and used to be an English translator in China, I believe the translation to be accurate and trustworthy. The British respondents were interviewed in English and I transcribed these sessions verbatim.

Data Analysis

I developed a three-stage process for the data analysis of this research. First, the main points of each interview were identified. Second, these main points were grouped and regrouped in search of recurring themes and patterns that emerged from the interviews as a whole. Finally, these themes were sorted and developed into related categories. Three main categories of themes emerged from this analysis: training for adult teachers, training for teachers of elementary and secondary schools, and general thoughts about the system of teacher education in China.

To protect the respondents' identities and encourage them to speak openly, no respondents' names were used in this study. The choice of pseudonyms was explored, but because so many people in China have the same names, these could be someone's real names and this might create confusion. Therefore, in the following discussion people are referred to as Chinese respondents or British respondents.

Discussion of Findings

The Training of Adult Teachers

Few places to train adult teachers. I mention above that few places in China provide university, college, or adult teachers with specific skill-sets for teaching adults. People are able to secure university or college teaching positions if they have higher degrees, but there is no provision or requirement for training in adult education in these cases. It was reported that only 31% of university teachers hold master's or doctoral degrees (*China Education Daily*, 2001). Teaching skills are not considered a must for teachers in adult and higher education institutions. If higher and adult education teachers do receive any teacher training, it is likely to have instilled pedagogies more appropriate to instructing young children. Jiang and Lin (1988) summarize the pitfalls that adult educators face as follows:

Chiefly, most practitioners lack experience in adult education; they do not have much professional background; they lack understanding of the nature, status, function, and characteristics of adult education; and they have never studied theory, psychology, or administrative theory of adult education. (p. 110)

I believe that these pitfalls may apply to university or college teachers also. Postsecondary students aged 18 or older are regarded as adults; yet teaching practices at this level do not reflect this recognition, and the Chinese interviewees confirmed this view. Among the 10 interviewed, half had received their education as schoolteachers at teachers' universities; the others had received no preparation. Graduates of specialized universities or colleges received subject training only. Those who had received no formal teacher education simply modeled themselves on their observations and experiences with their own school and university teachers. As one interviewee stated,

We repeated what we had learned. When I was a student, I knew how my teachers taught. After I graduated, I started teaching immediately. I would use the same textbooks used by my teachers when I was a student. I taught according to how I had been taught.

Others believed that good teaching is instinctive. One Chinese interviewee stated, "Sometimes, people who graduate from comprehensive universities may teach better than those who graduate from teachers' universities. Being a good teacher is innate." It seems clear that Chinese university and adult teachers receive inadequate preparation, particularly in the area of teaching skills training. Although such training does take place, it is more likely to be about teaching young children than instruction for adult or university/college learners.

The challenges and special requirements of teaching adults. All the people I interviewed taught adult students. However, most seemed to think that 18-year-olds were not adults. Adult students were thought to have a great deal of life experience, although perhaps with a somewhat reduced memory for detail. When asked about teaching younger versus older adult students, most interviewees believed that they treated them differently. Only one respondent claimed to teach these groups in the same way.

Adult educators explain why teaching adults is different from teaching children. Knowles (1980) coined the term *andragogy* to differentiate adult instructional practices from traditional approach to teaching children or pedagogy. Selman (2001) summarizes why Knowles believes the teaching of adults is different:

Adults are more mature than children, and so their experience is more extensive and plays a more significant role in defining their self-concept. Adults are more likely to be self-directed rather than dependent on others for direction. Unlike children, they expect whatever they learn to have quite a direct and immediate application to their daily lives. (p. 59)

My interviewees' responses reflected some of Knowles' beliefs about the teaching of adults. One participant pointed out that adult students were highly motivated, whereas another said that adult students would persist in asking a question until they received a satisfactory answer. Most respondents agreed that older students were not keen to participate in class. One interviewee, a Chinese English teacher, described adult students as fastidious:

Besides high motivation, adult students were fastidious. They "nitpicked" your knowledge, your handwriting, your oral English, and how you look. It was dif-

difficult to keep them excited. Usually it depended on whether you made friends with them, rather than whether you had knowledge.

