

Fall 2001
Vol. 3 No. 3

Perspectives and analysis for those who serve China

China SOURCE



Graham Cousins

The Marketization of Education in China

Gary Waldron

China has a long history of valuing education. During imperial times, examinations were a meritorious path to civil service. These examinations favored rote learning of Confucian classics and produced an intellectual elite. In Maoist China, great strides were made in literacy and basic education. The emphasis was on political education over academic as it was better to be “red” than “expert.” Higher education followed a Soviet model that focused on technical studies over liberal arts. Later, the Cultural Revolution led to the closing of many schools, persecution of teachers, and students being sent to the countryside to learn from the peasants.

In the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping’s policy of modernization and opening China to the world led to dramatic reforms in education. The goal of education became serving China’s national modernization and an economy undergoing market reforms. Nine-year compulsory education was instituted in the 1986 Compulsory Education Act.

By the mid-90s, adult literacy stood at 74 percent. National college entrance exams once again opened the door to the nation’s universities. Students who passed the test were assigned to universities, guaranteed a free education and, following graduation, assigned jobs.

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people with high morals, creativity and critical thinking skills. However, a national debate about the efficacy of the Chinese educational system continues. Recent reforms have led to the marketization of education in China making more educational options available at all levels, at least in the urban areas, but at a steep cost. This educational system continues to make lurching advances toward meeting the social and economic needs of an emerging global power.

Disparity and Lack of Funds

The Chinese educational system faces great challenges. Educational attainment and funding show widespread disparity with the average educational attainment in China today being 5.6 years. The rate of enrollment in higher education is below the average for Asian nations and low-income countries worldwide. Per-pupil expenditures are disproportionately higher in rich provinces compared to those in poorer provinces. Urban children and those from wealthy provinces are much more likely to attend secondary school (about 2.2 times) compared to children from rural areas and low-income provinces.¹ While differentiations in dropout rates between boys and girls are modest in primary school, they vary sharply in secondary schools. In rural areas more females drop out of secondary school than males. Excessive school fees have driven out many poorer students.² Higher educational institutions capture only one fifth of secondary school graduates indicating that alternative methods of financing higher education, such as scholarships, student loans and work-study programs, need to be further developed.

The condition of Chinese education in many remote regions and rural areas is deplorable and deteriorating further. According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), China ranks 145th out of 153 nations in per capita educational spending. Educational expenditures in China have remained at less than 2.4 percent of the GDP throughout the 1990s, one of the lowest rates in the world—lower than that of most developing nations and China's neigh-



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boring Asian nations.³ (By contrast, China's military spending is 14 percent of its GDP.) In many areas, up to one third of educational funding comes from local or provincial sources while in numerous rural areas a smaller portion of the budget is allocated to education than mandated by the central government.

Universal nine-year education remains an elusive goal and up to one quarter of the Chinese population remains illiterate. The official primary school enrollment figures often do not take into account children of illegal migrant workers and additional children born to families in violation of the one child policy. There is over funding of the higher grades while only two-fifths of expenditures goes to elementary and junior high levels. In some rural

areas the actual per pupil expenditure is less than 10 yuan (US\$1.20) per year.⁴ Rural parents are beginning to question whether schooling is a way out of poverty in modern China.⁵ Even hard working students often have little hope of continuing past sixth grade as middle school fees skyrocket. In addition, there is inequality in Chinese education between the majority Han people and China's ethnic minorities. The minority illiteracy rate is almost double that of the Han majority.⁶

To counter the continued erosion in public education, new initiatives, such as the China Youth Development Foundation's Project Hope, have been established to raise much needed funds for the improvement of educational conditions in China's poorer areas. Project Hope has provided drop-

Brent Fulton, Editor • Julia Grosser, Managing Editor • Dona Diehl, Layout and Design

ChinaSource
Partnering Resources with Vision

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outs the opportunity to return to school, built 5,256 Hope elementary schools and conferred scholarships. Similar projects include New York based Support Education in Rural China (SERC) and Rural Education Assistance and Development (READ) both of which seek to improve school conditions in rural China.⁷

The Marketization of Education

China has been aggressively encouraging a diversity of educational options. The government is allowing the establishment of *minban*, or “people-run,” institutions and *shehui lilian*, or institutions run by social forces that are adopting funding strategies that rely on multiple channels. Universities are setting up their own businesses including commissioned courses, adult education and consultant services.⁸ In the mid-90s, tuition was being charged for a special class of self-paying students who often did not have test scores high enough to enter the university the traditional way. By the year 2000, every student was being charged tuition and costs were increasing rapidly.⁹

China moved from a centralized and standardized curriculum to one in which the State Education Commission sets curriculum guidelines and institutions are then free to adapt it to the needs of the local economy. The college entrance exam is being replaced by provincial level and, in some cases, city level exams. Students now have a greater say in what schools they wish to attend and this has injected an element of competition into the educational system that had hitherto been non-existent.

Teacher Crisis

China faces a crisis in the teaching profession. Receding central government funding for education has led to chronically low and, in many cases, unpaid salaries. A study conducted by the Educational Worker’s Trade Union in 2000, found that two-thirds of the teachers in 125 regions were owed \$85 million in back pay.¹⁰ The average annual income per capita for teachers is 2,724 yuan or roughly US\$330. The

State Education Commission has reported that only 13 percent of primary school teachers had attained higher education qualifications at sub-degree level. Current Normal School enrollments show a gender imbalance with some schools having as low as 12 percent enrollment of male students preparing for the teaching profession.¹¹ Efforts to increase the level of teacher training have often backfired. Many teachers who come from rural areas into cities for a year or two of additional training fail to return. A new teacher education curriculum is being tested in the fall of 2001 and the State Education Commission hopes that all new primary teachers by 2010 will be at least graduates of three-year teacher education programs.

Focus on Higher Education

Chinese leaders theorize that in order to modernize the country, China needs more highly trained party officials, business managers and military

officers. The quality of human resources will be important in determining China’s market competitiveness. Therefore, they have made decisions that favor the expansion of university education over that of basic lower grade education. This has led to decrees for increased enrollment and the building of new schools. In the fall of 2000, colleges and universities were told to enroll 20-30 percent more freshmen. Private universities are opening, as are branch campuses of established institutions.

