



China's Compulsory Education Law

Sreemati Chakrabarti
Department of East Asian Studies
University of Delhi, Delhi 110007
&
Institute of Chinese Studies,
e-mail: sreemati@gmail.com
March, 2014

Working papers are in draft form and are works in progress that will eventually be revised and published. This paper has been prepared to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and to stimulate discussion. The text has not been edited to official publication standards and ICS accepts no responsibility for errors.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sreemati Chakrabarti is Professor of Chinese Studies in the Department of East Asian Studies, University of Delhi and Honorary Fellow of the Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi. She has been Head of the Department from 2000 to 2003 and then from 2005-2008. Between 2009 to 2012 she was Honorary Director, Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi. She has a Ph. D in Political Science from Columbia University and holds Master's degrees from Delhi University (Political Science) and Harvard University (Regional Studies – East Asia). She has done post-doctoral research at Beijing Normal University. Currently, she is the Book Review Editor of the Sage journal China Report. Her publications include *China and the Naxalites* (1990), *Mao, China's Intellectuals and the Cultural Revolution* (1998), *Taiwan Today* (2007, edited with Anita Sharma) and a National Book Trust document, *China* (2007). On academic assignments she has traveled to Russia, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Nepal, the United States, and several times to China. She is on various China-related panels in Indian universities and government-run research and educational organizations. Several television and radio news channels, including the BBC, invite her to comment on issues concerned with China and East Asia. In the year 2010 Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao felicitated her with the China-India Friendship Award.

First published in 2013

by the Institute of Chinese Studies,
8/17 Sri Ram Road,
Civil Lines,
Delhi 110 054, India
Ph.: +91-11-23938202; Fax: +91-11-23992166
Email: info@icsin.org
Website: www.icsin.org

Digitally printed at Sapna Photostat,
Munirka Phase-II, New Delhi

© **Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi**

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers

China's Compulsory Education Law

The PRC's achievements in basic education, in comparison with most developing countries, have not been disputed. At Liberation in 1949 the literacy rate was less than twenty percent and by the turn of the century it reached eighty-five percent. This is a phenomenal achievement keeping in view the drastic rise in population and China remaining at a low level of development in the first three decades after Liberation. Nonetheless, the Chinese regime's desire of complete elimination of illiteracy remains a somewhat distant goal. However, one of the measures to eliminate illiteracy has been the passing of the Compulsory Education Law (henceforth CEL) in the year 1986 which was amended in 2006.

The post-Mao reforms Chinese regime has focussed on economic growth and development and it realizes that mere literacy (i.e. ability to read a newspaper and write a letter) of the overwhelming majority of the populace would not help China's ambitious goals to be achieved. The average education level of a Chinese is 4-5 years. While most people can read and write, the Chinese do not possess a high level of education. On the other hand, more education and skills are required during this period of economic reforms. Large numbers of peasants are moving away from farming into construction, transportation and other enterprises and desperately need knowledge and skills to develop their business and survive amid severe competition. (Dreyer, 1996.) An educated population with potential to acquire skills is required to be the basis of a vast knowledge industry which in turn would lead China to the goal of an economically advanced nation. The CEL, therefore, is aimed as much towards creating a vast human resource for the nation's overall development project as much as for the drive to achieve total literacy. The CEL's main stipulation of nine years mandatory schooling makes it clear that the regime sees beyond *literacy* towards *education*. To achieve all-round success in its economic development goals China needs both an educated population and a strata of highly qualified people: scientists, engineers, managers, accountants, lawyers, teachers and so on.

In this paper, I would study the factors that led to the promulgation of the CEL as well as the methods of its implementation and how far it has been effective. My chief argument is that in this era of reforms and globalization **the goals of compulsory education remain unachievable not only due to problems in the school system but also because of policies that boost the market-oriented development strategy.** This research is based

partly on data collected during a field trip to China in September 2003. and December 2008. (1) Information was gathered from officials at the Ministry of Education in Beijing and from education administrators and academics in Beijing and Shanghai. Useful printed, including unpublished, literature was also provided by the above as well as by the UNICEF office in Beijing. (2) Secondary literature as well as Internet materials from western and Chinese sources have also been used.