Because most of the respondents' students had teaching experience, some interviewees revealed that it was harder to teach adult students not only because they were adults, but also because many were teachers themselves. One Chinese interviewee said, "They have experience. They judge your teaching as teachers themselves. Your attitude towards them should be polite. You can't put pressure on them, you can't frighten them as you usually do children."

The above discussion illustrates that teacher education, especially that for adult and university or college teachers in China, is woefully inadequate. A complete teacher education program is needed to prepare teachers at various levels not only with subject knowledge, but with age-appropriate teaching skills as well. It is still unclear whether the outcome of the courses available in secondary teachers' schools is effective for preparing teachers, because the interviewees were teachers or teacher educators of secondary school teachers in education colleges and were familiar only with the education of secondary schoolteachers in their own institutions. Because the same divisions in central and local education departments are responsible for teacher education, the same policy or emphasis on teachers' universities may also apply to the situation in secondary teachers' schools.

Teacher Training for Elementary and Secondary Schools

One difference between elementary and secondary schoolteachers is that in elementary schools a single teacher may have to be qualified to teach a range of subjects, whereas in secondary schools she or he usually specializes in teaching one subject. Before becoming secondary schoolteachers, student teachers study in subject departments—English or physics, for example—and course content is similar to what is provided in a comprehensive university. Program routes in teachers' universities or colleges are distinct largely in that in addition to subject knowledge, they offer courses in pedagogy, psychology, and subject-specific teaching methodologies. In addition, these institutions organize teaching practica. After taking courses, student teachers are assumed to have a good command of the basic theories of teaching and learning. These courses are largely lecture-based, providing little opportunity for student practice, interaction, or engagement. Students themselves have the opportunity to practice what they have learned in formal lectures only at the last moment before they start their teaching career. From talking to the respondents, the following issues in teacher education for elementary and secondary schools were identified.

Courses are theoretical and abstract. A major problem identified by respondents is that courses provided for teachers in teachers' universities/colleges are more theoretical and abstract than practical and offer little of relevance to teaching in the field. One of the Chinese interviewees explained, "Students don't have a chance to practice in Pedagogy and Psychology.... Some [courses] are quite useful, but they are short of practice." Another interviewee stated:

Courses such as Pedagogy, Psychology and teaching method[s] were of little relevance. For example, the teaching method course was aimed at secondary

school teaching. Teaching practice was aimed at helping students understand how secondary school teachers organized their teaching. We had so little practice. We didn't know what to do when we were put in a real classroom.

Teaching practica are too short. Teaching practice is an important part of a teacher education program, as student teachers need opportunities to translate theory into practice. It is usually "highly organized and very systematic" (Paine, 1990, p. 59). Student teachers are not there to develop particular teaching skills by trial and error, but to learn from master teachers. Therefore, the traditional teacher-centered teaching style of Chinese classrooms is reproduced not only in postsecondary classrooms, but also in the practicum experiences that follow (Paine, 1990). The duration of teaching practice is six to eight weeks. This typically includes one week of preparation and orientation lectures, four weeks of practicing as a subject teacher and class advisor, and a final week of summing up.

Among interviewees there was a mix of responses as to whether teaching practice was helpful. Some respondents believed that teaching practice was helpful, especially for those teaching for the first time. Many others asserted that teaching practice was too short to be of significant value. This point was made clear by one of the British respondents:

Many Chinese student teachers arrive in the classroom with very little actual teaching practice and little experience of classroom teaching. They have to learn "on the job," really. They learned the old methods from their previous teachers. They never seemed to have any new methods.

Pedagogical training is weak. A number of the respondents claimed that training in teaching skills was very weak in China, and student teachers did not perceive such preparation as important. For example, in EFL (English as a foreign language) teacher education, many Chinese teachers want training for language improvement and consider EFL teaching methods of secondary or marginal value. They believe that if a teacher knows more English, this alone will make him or her a better teacher (Penner, 1995).