In 1993, the Chinese government reiterated its commitment to actively encourage and support individuals and social institutions to establish schools. In the mid-90s, the State Education Commission launched Project 221 whose purpose was to raise 100 key universities to world-class status.¹² By the year 2000, two hundred eleven Project 221 institutions had received a total investment of 15 billion yuan and now take up 72 percent of research fund-

Ministry of Education goals for 2001

- 1 **Universalize** nine-year compulsory education, accelerate the development of secondary education and continue to expand higher education.
- 2 **Adjust** the educational structure to meet the demand of national development and the development of the west.
- 3 **Develop** quality education and quality teacher education.
- 4 **Emphasize** innovation in educational management, deepen the reform of educational administration and employ laws and regulations for school management.
- 5 **Speed up** the construction of information technology education and build up the system of life-long education.
- 6 **Ensure** the development of world-class, high-level universities, encourage university participation in the “Tenth Five-year Plan,” and establish 15 National University High-tech Parks.
- 7 **Strive** to increase the government’s educational investment and improve working and living conditions for schoolteachers.
- 8 **Implement** the National Language Law and reinforce information management of oral and written languages.
- 9 **Reinforce** the Party’s construction for “thought and political work” in higher education institutions and correct unhealthy tendencies.

Source: China Education Daily, Jan 15, 2001. The Ministry of Education changed its name to the State Education Commission several years ago. The older name is still used on occasion.

ing, 54 percent of the value of research and instruction facilities and equipment, and 31 percent of library stock books.¹³

The remaining universities face severe cuts in central government funding. The State Education Commission repositioned itself to no longer run schools and direct curriculum but to set general policies and regulations and allow individual institutions more administrative autonomy. Many university presidents and leaders were unprepared for this shift in authority. Until then, they had largely been responsible for implementing central government instructions; suddenly they were responsible for governing the institution. The State Education Commission found itself providing additional training for university leaders while universities were forced to look for provincial and local funding sources and new partnerships with companies. They began running businesses and charging students tuition to continue operating while professors found outside jobs to make up for low pay. Often, the instructors spent more time at these jobs than in the classroom.

By the mid-90s there were over 1200 private colleges.¹⁴ About half were trade schools while the remainder were academic institutions. There are three types of private schools. The first type is funded and owned by private investors who run the school like a business. The second type involves Chinese business firms or individuals in collaboration with overseas investors. These are joint venture schools oriented toward making a profit. The third type is owned and operated by Chinese enterprises or non-governmental departments, institutions or communities. Many schools have retired government officials or military men on their boards, which helps to overcome strict government regulations. Critics, however, contend that private schools contribute to social inequality and exacerbate regional differences and social stratification.

Conclusion

Education experts offer a host of recommendations for improving China's



Per-pupil expenditures are disproportionately higher in rich provinces compared to those in poorer provinces.

educational system.¹⁵ These include increasing student retention in primary and secondary schools, relocating schools, recruiting more teachers and reforming curriculum. Necessary funding reforms include eliminating tuition and fees and the introduction of vouchers and subsidies to remove obstacles to basic education. Teacher education and compensation need to be improved. Overall government support for education needs to be increased as well as more flexible regulations for private schools. Partnerships between businesses and academic communities need to be strengthened for education to be more responsive to the labor market. Scholarship programs need to be created to foster the development of poor, but qualified, students.

In the new century, China's educational system faces even more fundamental changes. There is an emerging market that creates educational services as commodities provided by competitive suppliers. Government regulations now allow for more flexibility to establish various schools and universities. With the reduction of state subsidies, there are multiple channels of educational financing, most of which are coming directly from consumers, and this makes the educational institutions more responsive to the demands of the marketplace. With school funding more directly related to student enrollment, the educational market will

heighten competition and lead to efficiency and effectiveness. Parents who are willing to spend money on their children's education have more choices for quality educational services. This reflects the changing values of China's people as decentralization results in greater reliance on individuals and market forces.

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Private education in China

Lisa Nagle

Chengdu is a city of nine million people located in Sichuan Province deep in the interior of the People's Republic of China. It is the closest city to the home of what many Americans regard as the most famous image of China—the panda. But Chengdu is also the home to something that is much more surprising—a private school that looks like a movie set. Private schools are a new phenomenon in a country where the government has long assumed exclusive control for education. Today, though, private schools are flourishing. The first private school established in China in over forty years is found in Chengdu. Guangya School was established in June, 1992 by Mr. Qing Guangya, who modeled the school after sets that he had designed for movies in his previous career.

I visited the Guangya School in December of 1996 and met with Mr. Qing, its founder and owner, to explore the possibility of some of his students coming to visit the United States. As a new organization, Pacific Link International Exchange Students (PLIES) was working to partner with private schools in China whose students wanted the opportunity to study English and learn more about American culture. I could tell right away that the Guangya School was unlike any school I had ever seen



Guangya School in Chengdu, China.

in China. Most Chinese public schools are drab looking with dusty chalkboards as the only teaching tool in the classroom. By contrast, the Guangya School amazed me with its brightly colored classrooms, a library building built like a country lodge and a beautiful lake in the middle of the school campus. Inside the classrooms, students and faculty enjoyed access to the latest computer technology. The students had come from all over China to take advantage of the opportunities and resources that only such an elite private school could offer them—and all of this located in the midst of rice

paddies an hour west of Chengdu city.

The development of private education in China has important consequences for both its economy and culture. The rapidly growing economy has encouraged many non-governmental agencies as well as individuals to devote themselves to new private schools. Following the economic reform of 1978, more than 50,000 private schools have been founded, ranging from pre-schools to colleges. Approximately 10 million students now study in private schools staffed by 400,000 teachers and support personnel.

The senior high schools in China are divided into three groups: key public schools, common public schools, and private schools. The best students often attend the key public schools, which are famous for sending more than 90 percent of their students to enroll in colleges or universities in China. The common public schools, by contrast, are not quite as prestigious, and the students there are not as likely to attend college. The third group is private schools. The teachers working at these schools are retired from the key public schools, so they possess exceptional experience and skills.