The Backdrop

The Communist Party of China (henceforth CPC) has given due importance to education since its inception in 1921 as is evident from its activities, and the writings of its supreme leader, Mao Zedong. (3) At liberation in 1949, the government of the People's Republic of China (henceforth PRC), adopted various measures to enhance the literacy levels of its population particularly in the rural areas where illiteracy was rampant. The peasantry had been the most important constituent of the CPC during the war of liberation, despite its very low level of literacy. In the post-Liberation period, novel methods were adopted to spread basic literacy in the countryside. Night schools, winter schools, off-season schools, mobile schools, teacher-in-home schools etc. along with post literacy drives were carried out on a nation-wide basis in the early years after liberation. Impressive results were visible in the first decade. Literacy levels had improved remarkably despite very low investments by the state. Much of the efforts to disseminate literacy were voluntary. Mass organizations of the CPC like the peasants associations, women's organizations, youth associations, trade unions and so forth played a vital role in the dissemination of basic literacy.(4)

Nonetheless, the Chinese admit that a large number of their population remain illiterate and uneducated. According to a document published in 1995, "China is a developing country with a vast territory, characterized by highly uneven developments between different regions as regards the level of socio-economic, cultural and educational development... Consequently, there are still over hundred million illiterates throughout the whole country. The eradication of illiteracy remains a Herculean task".(5) The document further adds that the 'Outline for Reform and Development of Education in China' promulgated by the Chinese government explicitly states that efforts must be made to not only to eradicate illiteracy among the middle-aged and young but also "to reduce the illiteracy rate of the

target population to under 5 percent by the end of the century.” **This goal has not been attained even after a decade into the next century.** This is despite the fact that in 1986 the government of the PRC promulgated the ‘*Compulsory Education Law*’ and in subsequent years passed other laws and regulations to strengthen the same. The next section of the paper takes up a detailed analysis of the circumstances leading to the passing of this law, the provisions of this and other related laws, the effectiveness as well as impact of the law and finally the problems and challenges emerging from this law.

The Imperatives of the CEL:

In 1985, the Central Committee of the CCP issued the “Decision on the Reform of the Educational Structure” which laid the guidelines for the National People’s Congress (NPC) in 1986 to promulgate the “Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China” thereby placing basic education on a legal basis. (6) The crux of the CEL was nine years of basic schooling for all children. Operationally, this meant primary and junior middle school education for all.

The reforms initiated by the Chinese leadership since the Third Plenum in 1978 had begun to show its adverse effect on basic education by the mid-1980s and the CEL was therefore necessary. Official statements indirectly accepted that fact. Li Peng, the then vice-premier of the State Council and Chairman of the State Education Commission, while explaining the draft of the CEL in April 1986 to the Fourth Session of the Sixth NPC said the following:

...generally speaking China’s elementary education is still relatively weak, and cannot meet the needs of our socialist modernization and construction. In a considerable number of rural areas, primary school education has not been made universal, and many school-age children, particularly female children, have not completed their primary school education. This has caused illiterates and semi-illiterates to continually appear among our young people and those in the prime of life. Many primary and middle school teachers lack the necessary training, and, in general, the teachers’ education and professional level has failed to meet the state standards. A considerable number of primary and middle school buildings are dilapidated and in poor repair, and teaching aids and cultural and sports facilities are seriously inadequate. This situation cannot but hamper the teaching quality. In some cities, towns and villages *a salient problem is the dropping out of junior middle school students to find work or do manual labour.* (Italics mine) Some enterprises frequently hire school-age children and adolescents. This backwardness in elementary education cannot but arouse the concern and

worry of the party and the government, as well as that of the vast number of people of insight in society. They have arrived at the unanimous conclusion that this situation has presented a sharp contradiction to the grand goal of the people of the whole nation in building China into a wealthy, strong, civilized, democratic, and modern socialist nation. (7)

Li Peng had adequately put forward the reasons for the need for *a law* to enhance the literacy and educational levels of the Chinese. In the pre-Reform (Mao) period significant strides were made in literacy and education although there was no law to enforce it. A law became necessary as some of the fundamental policies and their fall-outs led to a noticeable decline in school enrolments vis-à-vis population growth and more importantly a high drop-out rate.(8) The Production Responsibility System (9) which was introduced as an alternative to the Mao-initiated commune system as an essential part of the 1978 reforms has a direct bearing on rural education at the primary and junior middle school levels. Under PRS, family farms became the norm. Unlike the commune system, where income was distributed according to the work-points earned by each adult individual, under PRS, family income depends on the amount of labour input of each family. It was therefore not unusual for parents to withdraw children from school for work in the family farm in order to enhance incomes. As obvious this is a pattern seen in many developing countries.