Respondents also stated that textbooks used in subject teaching method courses were outdated, providing few references to new methods. Some further suggested that teaching methods lecturers were in pedagogy because they could teach nothing else. Instructors may well not have had training in teaching methods themselves, although they are assigned to teach method courses. One Chinese physics teacher said:

Teaching method course is weak in China. It is not regarded as important. Those who cannot teach other subjects seem to be asked to teach this course. This is a wrong idea ... and it is a kind of prejudice. Trainers should discard traditional and wrong ideas; only then can we train good students.

Teacher Education in China: Systemic Concerns

The issues discussed above relate to the design and implementation of teacher education programs. The following issues raised by study respondents relate more to the general state of the education system itself. Because these are deep systemic concerns, they may be considered as detrimental to the recruitment of qualified teacher candidates even before teacher education concerns per se set in.

A mismatch of goals. There is incongruence between the expected level of work done in teachers' universities or colleges and that done in specialized universities or colleges. In his book *Higher Education*, Tian (1990) highlights two contrasting views about this. Some Chinese educators regard teachers' universities and colleges as institutions of academic research. Their students are judged on the quality of their academic work. Others argue that the specific purpose of teachers' universities is to prepare teachers to be professionals, not to be academic researchers. Although either of these two contrasting opinions may be held among Chinese educators, it is the first view that dominates government policy. This point was also identified by one of the British respondents:

Teachers' universities are basically teaching institutions, not serious, highly academic institutions. In fact, lots of work ... going on in these places is more similar to the work of a college of education in the UK rather than the work of a top university. There is a problem whether the place is really an academic institution or whether it's a teaching institution. Is it really there for research, or is it really there for training student teachers? The majority of the students won't continue to work in universities or to study. They'll go to middle schools in the countryside, where the most important skill they'll need is their ability to teach rather than their academic study.

Paine (1991) looks at the rationale behind this. She points out that teacher education institutions in China reflect a model of specialization borrowed from the former Soviets. Specialization is mirrored in the narrowness of the student's programs of study. Its resulting rigid curriculum reflects an underlying rational-technocratic mindset and accounts for a general dearth of quality teaching material and faculty in Chinese teacher education programs. As a result, students have little input into the course content of their own higher education and limited opportunities to gain guided teaching experience.

The political and social status of teachers is low. Despite the government's legislative efforts to improve the status of teachers, the political and social status of teachers in China remains low, so there are few incentives to take up a teaching career. Historically, teachers were held in high esteem, not least because they helped people climb to the top of the ladder and obtain official positions through the Civil Service examinations. Teachers were paid by the government, and some government officials were teachers before being promoted to the civil service (Kuo, 1915).

But circumstances have changed. Compared with other professions such as engineering, administration, and economics, teaching is poorly paid. Compared with peer institutions, teacher education institutions are usually characterized by poorer facilities and weaker funding, faculty, and students. Teaching is seen as a job with little real power. The teacher is someone who is respected for his or her intellect, but he or she is usually rather "poor and shabby," and does not have much status in society. Paine (1991) maintains that many people view teaching as a profession with poor economic rewards, political status, and social prestige. It is this social status that hinders able people from going into teaching. This was made clear in a statement by one of the Chinese interviewees: "They [student teachers] don't want to learn the

technique of being a good teacher because they don't really want to be a teacher. There is no incentive to learn to teach."

This issue was addressed by Li Lan-qing, former Vice-Premier of the country, on numerous occasions. In celebrations during the ninth Teachers' Day on September 10, 1993, he pointed out that the treatment of teachers has been less than admirable. Some of this poor treatment translates into practical problems in teachers' living and working conditions. For example, some regions have delayed paying teachers (*China Daily*, 1993b). At a State Council meeting on July 16, 1998, Vice-Premier Li also pointed out that faculty and staff members' housing is a significant problem in universities. Owing to the shortage of housing, some teachers are forced to delay marriage or find that they cannot live with their wives or husbands after their marriages. The single-room apartments provided for most young teachers do not even have private washrooms or kitchens. Worse, some are in dangerously dilapidated condition (*People's Daily* [Overseas Edition], July 16, 1998). How can teachers wholly devote themselves to their profession when they are preoccupied with such difficulties and are not paid on time no matter how much they should actually receive? The government claims that 3.78 billion Yuan was invested from 1997 to 1999 to renovate single-room apartments for young teachers in state-affiliated universities and colleges (Chen, 2000). However, the same provisions have not been made for most who teach in universities or colleges that are administered by provincial and municipal governments. Conditions for elementary and secondary schoolteachers are equally abysmal. Surely China's educators deserve better.