Photos courtesy Lisa Nagle



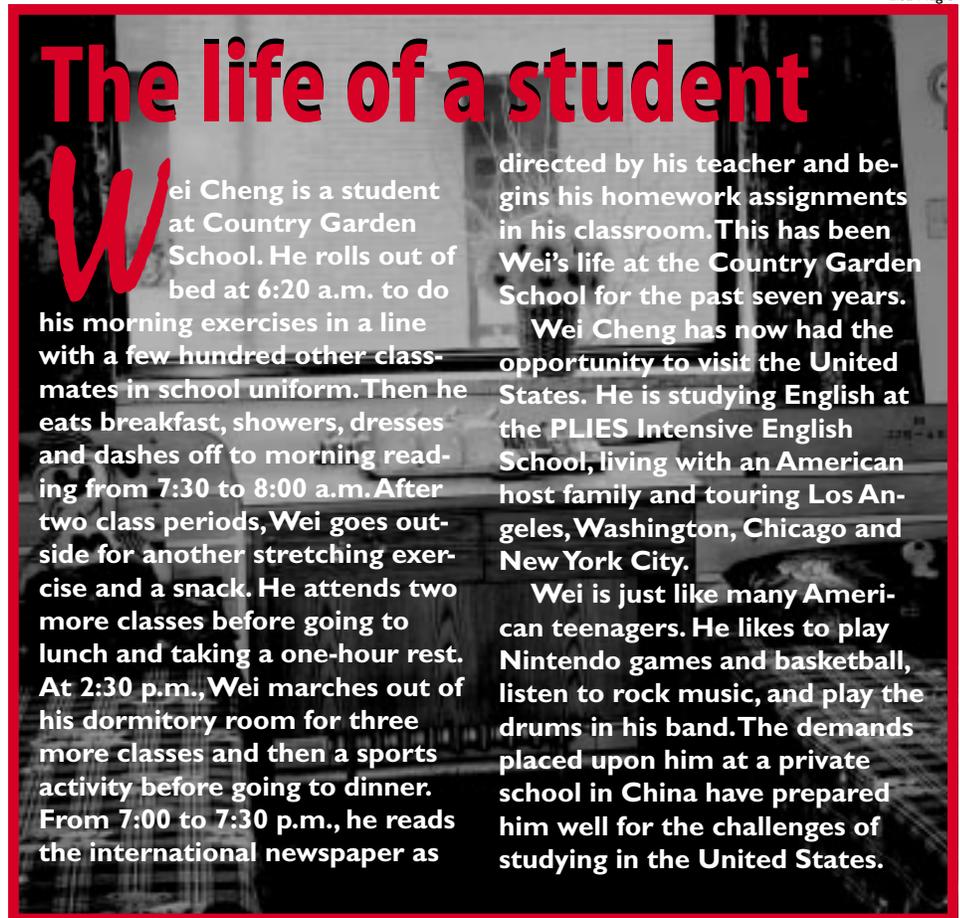
Jr. High students at Guangya School.

Many of the students who attend private schools dream of attending college in the United States. Since they did not perform well enough on the exam to enter a key public school, they are pursuing the alternative route of attending an elite private school. They hope that such a school will prepare them for college in the United States or to begin a lucrative career with a foreign company in China.

There are three different types of private schools in terms of their ownership, financing and management. The first type is funded and owned by private investors. Some of them are former educational professionals, but most are successful businessmen. For them, running schools is running businesses. The second type of private school is owned by Chinese business firms or individuals in collaboration with foreign investors. These schools are joint ventures between Chinese and overseas partners with the goal of making profits. The third type is owned and administered by Chinese enterprises or non-governmental departments, institutions or communities.

Private schools are subject to the authority of the local educational authorities. With few exceptions, all private schools have to fulfill the core curriculum set for any public school by the State Education Commission (Ministry of Education). Usually, the local municipal education commission ensures that private schools are politically correct and monitors their educational revenues and expenditures.

Private schools in China are very expensive. The tuition at the best private schools is greater than two years wages for an average Chinese worker. However, private schools are within reach of China's rapidly emerging middle class and business elite. Many of these successful entrepreneurs did not receive a formal education because they were children during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and early 1970s when schools were closed so that Chinese youth could further their nation's revolution. The combination of the lack of opportunity to have received an education themselves, and the economic re-



The life of a student

Wei Cheng is a student at Country Garden School. He rolls out of bed at 6:20 a.m. to do his morning exercises in a line with a few hundred other classmates in school uniform. Then he eats breakfast, showers, dresses and dashes off to morning reading from 7:30 to 8:00 a.m. After two class periods, Wei goes outside for another stretching exercise and a snack. He attends two more classes before going to lunch and taking a one-hour rest. At 2:30 p.m., Wei marches out of his dormitory room for three more classes and then a sports activity before going to dinner. From 7:00 to 7:30 p.m., he reads the international newspaper as

directed by his teacher and begins his homework assignments in his classroom. This has been Wei's life at the Country Garden School for the past seven years. Wei Cheng has now had the opportunity to visit the United States. He is studying English at the PLIES Intensive English School, living with an American host family and touring Los Angeles, Washington, Chicago and New York City.

Wei is just like many American teenagers. He likes to play Nintendo games and basketball, listen to rock music, and play the drums in his band. The demands placed upon him at a private school in China have prepared him well for the challenges of studying in the United States.

sources they enjoy today, impels many of these new Chinese business leaders to spend whatever it takes to provide the best possible education for their own children—or often their only child—at a private school.

The very idea of private education seems incompatible with the nature of the government of the People's Republic of China. But private education has been endorsed by the central government in Beijing as a means of easing the state's financial burden. The government sees other benefits as well. The Ninth People's Congress emphasized the importance of education and science for China's prosperity and development in the 21st century. The official "China's Educational Reform and Development Scheme for the 21st Century" explicitly "welcomes and encourages," "gives full support to" and "strengthens regulations" regarding private institutions. The Chinese government envisions an integrated educational system with public schools playing the leading role and private schools

providing the same services to a different clientele of students and parents.

In order to control and guide private schools, in 1997 the State Education Commission issued "Regulations Governing Private Education." These regulations officially legalized private education so that all registered private schools are licensed as government-run educational institutions. Private schools are still controlled by the central government in Beijing as they must meet requirements for faculty quality, school management, facilities and curriculum to obtain a registration certificate from the government.

The story of the Country Garden school in Guangzhou is typical. It opened in September 1994 with 1,700 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The student body more than doubled within six years. Country Garden now offers 102 classes taught by 960 faculty members. It is one of the largest private schools in Guangdong Province, where Guangzhou (previ-

Continued on page 12



"Foreign Teachers" in China

Michelle Moore

Chinese education is impacted by expatriate teachers who choose to teach English as well as other courses in China. The opportunity to be a "foreign teacher," as expatriate teachers are often referred to in China, allows one to make a difference in the education of individuals in numerous ways. While teachers in general have the opportunity to impact students' lives through enhancing their education, in China quite often expatriate teachers can offer strong education in disciplines that might otherwise have had weaker teachers. For example, native speaking English teachers are strong "English Listening and Speaking" teachers, often replacing Chinese teachers with weaker English speaking skills.