Yet another noticeable reason for children being withdrawn from school is the reemergence of child labour – a social evil which was rampant in pre-Liberation China and had been almost done away with during the Mao period. Proliferation of small and medium enterprises, result of officially sanctioned policies have led to numerous violation of labour norms particularly due to the absence strict legal guarantees and enforcement. According to officials of the Ministry of Education, in rural areas where township and village enterprises (TVEs) have flourished, it has been accompanied with dropout rates going higher specially at the junior middle school level.(10) Paradoxically, TVEs add to the prosperity of the villages but frequently lead to lowering of educational levels. Prof. Shi Weiping of the East China Normal University shared his research findings with me. He points out that in the 1980s with growth in the arena of secondary education there was “demand for continuing education in colleges and universities, Economic reforms created high rate of unemployment in industrial cities which made vocational school graduates much less favourable in the labour market compared with college graduates. This also created a great

demand for higher education. Hence vocational education after completion of 9-years compulsory education is, therefore, not an attractive proposition for students and their parents. (11)

In the mid-1980s when the CEL was passed the above two problems viz., work in the family farm and child labour in rural enterprises were identified as the main factors for high drop-out rates as is evident in Li Peng's speech. Scholars of all hues also considered these two factors being primarily responsible for continued low educational levels in rural and backward areas. More than two and a half decades into the functioning of the CEL, the drop-out syndrome has continued although enrolment rates in the first year of primary school have shown excellent progress. This is undoubtedly the most remarkable accomplishment of the CEL. Nonetheless, the dropout rates are highest at the upper grades of primary school and lower grades of junior middle. Children, roughly in the age group of 9-12 drop out of school in rural China at a rate, which is quite alarming although data on this is not provided officially. This implies that **China is doing exceptionally well in terms of basic literacy even if the goals of CEL are yet to be achieved.**

In his 1986 speech Li Peng had specified the goals that the Chinese regime had in mind in the implementation of the CEL. He stated:

The promulgation and implementation of the "compulsory education law" will mark the beginning of a new stage in the popularization of elementary education in China. With unremitting efforts, by the end of this century, school age children and adolescents, in an overwhelming majority of areas in China will be able to receive a 9-year school education, and the cultural and scientific qualities of the people of various nationalities in China would be raised to a new level. This will not only lay a good foundation for the fostering and training of various kinds of professional people, but also create the necessary conditions for the success of the "two civilizations". It will also make our education "meet the needs of the four modernizations, the world and the future", (this is a quote from Deng Xiaoping) and have a far-reaching impact on our future social development and scientific and technological progress, both now and in the future. Therefore, the formulating and implementing of a "compulsory education law" is an important strategic measure related to the future of the state and the nation. (12)

It is obvious that in line with the post-Mao reforms policy China was in a hurry to expand its knowledge industry which had remained relatively weak in the Mao era when the slogan of 'red and expert rule' effectively meant predominance of 'red' over 'expert'. Literacy, i.e.

ability to recognize a few hundred characters which helped in reading and comprehending party newspapers, posters, slogans and so forth, met the regime's expectations. (13). Deng Xiaoping's reforms intended to make China an advanced industrial country and that would only be possible with a sizeable population of well-educated people. The CEL is to play a crucial role to facilitate this process. To completely modernize, China not only needs literate farmers but also scientists, engineers, technicians, lawyers, teachers, accountants, managers and so on.

Provisions of the Law: An Analysis:

CEL was adopted at the Fourth Session of the Sixth National People's Congress, promulgated by Order No. 38 of the President of the People's Republic of China on April 12, 1986 and effective as of July 1, 1986.(14) It comprises of 18 articles. A few of the articles relevant for this paper are quoted below:

Article 2: The state shall institute a system of nine-year compulsory education. The authorities of provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities directly under the Central Government shall decide on measures to promote compulsory education, *in accordance with the degree of economic and cultural development* in their own localities.