Exemplary teaching brings few rewards. As shown above, in teacher education institutions emphasis is placed on academic work rather than on teaching ability. Promotions result from academic success; there is little reward for masterful teaching. Senior teachers stick to the same old methods they have used for years, preferring to spend their time and energy on more academic pursuits. A few study respondents stated that many teachers are not motivated to put much effort into teaching. This is summed up by both the Chinese and British respondents:

It would have been very helpful if I had taken it [inservice teacher education course] serious. The problem was that the teachers didn't have the incentive to learn although the trainers hoped the trainees would teach more efficiently after training. Young teachers were not interested in teaching skills. They didn't see teaching as a way of getting promoted. (Chinese respondent)

Once the students are in university, the work they do has little relation to what they will do in the future. There is little relation to the chances of getting a good job. If they want to get a good job, they will get it by connections, so their work is not that important. Those who have no connections know that even though they may work very hard, the chances of getting a good job are slim. There is little reward for success in education. (British respondent)

Discussion Summary

Some of the above-mentioned issues are related to curriculum and the design of the programs, and others are broader concerns with the educational system in China. In sum, this discussion makes it clear that current teacher education programs are narrowly designed, with rigid curriculum, excessive focus on

subject training, and insufficient emphasis on teaching skills. Also, courses are theoretical and abstract, and teaching practica are too short to provide adequate preparation for the field. Many teachers arrive in the classroom with little teaching experience. However, the most significant flaws lie in the system itself. Teachers' political and social status is low; their living conditions are poor. There is no reward for success in teaching. People do not have the incentive to teach. These systemic issues must be addressed before real progress can be made in the reform of teacher education programs.

Recommendations

The inescapable conclusion is that the teacher training system in China is not altogether satisfactory and calls for urgent remedial action. During the interviews, attempts were made to examine what could be taken back from the UK and elsewhere in the world and applied successfully to teacher education in China. Based on discussions with this study's respondents and my own personal reflection on current policies and practices in teacher education in China and elsewhere, the following suggestions are offered and explored in the hope that they may help to effect much needed changes in China's teacher education system in China.

Provide effective teacher education for both child and adult educators

A complete and thorough teacher education system should be implemented in China to prepare qualified students to teach not only in elementary and secondary schools, but also in other educational institutions. In the new millennium China is planning to expand its higher education from 7% high school completion to 15% by 2010. The government is also planning to improve the quality of education by reducing class sizes and shifting teaching away from traditional memorization and lecture to more student-centered and constructivist approaches (Grubb, 2000). It is clear that the traditional Virtuoso Model will not be able to meet the new challenges. A new teacher education system is needed. This is time-consuming but urgent.

Broaden the teacher education curriculum

Emphasis should be placed on teaching in subject specialization, and special attention could be given to training in teaching skills. It is insufficient to offer courses such as pedagogy, psychology, and subject teaching methods for teaching skills training. A wide variety of other education courses such as sociology, history, and philosophy of education could be integrated into the teacher education system in order to prepare more effective teachers.

Enhance practice and application in theoretical and methods courses

Reorganization of current courses in pedagogy, psychology, and subject teaching method is imperative in order to wed theory with practice. It is insufficient to teach students theories only. It is more important for students to learn how to apply these theories to their teaching practices in each subject area. New teaching methods such as problem-based learning and collaborative learning could also be attempted in these courses.

Lengthen teaching practica.

The teaching practicum should be extended, occurring more than once during the training period so that students may spend more time in the classroom

before they start their full-time teaching. A new teaching practicum model could be experimented with as well.