In teaching Chinese students, an expatriate teacher contributes to a well-rounded, valuable educational experience and may therefore gain respect and influence among the Chinese people. The personal influence of a respected expatriate teacher can have a considerable effect on the values and beliefs of students. Such teachers also influence the general education of school administrators, colleagues, merchants and others as they help the Chinese people increase their understanding of "Western ways." This is becoming more important to the Chinese as Western influences increase in their once closed society. This article presents a brief analysis of an expatriate's impact upon education while teaching in China and also gives insight into life as a foreign teacher.

The Role of the "Foreign Teacher"

The teacher-student relationship is very important in China. In Chinese

culture, students have been taught to respect their teachers and work hard to please them; Chinese students look up to their teachers. At a young age, they learn that education itself is a privilege, and studies should be taken seriously. Therefore, if the expatriate teacher does not educate well, the students will lament and wish for a better instructor. This means that expatriate teachers need to continually strive to teach well. Since teaching is a job without much supervision, they must keep a check on themselves so that they do not become lazy. They should work hard to put forth their best efforts in educating their students so that they will not do a disservice to them.

The encouragement and enthusiasm of expatriate teachers is very important for their students. This is obvious to the foreign teachers because most of them are "students" of the Chinese language themselves—at least at some level. Whether expatriates are

learning "survival Chinese" or adding to the foundation of their Chinese knowledge, they know that encouragement is important in their learning process. When the "foreign experts" offer encouragement to their Chinese students, the effects can be profound resulting in highly motivated students of English.

In my experience in China, I was amazed at the strength of the expatriate teaching force. Even though many of them were not formally trained in education, I found that most did an excellent job. In order to ensure quality education, the experienced ones often shared materials as well as tips and techniques with their peers. They discussed what worked in their classrooms and the teaching methods that seemed best for the Chinese culture. They shared the best ways to teach specific concepts as well as outstanding assessment and testing methods. This information sharing between expatriate

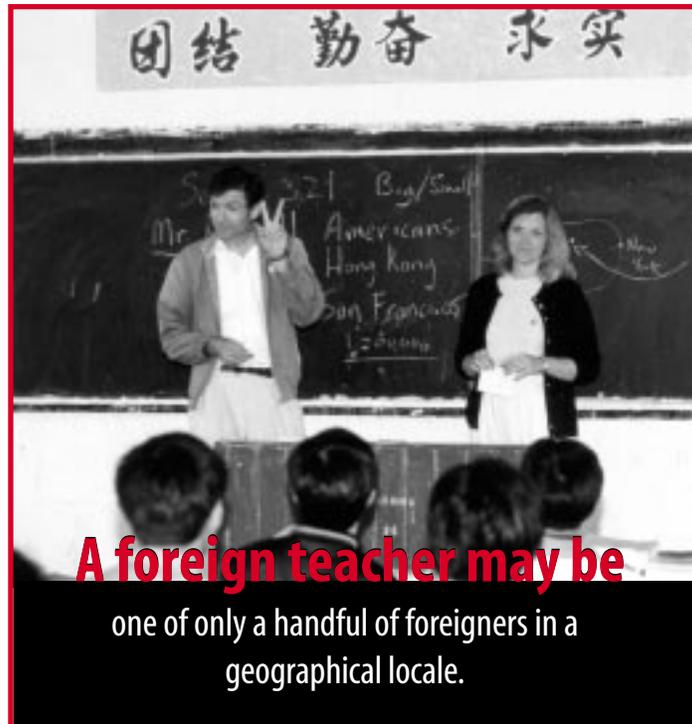
English teachers was often broadened to include Chinese English teachers.

Many expatriates work at “teacher colleges” where Chinese English teachers are trained for their public education system. The expatriate teachers have the opportunity to influence the Chinese public educators in how they can more effectively teach English in their classrooms. Since Western methods of teaching are more interactive and much less “rote” than Chinese methods, expatriate teachers are often perceived as charismatic in their style. The Chinese instructors become excited about being taught by native speakers and emulate their teaching methods and style. With encouragement from a foreign teacher, they become very motivated about teaching in their public school positions.

Personal Influence Through Relationships

As stated earlier, Chinese students are generally very respectful, treat their teachers with honor and consider it a privilege to spend time with them. They have a welcoming spirit, are very generous in their hospitality and love to help their teachers go sightseeing, make purchases and settle into Chinese life. Chinese students are often quick to come to the aid of their foreign teachers when asked to be an interpreter.

Expatriate teachers often try to befriend their students and form relationships with them. Many teachers entertain students in their homes so that they can get to know them better. Students enjoy this and often respond in kind with invitations to their homes to meet their families. Many schools have “English Corner,” which is a gathering of Chinese people who want to practice English with each other. Foreign teachers are welcomed and encouraged to participate in these and frequently are



the ones responsible for organizing “English Corner” at their university.

Clubs provide another opportunity for teachers to get to know their students. During my time as a foreign teacher in China, I sponsored a Future Business Leaders Club for students. A new and different experience for my Chinese students, the club periodically organized lectures by guest speakers from the business community. Some of these speakers were alumni who could share helpful advice about the business world. Others were important businessmen and women who shared information about various local industries and companies. In the spring, the club sponsored a special week of speakers during the long lunch/break time before afternoon classes. Throughout the year, the club members organized fundraisers gaining hands-on business experience while at the same time obtaining financial support for the club. While my students enjoyed this experience, meeting and working with them on committees within this “club atmosphere” allowed me the opportunity to really get to know them and form close relationships with them.

Foreign teachers often sponsor dramatic productions and other types of

activities. As teachers and Chinese students work together toward a common goal, camaraderie develops and these activities allow relationships to grow deeper than the normal student-teacher relationship. Many teachers find these opportunities to be the most rewarding part of their job.

“Celebrity” Status

Another part of teaching in China may involve somewhat of a “celebrity status.” A foreign teacher may be one of only a handful of foreigners in a geographical locale. Teachers can use the attention that being a foreigner brings to further their opportunities for relationships with the Chinese

people. Often they are invited to dinners, plays and performances in places of honor because they are foreigners. Television cameras appear when they enter the performance hall or move their way when the audience is shown. Attention such as this allows the expatriate teacher to show good manners and respect to Chinese people of position and influence. The end result may be that the teacher can form influential relationships with people of power.