Article 4: The state, *the community, schools and families* shall, in accordance with law safeguard the right to compulsory education of school age children and adolescents.

Article 6: Schools shall promote the use of *putonghua* (common speech based on Beijing pronunciation), which is in common use throughout the nation.

Article 7: Compulsory education shall be divided into two stages: primary education and junior middle-school education.

Article 10: The *state shall not charge tuition* for students receiving compulsory education. The state shall establish a system of grants-in-aid to support the school attendance of poor students.

Article 15: The local people's government at various levels must create conditions for all school-age children and adolescents to enrol in schools and receive compulsory education. In cases where school age children or adolescents do not enrol in school and receive compulsory education, with the exception of those who, on account of illness or other special circumstances, are allowed by the local people's government not to go to school, the *local people's government shall admonish and criticize the parents or guardians* of

those children or adolescents, and adopt effective measures to order them to send the children or wards to school.

In cases where organizations or individuals employ school age children or adolescents for work, the local people's government shall admonish and criticize them and shall order them to stop such employment. In serious cases, the *offenders may be fined, ordered to suspend their business operations or have their business licences revoked.* (All Italics mine).

The other provisions of the CEL pertain to quality of education, minimum age for schooling, teaching methods, course contents, text books, etc. It should be stated here that all over China a massive programme for curriculum development has been undertaken. Also among the provisions of the CEL are matters on administration, funding, teacher training and their professional competence, their rights and obligations, etc. On funding, the stipulated article says, among other things: 'the people's government at various levels shall levy a surtax for education, which shall be used mainly for compulsory education.'

Whether the law has been enforceable in a strict sense is what I desired to investigate mainly during my field-trips to China. This was provoked by a news item I came across in the official Chinese weekly, Beijing Review, which appeared in 1998. The item captioned: *A Court Enforces The Right to Study* said the following:

On May 5, 1998, a cinema in Tuanlin town of Jinmen city in central China's Hubei province was noisy, bustling and full of excitement. The more than 1000 villagers who flocked there did not go to appreciate a film, but to take part in an open trial between a school and the parents of two teenagers.

The defendants, Zhu Shicai and Tang Zhiyu were brought to the court by the Chejiaping Primary School because they did not allow their twelve year-old daughter Zhu Qiuxia and ten year-old son Zhu Qiubo to go to school.

Before placing the case on file teachers at the school and village heads visited the couple many times about their children's truancy and tried to persuade them to allow the children back into the classroom.

But the couple were rude and unreasonable, even throwing a bag, donated by the son's classmates, into a paddy field.

Under these circumstances, Principal Ding Qihong decided to tackle the problem through legal proceedings.

Under the Compulsory Education Law and the Law on the Protection of Minors, the couple as the children's guardians, had infringed on the right bestowed on all school-age children to have access to formal education.

In the initial stage an attempt was made at reconciliation, but the couple refused to accept the court's mediation. Their tough attitude aroused discontent among those watching.

After a five-minute adjournment, the three lawyers sitting as arbitrators announced that the defendants must

send their children back to school to receive compulsory education. If they refused to accept the judgement, they had 15 days to appeal. At this moment, those sitting in the visitor's gallery burst into thunderous applause.

But, the couple still refused to execute the court's judgement. So the local court ordered Tang Zhiyu to undergo 15 days of detention because of her abominable attitude. At last Zhu Qiuxia and Zhu Qiubo returned to the classroom some twenty days later.

The first case in an effort to impose the implementation of the compulsory education in China produced wide repercussions. Through the case many got to know that not allowing their children to go to school violates the law.

"I didn't realize its an issue concerning the law before I was put in detention. I will draw a lesson from this case and be armed with knowledge about the law,," said Tang Zhiyu. (15)

During my meetings with Chinese officials and academics, I pointed to this news item in their official media in order to invoke a discussion on the legal measures that are undertaken to implement the law. Most officials were of the view that stern measures like imprisonment are extremely rare and in most cases the local officials admonish and threaten villagers who keep their children away from school. Academics, however, indicated that there have been many evidences of confinement of parents/ guardians who have prevented their wards from attending school. On the whole, what I have gathered is that in poor villages where family after family have not been able to send their children to school stern punitive measures have not been taken. However, in villages where most children go to school the parents of those who do not are taken to task by the officials.