Emphasize critical thinking skills in training and practice

Besides subject and teaching skills training, teacher students should also learn critical thinking skills in order to equip themselves to teach their students how to think critically. As stated above, China is implementing a new plan to improve the quality of education by shifting teaching away from traditional memorization and lecture to more student-centered and constructivist approaches that will enhance students' initiative, problem-solving, and creativity. In this regard, critical thinking skills could be instrumental in helping China achieve its goal.

Draw from teacher education practices in other countries

Teachers, especially those of subject teaching method courses, could be sent abroad to see how teachers in other cultures are trained and what methods are used. By this means, different perspectives and useful techniques could be gleaned and tried at home in China. However, it is true that China is still a developing country, and this seems an ambitious plan. An inexpensive alternative could be to form a worldwide network of teacher learning through the Internet, multimedia facilities and learning materials, and videoconferencing (Cheng, 2001). Observing China's current practice of sending so many business people and engineers abroad for training, clearly if the government has a will, they will find a way.

Retain practicing teachers with improved living and working conditions

Measures should be taken to make it unnecessary for teachers to move to other jobs. This cannot be achieved by using administrative measures alone. It must be preceded by reforming the whole teacher education system itself, improving teachers' living and working conditions, enhancing professional support, and changing public perceptions of teaching and teachers in order to make conditions more attractive for teachers to stay.

Draw public attention to teacher education reforms

The roles of teachers' universities or colleges could be subjected to public debate in the hope that helpful suggestions might be supported and implemented. A new teacher education system or model could be explored. The new model could take into consideration the above recommendations, balancing theory with practice, specialization training with pedagogical preparation, and training in teaching skills with critical thinking in educational foundations.

Raise the status of teaching and teachers

Most important of all is the need to raise the political and social status of teachers, to increase their salaries, and to distribute more economic and material benefits to them. The Essentials of China's Educational Reform and Development, the government reform program that set the goals of education development in the 1990s, pledged to increase teachers' income to a level higher than that of the average of employees of state-run enterprises and governmental institutions and to strengthen teacher education (*China Daily*, 1993a). A decade has passed since this resolution was passed in 1993, and the situation has not improved much. At the Third Plenary Session of the Ninth

Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference held in March 2000 in Beijing, the well-being of teachers, especially the low salaries of those in elementary and secondary schools, drew the attention of delegates. Delegate Wang Dan-feng urged the government to make special efforts to solve this problem (*People's Daily* [Overseas Edition], 2000). However, with such a string of unfulfilled promises in the past, it can only be hoped that this time the government will consider the matter seriously and take definitive action.

Conclusion

This study examined many important issues in the current teacher education system in China. These issues pertain to the preparation of teachers to teach both adults and young children, courses offered, teaching practicum, and treatment of teachers. It demonstrated that the teacher education system in China is woefully inadequate. It is narrowly designed with rigid curriculum, excessive focus on subject training, and insufficient emphasis on teaching skills. Furthermore, courses provided for teachers are more theoretical and abstract than practical, and teaching practica are too short to provide adequate preparation for the field. Among all issues discussed, the most important are teachers' low political and social status and poor living conditions. This study calls for urgent remedial action to effect changes in China's teacher education system. Among all recommendations it is suggested that solutions to the latter issue must precede other changes. Moreover, many other pressing issues face teacher education in China today such as training and treatment of teachers in rural and remote areas, preparation of teachers to teach environmental education, and the implications of technological changes for teacher education. These topics should be addressed elsewhere in the near future.

It is believed that China is by no means the only country that is challenged by the above-mentioned issues in teacher education. A number of studies (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2000; Goldberg & Proctor, 2000; Smithers & Robinson, 2003) have demonstrated that industrialized countries such as Canada, the United States, and the UK also face similar problems. Shortages of teachers and recruitment and retention of quality teachers are pressing issues facing many schools in the world. Many countries, including Canada, are looking for alternatives for teacher education and staff development. It is hoped that the findings of this study will shed new light on the continual search for solutions in many other countries in the world.

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