Some expatriates may feel uncomfortable about the attention they receive. Although it may be difficult for them to enjoy it, it is best if they can embrace their “celebrity status.” By trying to hide foreign looks, they may remain frustrated and ruin their time in China by fighting the undeniable position as a “foreign face.” They should remain humble and yet hospitable in addressing their status as a foreigner. This prevents alienation from society and allows the teacher greater impact among students. However, this “celebrity status” may begin to wane as China becomes more Western.

Providing “Western” Understanding

Today, China remains vastly different from the West in most areas, but it

is quickly gaining Western influences in the large cities. As Western influences become more prevalent, the contribution of the expatriate teacher also expands. Since many English students will have opportunities to work with Western companies, students benefit from expatriate teachers because it allows them to have face-to-face contact with Westerners. An understanding of Western manners and culture is beneficial to them while strong English skills give them an advantage in the workforce. The skills and experience that expatriate teachers can provide their students makes the entire process of dealing with foreigners far less intimidating for them when they enter the marketplace.

Chinese people are also gaining more opportunities for travel into English speaking areas. Today, it is far easier for Chinese people to travel outside of China than it was only a few years ago. After students graduate, whether they travel for business purposes or for personal enjoyment, strong English skills enable them to take advantage of opportunities that come their way.

English skills also allow Chinese people to better understand and communicate with those outside of China. Solid English skills allow them to articulate their positions on issues without the hindrance of an interpreter. Via the Internet, they are able to communicate with other English speakers all over the world. They can read books written in English that will broaden their horizons. The contributions that the expatriate teacher brings are very valuable to the Chinese educational system.

The Survival of the Expatriate Teacher

Because of their appreciation of expatriate teachers, Chinese universities have an administrator assigned to take good care of them. Generally, these administrators are a very important part of the support system for the foreign teacher. When the foreign teacher first arrives, the administrator is the liaison between society and the expatriate in important matters such as work permits

and travel documents.

The first days and weeks in China can be a very difficult time of adjustment for many expatriates. The Chinese understand that Westerners need extensive support and in many instances make special provisions for their needs. Foreign teachers may have air conditioning while Chinese teachers around them simply endure the heat. In addition, they are generous in

blame China for marriage and relationship difficulties and for health problems. It is tempting to forget that life in America has its very real hardships. It is tempting to forget that it is not China, but God who controls all that is allowed to enter one's life.

Expatriates must keep their perspective and maintain their vision while guarding their spiritual health. Foreign teachers in China go through great gy-

Don Picker



understanding the adjustment of outsiders who are unaccustomed to their system of water supply, sewage disposal and transportation.

Maintaining a Christian Perspective

Difficulties in adjustment may catch the foreign teacher by surprise. Many expatriates have the misperception that because God led them in a special way to an unusual land they will be an exceptional Christian. In reality, people continue to struggle abroad just as they struggle in America. Satan is not on sabbatical. Expatriates must keep a perspective on reality and their humanness. The culture shock of living in a new land is challenging and it can be a "hostile environment" which can lend itself to discouragement and despair.

There is a great temptation for the expatriate teacher to blame China for all the woes of life. It is tempting to

rations in order to make sure that they maintain their physical health. They boil their water, peel their fruit and avoid eating raw vegetables. Yet many Christians struggle to maintain their spiritual health, which is vital for them to thrive in China. Christians should be very careful to guard their quiet time of Bible study and prayer each day. They should be looking for ways they can be fed and edified spiritually with the same vigilance they use to maintain their physical health. In this way, Christian "foreign experts" in China can maintain their spiritual health that they might fulfill their desire of serving China and contributing to the country and its people.

Michelle Moore, M.B.A. lived and taught in China for four years and continues to be active in China service.

Getting Out of the Mud

As China's rapidly changing market reform enters the 21st century, China's educational reform, in contrast, seems to experience little change. Nevertheless, changes in education are occurring. While these changes have not caught the attention of many people, nonetheless, their meaning is more far-reaching than most realize.

Wandering in a Dead End Street

Since the beginning of their civilization, the Chinese have always held education in very high regard. Their old saying, "Every pursuit in life is inferior to obtaining knowledge" expressed this attitude. A person with great learning, by passing examinations, could, step by step, climb all the way up to a high position in the imperial court. The examinations started at the local level, gradually moved up to the provincial level, and finally, the emperor himself would administer the examination at the highest, national level. This ancient system created numerous opportunities for many but, at the same time, fostered the attitude among the Chinese people that becoming an expert in ancient Chinese literature was the only way to a good, prosperous and honorable life.

In those days, studying was a static event and memorization was the key to success. Consequently, becoming a "book worm" and memorizing everything became the only option in education. This feudal educational system was abolished when the Qing dynasty was overthrown and China became a republic. Western style education was introduced in China. However, the old way of education—memorization—would not die easily. Parents, teachers and school officials today still regard test scores as the most important aspect of education and memorization is still the key for doing well on those tests.

After the 1949 revolution, the new government centralized the educational system in China; however, the methods and styles of teaching, learning and testing were basically unchanged. In 1964, chairman Mao spoke out against the then existing educational system as "treating the students as we would have treated our enemies." Mao believed the students were completely out of touch with society and reality and were not learning anything worthwhile. He said the existing educational system produced only the "counter-revolutionary" element in students and was seen as the classic oppression that "capitalists" imposed on peasants. Therefore, in 1966 the "Cultural Revolution" began which virtually shut

down all colleges and universities in China. Then, starting in 1968 and for the next nine years, more than twelve million middle school students were sent to rural farms to be "re-educated." All university teachers and professors were also sent to farmlands or factories for the same purpose. From 1966 until 1977 when Mao died, China went through twelve years of an educational vacuum. During this time there was no elementary education, no higher education and no exams. This was Mao's way of resolving China's educational problem, and he called this China's "revolutionary period" of education.