According to most of my sources the CEL is an 'enabling measure' and not a legal provision in the strict sense. It is on the basis of this law that people can demand educational facilities in areas where they are non-existent. Officials quoted several instances of villages and counties where the law has been mentioned in petitions to higher authorities either to set up schools, revive schools that have stopped functioning or arrange for children to reach another school (which may be far from home). Most of these petitions, they admitted, are initiated by local officials/cadres. (16)

To make CEL more effective some major initiatives were taken beginning 1995 and continue till date thereby making it evident that its objective is yet to be achieved. As per the Education Law of 1995 students in poverty-stricken areas received remission from school fees. (17) According to a *People's Daily* report, the Ministry of Finance sanctioned 5

billion Yuan to improve the basic education in impoverished rural areas in the next five years. The government also allocated 3 billion Yuan to renovate run-down schools in rural areas. This report also admits “the level of China’s rural education varies from region to region. The fact that the funds used in compulsory education cannot be ensured, especially in rural areas, is the most prominent problem in the current basic education system.” (18)

The Research Department of Rural Economy which is a unit of the Development Research Center of the State Council came out with a paper written by Research Fellow Xie Yang titled “Chinese Compulsory Education and Investment System Reform”. (19). In this paper the author has gone into great details of the funding, the administration of finances and the shortcomings and drawbacks in the implementation of the CEL. This study correctly suggests measures and draws a new set of guidelines for policy makers to ensure that farmers’ incomes and paying capacities must be borne in mind while planning the funding of rural education and in particular compulsory education in the countryside. However, it falls short of identifying the larger issues that impede the complete success of CEL

The unbalanced implementation of the CEL has continued to be a cause of concern for the Chinese state. In May 2005 the MoE issued a document titled ‘Some Guidelines on the Balanced Development of Compulsory Education’ which indicted change in the policy priority of the development of compulsory education. It stressed that more attention should be paid to the spread of compulsory education in “less developed rural and western areas” as it was noticed that gaps existed and even widened in some regions. The document listed six points to be borne in mind by provincial and county governments to tackle the uneven development of CEL. These included partnership building, resource sharing, financial support to weak schools, school infrastructure construction, teachers’ professional development, special arrangements for migrant children and differently abled children. It also suggested that provincial and county authorities should establish evaluation and inspection systems to measure the performance of local education officials. (Wang Libing, pp, xxii-xxiii). Equity in education has been an unachievable task so far.

In 2006 the CEL was amended to ensure its all-round success. Rural areas and minority areas had high enrolment rates but saw only marginal improvement in drop-out rates. The amended version of the law came into effect on September 1, 2006. The law now gives children in the rural and urban areas 9 years of “free compulsory education” but it also

stipulates that “tuition charges will not be completely waived for a few years as clauses in the law still have to be approved by the State Council. It says that expenditures will be jointly shouldered by the central government and the local governments and all local governments were to henceforth put the expenditure for compulsory education in their budgets. Vice-Minister of Education also cautioned the local governments they would be disciplined if they fail to pay for compulsory education. These amendments were in fact aimed at the poor rural areas where dropout rates are rather high. The revised law also said that children of migrant workers enjoy equal education rights as the children of other city-dwellers. Children with disabilities too have right to compulsory education. It further states that schools would no longer be divided into key schools and common ones. In an effort to improve the quality of rural schools the law now requires teachers in urban schools to work for a period of time in villages to make up for adequate rural resources. (“China Adopts Amendment to Compulsory Education Law”, Xinhua News Agency, June 30, 2006)

According to a report in the China Daily the government issued a document regarding wage reforms for rural teachers. To be implemented from January 2009 it stated that salaries of rural teachers should not be less than that of local civil servants. Government also announced some preferential policies to encourage teachers as well as normal school students to go and teach in the countryside. Zhou Ji, the then Education Minister, announced that secondary vocational schools will have free access for poor students.