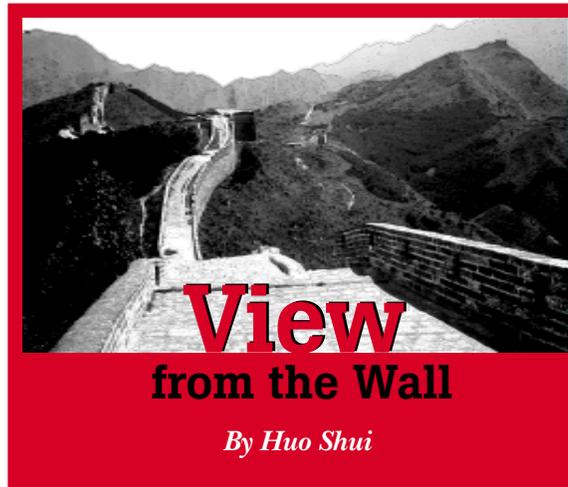
Deng Xiaoping reinstated college entrance examinations at the end of 1977. By that time, virtually all Chinese felt that it was one of the most urgent and important tasks for the country's post Mao era. People once again regained hope in their educational system. In 1978, China's educational system began a gradual restoration, returning to the old system.

As population increases, the demand for educational institutions also increases—especially for colleges and universities. The central government in Beijing had total control over education in China and allocated all funding. However, since Beijing was not able to provide adequate financing, education in China fell far behind the country's need. China currently ranks about number 145 in the world for per person educational spending. This is less than

many third world countries and far less than the United States and most European countries.

Almost all families in China want their children to go to college, but there is just not enough room in Chinese universities to absorb all the students. As a result, pressure begins to build on students early on—even while they are still in elementary school. In order to enter a good school, students must work hard memorizing material to the best of their ability in hopes of doing well on tests. Attending college means a good opportunity for a decent job after graduation, which ultimately brings honor to the family. On the other hand, not to get into college brings a high likelihood of being stuck in an undesirable job with no future. Therefore, there is much pressure on the students to do well in the annual national college entrance examination.

The cruel reality of "only the best survive" has resulted in numerous family tragedies. Students are forced to become memorization machines while creativity and pro-active learning are completely killed off. Students begin college with the knowledge they have memorized, but they cannot be creative in developing new ways of thinking and research. After their graduation, they simply cannot meet the needs of a rapidly developing China. Without healthy economic devel-



View from the Wall

By *Huo Shui*

opment, the government does not have the financial resources to build universities or train more qualified teachers. Thus, it becomes a never-ending circle. As time goes by, more and more teachers, parents and students have come to realize that this vicious cycle has brought the entire national educational system to a dead end street. Without reform, Chinese children cannot look forward to a bright future and full modernization can never become a reality in China.

A Non-political Approach to Education

Many attempts have been made by various educational institutions to improve and reform China's existing educational system. Starting in the early 1990s, many universities began to recognize that the major need of the market was for people with practical skills in technology and business. Although universities were unable to supply this need of the business community, by efficiently utilizing the resources they already had available, separate vocational training programs were started for non-college students. These programs now meet that need and also help the university and teachers to earn extra income. Suddenly, like wild flowers, all kinds of vocational training centers started to bloom throughout the country. Non-college students are now able to obtain nationally recognized certificates or diplomas by passing examinations after completing required courses acquired via the classroom or self-instruction. The popularity of TV also makes learning through televised educational programs a reality. Opening to the outside world helped English language learning become an emphasis among the youth. All of this is shaping up to what can be called an "adult education" or "self-instructional" fever in the entire country. Every evening, classrooms in middle or grade schools throughout China are full of adult stu-

dents participating in educational classes. For the first time in Chinese history, education is being driven by market demands.

However, even with the new emphasis on market driven education, and even though this has created opportunities for college professors to earn ad-



Pressure begins to build on students early on—even while they are still in elementary school.

ditional income, it still has not changed the fact that the existing education puts more emphasis on test scores than it does on true abilities. For most students, the goal is still to get into traditional colleges and universities that have very limited space. Many people have suggested that the government relax the requirements for establishing new institutions of higher education and allow civilians—and even foreign capital—to build new universities. Reform will come, they believe, by building more universities, raising the educational quality of middle and grade schools and reducing the workload of students. This proposal was elevated all the way to the People's Congress where it received overwhelming support and also caught the attention of China's top leaders. In order to arrive at a common understanding of the issue and to end the cycle of wandering in the existing dead end educational street, a national meeting on educational reform was called for in Beijing in 1999.

During this meeting, what surprised

people was that most of the current Ministry of Education leadership was not interested in allowing civilians to build new universities. Fierce arguments broke out regarding "control of education." It was then that the public finally began to understand why the Chinese government would allow civilian owned businesses and private enterprises, but would not allow civilians to start new universities. By allowing the private sector to open private universities, the government feared that private university administrations might not follow its direction in educational matters and politics. The Communist party must maintain full control of China's education—especially on the college level. If this were not so, would students be willing to submit to party authority? Obviously, the scope of this meeting had become very political and exceeded the original intent of improving the existing educational system.

As this national conference on education was about to end without having achieved any concrete results, Premier Zhu Rongji gave a speech to the attendees. He made two points regarding the future of education. First, the Ministry of Education should guarantee that all students in China have access to schools. Second, education in China must adopt a multi-pronged approach to building new schools. Education must be treated as an investment or business, not as the duty of the Communist party. With this speech, Zhu shed new light on the direction of educational reform in China.

Allowing for Educational Privatization

For the first time in over 2000 years, the educational system in China is experiencing real changes, including the following.

1. The central government eliminated all educational agencies or bureaus other than the Ministry of Education. All previous authorities were

transferred to the Ministry of Education or local educational bureaus.

2. Enrollment in colleges and universities was expanded and civilians are allowed to run and manage dormitories and cafeterias as businesses.

3. Teaching materials and the evaluation system were improved.

4. Students are allowed to transfer, take time off, audit classes and graduate as they complete all the required courses.

5. Last, but most importantly, the government no longer subsidizes students' tuition and no longer distributes jobs to new college graduates. This means that higher education in China will be market driven and not dependent on government funding for survival. When students go to college, it will be their own personal decision and investment. They will no longer rely on the party to provide for them.

At the same time, various private and joint venture colleges officially entered the educational arena. There are increasing numbers of private and joint venture kindergartens, elementary schools and middle schools. Many colleges are now concerned with their ability to attract sufficient numbers of students. In 2001, the national college entrance examination will be held twice during the year, once in the summer and once in the winter. Students today worry less about whether they can get into college, but more about which college they should attend and the kind of jobs they can find after graduation. The subject of "political education," that had been a requirement for many years, has been eliminated from the examination. The educational slogan has shifted from "examination based education" to "quality based education." Finally, education in China, has evolved from being politically driven to being market driven.

Measuring Up to International Standards

Although education in China has just gone through exciting transformations, it still has a long way to go to measure up to international standards.

China has just reached the goal of offering nine years of government sponsored education to every citizen. However, tenth to twelfth grade education is still not available to all. It is only recently that the Chinese have begun to accept the idea of vocational and special education. In colleges, the nation has just begun to allow different kinds of higher education and improvement in teaching materials. It is still unclear how private and public schools will be able to conduct a uniform evaluation of students. Will foreign investment be allowed in to build new schools without Chinese partners? Above all, what is the true nature of education? If it is not for political purposes, might it be for money? At present, Chinese educators have no clear answers to any of these questions; nevertheless, these are questions China must face. Education is an investment. How should it be developed in the context of ethics and virtues? How should the next generation be raised? These issues urgently require responses. Although no one may have all the answer, there is one thing we know for sure: education in China can no longer afford to go back to the old days of the dead end street.

Huo Shui is a former government political analyst who writes from outside China. Translation is by Tian Hui.

The Marketization of China's Education

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Private Education

Continued from page 6

ously known to Westerners as Canton) thrives as home to much of the rapid development of the Chinese economy. The school emphasizes the importance of moral education, patriotism, teaching "life's ideals" and encouraging service. All of the students live at the school, sometimes far from their parents, thus making the school responsible for much more than academic progress.

Private schools in China do differ from schools in America. Even in private schools, students are required to attend political training meetings and moral education classes that are regulated by the central government in Beijing. Chinese students are much less likely to be exposed to any teachings about religion, especially Christianity. Nevertheless, one school that I visited in China demonstrated that such ideas are taking root there. As I toured the school's campus, I noticed three words painted in English in large letters on the outside of one of the classroom buildings: faith, hope and love. Those words point toward the best hope for the future of China, its private schools and its students.

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The fundamental question underlying much public discussion regarding China always seems to be, What is the best way to change China? Can we facilitate change by engagement or by punishment? The discussion surrounding selecting Beijing to host the 2008 Olympics is no different, yet it ignores the fact that China is already rapidly changing due to internal dynamics, and that external actors have important but distinctly secondary roles in the drama of China's ongoing transformation.

Much opposition to a Beijing Olympics is rooted in out-dated notions of China as a communist monolith. Some see the Olympics as merely a platform for the Party to trumpet its ideology and achievements. To be sure, the Party will try to use the Olympics to enhance its weak legitimacy, but other levels of society are celebrating the decision for different reasons. All sectors of a dynamic society will be actively seeking to gain advantage. As Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote in the *New York Times* (7/14/2001), "...there is a growing sense that Chinese Communism has become a facade for a society that no longer operates according to Marxist tenets.... The Olympics in Beijing may be a triumph for China, but by intensifying the pressures for change the games are quite unlikely to be a triumph for China's waning Communism."

It is important to distinguish between social change and opening up (which is certain) and political transformation in the near future (which is highly unlikely). The main impact of hosting the Olympics will not be the event itself, but the process set in train by key deadlines. Investment, trade, and tourism are driving incentives, but the resulting dynamics will include the further opening up of Chinese society to the outside world, with two-way ex-

changes, visits, and joint projects in many fields. All of China knows that significant changes are required to host successful games, and public expectations will grow for more openness. The Olympics will accelerate that pace of openness.

Many critics highlight China's nationalistic response, and some Chinese are emphasizing China's return to its rightful place in the world as a great power, which tends to make outsiders nervous. However, the views of other Chinese citizens show a positive effect: "This proves that if China learns the rules of the game and abides by the international rules, it can win respect and influence." The Olympics decision encourages the blend of nationalism and patriotism that has an internationalist com-

ponent to it, something we should encourage. In the opinion of a graduate student in Beijing, "Ninety per cent of Chinese young people aren't rabid anti-Western nationalists, but are patriots who want a strong but constitutional, democratic China." The Olympics decision reinforces those in the system who would argue that it pays off to continue to pursue the goal of being a "responsible world power" within the existing world system. It also provides a strong incentive for Beijing to avoid threatening Taiwan, while using the Olympics as a reconciliation mechanism.



China and the Olympics: Prospects For Change

Carol Lee Hamrin
and Kay Danielson

hai or Harbin. When Beijing lost the bid to host the 2000 games (chosen in 1993) the people of Shanghai quietly celebrated, fearing they would never get their subway finished. The central leadership will have to work hard to continue meeting the needs of the provinces.

So where do we as American Christians (especially those who live in China or have close ties to China) fit or play into all of this? Is there a "correct" response? Should we intensify our criticism and decry the decision? There are some obvious practical alternatives. Beijing City will be looking for foreign investment in its infrastructure projects and foreign expertise in many related fields from real estate to sports medicine, so opportunities for positive engagement and influence will increase

throughout the decade.

But wouldn't we be even better off thinking in more incarnational terms, particularly as we relate to our Chinese friends and colleagues. A group of Americans found themselves in downtown Beijing on the night of the announcement and subsequent celebration, joining with the Beijingers in high-fives and cheering, and were moved by the response: "The Chinese were so thrilled that foreigners were celebrating with them and for them.... They soaked up every word of congratulations and rejoiced in every sign of encouragement and thanked us deeply for the support.... As goodwill ambassadors, we made this celebration extra special for several thousand Beijingers on this clear, warm evening that they will never forget." Does that not seem to be a tilling of the soil for the planting of the gospel?

There is a related point that has been overlooked by most commentators: the decision is primarily a win for Beijing City—at potential economic cost for the rest of China. One report cited the crowd in the capital as shouting "Bei-jing, Bei-jing!" They were not shouting "Long Live the Communist Party." It is fair to assume that the excitement and pride felt by Beijingers is not necessarily shared (at least to the same degree) by the people of Shang-

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Book Review

Peeking Beneath the Surface

An Introduction to the Mainland Chinese Soul, LEAD Consulting, PO Box 32026, Raleigh, NC 27622, 2001, 66 pages. Cost: (paperback) \$5.50, volume discounts available. To order, contact LEAD Consulting, Ph: 919.783.0354.

A review by Kay Danielson

In the introduction to this book, the authors set out their hope of getting the reader to set aside the over-worn cliché of describing the Chinese as “inscrutable.” I applaud that attempt and think the authors have largely been successful. In addition, there is another over-worn cliché that is set aside as the result of this book—the one that describes mainland Chinese as “Communist” or “Marxist,” at least down at the level of the soul.