Soon after the Sixteenth Party Congress(2002) the various units under the State Council were urged to speed up progress in rural education. A resolution of the State Council passed in 2003 called for “deepening of rural education reform, and promoting socio-economic advancement and the development in coordination between cities and towns”. It stresses that ‘the great task of rural education will meet the requirements of large rural populations by developing the quality of the labour force, transforming traditional agriculture into modern agriculture and rooting out the crucial factors of the problems related to agriculture, rural areas and peasants (*sannong*).’ (20). Clearly, this resolution attempts to link drawbacks in the implementation of CEL with the overall crisis in rural China. This realization is significant because in the earlier period shortcomings in the implementation of CEL were seen in isolation i.e. within the education system. Hence emphasis was given only to betterment of teacher quality, curriculum improvement

(making it more relevant to local requirement), enhanced funding, accountability of officials in the education sector and so forth. While each of these measures is crucial to the success of CEL, they are not sufficient for its complete implementation.

The Crux of the Problem

If the CEL has not yet achieved the objectives it was intended for, it is not only because of the persistence of the factors identified above but also due to the overall policies of the state pertaining to education and employment necessitated by the growth and development focus of the post-1978 reforms. This would be explained in the discussion below.

According to the State Statistical Bureau, dropout rate at the junior-middle school level is about 6 percent. Figures for different grades are not available particularly at the primary school level but often officially stated as high. The junior-middle school figure also does not take into account the invisible dropouts – students who stop attending school but do not withdraw officially.

Research done by UNICEF (Beijing) in the year's 2000-2002 (21) gives the following information:

- About 99% of children in the primary school going group are in school. (The enrolment rate in 16, mainly coastal provinces, had reached 99.5% by 1998, 9 municipalities and provinces had 100 percent 9-year compulsory education.7 provinces and autonomous regions remained at a rate below 60% with Tibet at only 18%.
- 15% of China's territorial area does not have a good record in basic education and have not reached the goal of compulsory education.

Main problem is funding. Development of basic education is unbalanced with wide gaps between rural-urban, East-West and Han-Minority

At the basic level there is no non-formal stream of education.

- In the Western region UCE achievement is a challenge. Of the 522 counties which have not achieved UCE goals 465 are in the western region.(UNICEF: Beijing): Situation Assessment, 2003)

Reasons for high drop- out rates

1. House-hold and farm work
2. Employment of children in private rural enterprises
3. Fees: On paper there are no tuition fees in non-private schools but a range of miscellaneous fees are charged from all students. Textbooks are not free either. Average fee per semester in rural primary schools is 40 yuan and in junior-middle it is 80 yuan. In poorer areas in order to keep schools running these additional fees are charged.

A survey of parents of children who drop out of school in the primary/junior middle level was done in the year 1995 in some rural areas. The reasons given by them in order of emphasis are:

1. Studying is wasteful as jobs are for the urban university educated people
2. Hired by enterprises children contribute to family income.
3. Rising cost of tuition, books etc.
4. Dilapidated buildings; 8% of China's school buildings are unsafe.
5. Teachers hired are of poor quality. (Former teachers who have become taxi drivers or barmaids earn 4 to 5 times as much as they would earn as teachers.)

Tuition fees and education tax levied on peasants are a major cause of rural resentment in many areas of China. Charging of tuition fee at all levels of school is having an impact on rural households. At the high school and college level the tuition fee of 1000 yuan per annum is too high. While entry to high school and above is through entrance tests, in the reform period there are no job guarantees after graduation, which lessens the attraction for higher education. Many school dropouts choose to "jump into the sea" i.e. engage in business and examples of such people who have succeeded in business are legion and unlike the past when entrepreneurs were frowned upon, today it elicits awe and admiration. Unless higher education becomes more accessible to rural students, the success of CEL

would remain limited. College /university education is almost the only way for upward mobility. In the absence of easy access to higher education there is very little incentive among rural parents to make their children complete the 9-year compulsory education.