An attempt to describe the soul of a people numbering 1.3 billion is a daunting task and may seem a bit presumptuous to some. Quite rightly, the authors acknowledge this. However, they have done a superb job of taking



The freshness of this book lies in the fact that it gives us a peek beneath the surface of China, beyond the socialist structures and rhetoric to the actual belief system and aspirations of the people.

this large subject, researching it and packaging the results in a way that I believe accurately reflects the prevailing mood and worldview of the people of the PRC at the century’s end. As the authors put it, it is an attempt at capturing “some of the soul-oriented insights that may impact how we relate to or communicate with Chinese” (p 2).

The book is based on an extensive research project conducted in China in the mid-1990s. The methodology included using visual images that allowed Chinese to provide a “cultural translation” of how they view themselves, their country, and their living conditions as

well as surveys conducted in a variety of locations. These were followed by personal interviews with Chinese and foreigners with extensive experience with China.

The format is crisp, with each section broken down into four or five questions followed by several clear and concise responses to each question. Interspersed among the questions and responses are first person narrative stories of Chinese lives that illustrate and illuminate the points being made. These are extremely helpful in “giving flesh” to the concepts, and anyone who has spent time working in China or

with Chinese people will find much that is familiar in them.

The book is divided into three major sections: The Chinese Context, The Chinese Viewpoint, and The Chinese Spiritual Orientation.

In section one, the authors start by asking where to begin in thinking about ministering in the Chinese culture. The answers to this question generally focus on the Chinese pre-occupation with and orientation to the past. Chinese people in 2001 are keenly aware of the glories of their past. When Europe was a collection of barbaric tribes, China was the world leader in technology, education and social development. Yet, at the same time they are burdened with their more recent history of decline, foreign domination and economic weakness.

The authors also wisely point out the paradoxes and contradictions of the Chinese context. In China nothing is as it seems and those of us who engage China do well to keep this uppermost in our minds.

The writers then raise the question of how the past affects the Chinese today and go on to highlight some key features of Chinese culture such as its resilience, its long-standing authoritarian nature and its emphasis on social relationships. These are particularly important because they help us to see that many of those cultural characteristics that we in the West might want to lay at the feet of Communism have, in fact, been present in Chinese culture long before Marxism appeared on the scene.

In the final part of section one, they explore the rapid change taking place in modern Chinese society and look at some of the key longings of today’s Chinese. I find it interesting to note that the longings mentioned—national restoration, family harmony and prosperity, personal success and inner satisfaction—are not vastly different from the longings and aspirations of most people of most cultures.

Section two raises the questions of how today’s mainland Chinese process life, how they learn and how they view foreigners. The issues raised about how they process life are particularly helpful

because it is at these points that the most serious “culture clashes” occur when Chinese and foreigners interact. China’s arbitrary and mysterious power structure leads Chinese to accept unpredictability, pursue the path of least resistance and defer to authority much more easily and quickly than would most Westerners. Because it is a relational, or more communal culture, greater emphasis is placed on striving for the common good of the group.

Section three takes up the issue of Chinese spiritual orientation, looking at how Chinese view God, sin, salvation and how they might respond to Jesus. The descriptions of Buddhism, folk religions, Daoism, Qigong, and Science are brief and accurate. They can be helpful tools in aiding us to understand how Chinese might hear the gospel.

I am particularly pleased that the authors raise the question of what we can learn from the Chinese. Unfortunately, it is not a question commonly asked by foreigners working with Chinese. Yet, the Chinese have many lessons to teach us individual Westerners about caring for in-group and family members, respecting authority and persevering in adversity.

As one who is involved professionally in preparing people for their sojourns (short and long term) in China, I am glad to see this book added to the conversation. It is a needed voice. Its conciseness and accuracy make it a valuable tool for anyone working in China or with Chinese. It makes Chinese culture more accessible.

So, I return to where I started. The freshness of this book lies in the fact that it gives us a peek beneath the surface of China, beyond the socialist structures and rhetoric to the actual belief system and aspirations of the people. I like to think of Chinese culture and society as a language, where the vocabulary is socialist, but the grammar is still essentially traditional. This book is a wonderful look at the grammar.

Kay Danielson has lived in China for 13 years and currently works in the field of cross-cultural training and consulting.

Resource corner

Factbook and atlas of the world’s peoples and languages from a mission perspective produced by Global Mapping International.

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Education: For Whom? And Why?

“Red or expert?” has been the central question in the ongoing debate over Chinese education for the past 50 years. “Redness” was a recurring theme in China under Mao, who, in addition to favoring political correctness over educational excellence, also promoted education for the masses and opposed programs aimed at raising up an educated elite. Deng Xiaoping’s policies during the 1980s signaled a radical shift, as “keypoint” schools were reopened and thousands of the finest students sent abroad for study.

With the dawn of the new millennium comes a third alternative—market-driven education. The marketization of education conveniently answers both the government’s desire to cease being the sole underwriter of education in China and the growing demand of a new class of consumers willing to pay for educational alternatives outside those provided by the traditional government-monopolized system.

This market approach appears to be a win-win solution for all in-

involved. China’s leaders can potentially have their cake and eat it too by balancing the need to extend basic educational opportunity to as many people as possible with the desire to focus resources on the development of highly trained “experts.” “Red” becomes less of a concern as the government loosens its grip on education and allows others to play a role. Meanwhile the proliferation of educational institutions and programs opens up a host of new opportunities for those seeking to serve China through the avenue of education.



Brent Fulton

However, allowing the market to direct the course of education in China has a negative side as well. The most obvious problem is the growing gap between those, primarily in the cities, who have both access to education and the means to pay for it, and those, often found in the rural areas, who have neither. Groups that have traditionally been on the fringes of society, such as minorities and students with disabilities, are particularly hard-hit.

Given this growing gap, the question that Huo Shui asks in this issue of *ChinaSource* is critical: What is the true nature of education? Who is to be educated? Why? How we choose

to become involved in addressing China’s educational challenges will offer clues to our answer, even if we do not state it explicitly.

Certainly a strong case can be made for the strategic importance of investing in the “experts,” the most promising students who will potentially shape their nation’s future. Yet we need to guard against sending the message that we are interested only in the elites of society and thus unconcerned about the great majority outside this privileged sphere. By providing the disenfranchised with education that contains a transforming spiritual element, we are perhaps more likely to be seen as having a positive impact on China’s rapidly changing society.

Granted, different ones will be called to make their contributions in different areas. However, as we confront the marketization of education and its ramifications for our involvement, we would do well to think through the “who?” and the “why?” of education and to pursue a balanced approach in both these dimensions.

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