Prospects

At the 2006 meeting of the National People's Congress, Premier Wen Jiabao made an important announcement that from the end of 2007 all charges for those going through the 9-year compulsory education would be abolished. Hailed as a "milestone" by the Chinese media, this step would reduce the pressure on parents who send their children to school but would in no way prevent dropouts at the junior middle school level. There have been suggestions that the 9-year scheme be increased to 12 years. Hu Angang, a Qinghua faculty, says that by extending the compulsory education term from the current 9 years to 12 will enable China to popularize high school education nationwide and would boost further economic growth. (22) He points out that half of the graduates from middle schools do not have access to higher education and become job seekers. Inadequate high school education opportunities have become a major problem that restricts the development of the education sector. Hu agrees that such a system would benefit the city dwellers more (as they have greater access to private higher education). He quotes a Chinese Academy of Sciences report that says that the average education of a Chinese labourer is 5.7 years whereas that of labourers in developed countries is 10 years. CEL, in other words, is also important for enhancing the skills of China's working class without which the developmental goals would take longer to reach. While Hu's analyses comes closer to the reality it still does not address and reach out to the main problem.

In 2009 again some members of the NPC and CPPCC demanded a 12-year compulsory education scheme although it was turned down. Supporting this Cai Feng, a researcher from CASS said that if the 9 year CEL is strictly implemented in all of rural China then there will be 1,86 million fewer labourers entering the job market and if it becomes a 12-year CEL the job market will have 8.45 million fewer jobseekers. Each year only 10 million jobs are created and increase in the years of compulsory education is likely to help in the employment problem. (China Daily, 2009-03-10).

In June 2012 the US based National Bureau of Economic Research (Working Paper no. 18189) did a study of the impact of the CEL. It points out that in the 1970s the average education of a Chinese was 3.4 years of schooling but by 2005 it has risen to 7.6 years, higher than India, Brazil and Indonesia. An additional year of schooling, it quotes another author, significantly reduces the probability of being in poverty. The main finding of this study, however, is that the law increased years of schooling by 0.8 percent on an average. The CEL also increased years of schooling strikingly for girls (1.17 years) than for boys (0.4 years).

All documents, statements and official pronouncements of the PRC' s central government indicate that rural education, of which CEL is an intrinsic part, is being given top priority. In 1989 Deng Xiaoping had admitted that education policies in China had not succeeded. In the same year an NGO of sorts was set up to help school children in poverty-stricken areas to enroll in schools. In areas where people lacked subsistence levels of food and clothing, basic education was out of question. When local governments were not able to take care of the basic education in all poor counties, Project Hope's participation and contribution to primary education grew significantly. Money to this NGO comes from donations from within and outside China. Project Hope sponsored the return to school of 2 million dropouts and constructed over 500 primary schools. Since 1997 Hope has offered scholarships to primary and junior middle school students as an incentive to their families.

(23)

Such efforts from the government, the non-governmental voluntary sector and the private sector are benefiting and would further help the cause of rural students. However, the almost hundred percent success of the CEL could be guaranteed only after prospects of all rural middle school students for higher education and employment brighten. In a post-reform, globalized China imbalances and inequalities persist making the ultimate goal of CEL still distant.

End Notes

1. This field trip was funded by the Department of East Asian Studies, University of Delhi (through the UGC's Area Studies Plan Grant) and the Institute of Chinese Studies, CSDS's Ford foundation grant.

2. Mr. Debnath of the Indian Embassy in Beijing and Mr. Sujan Chinoi, India's Consul-General in Shanghai helped in different ways for which I am grateful.
3. The Education Department of the CCP was set up soon after the formation of the Party. Work pertaining to education and literacy of workers and peasants continued throughout the period of revolution – in the Jiangxi-Soviet period, during the Long March, while fighting the Japanese and in Yanan as well as during the Civil War. Beginning with Mao Zedong's 'Hunan Report' several writings and documents show the significance the communists attached to literacy drives and popularization of education.
4. For more see, Sreemati Chakrabarti, "Women and Adult Literacy in China" **Indian Journal of Gender Studies** 2:2 (1995)
5. Eradicating Illiteracy in China, (State Education Commission of the PRC and the National Commission of the PRC for UNESCO) 1995, pp.8-9
6. For general information see China 2004 (Beijing: New Star Publishers), 2004
7. "Li Peng Explains Draft of the Compulsory Education Law" in China: PRC National Affairs, Beijing Xinhua Domestic Service in Chinese 0025 GMT, April 17, 1986
8. Chinese official statistics do not give any detailed information on dropouts.
9. Also called the Household Responsibility system, this meant individual family farming. In the post-Mao era this replaced the commune system. In the latter only adult individuals worked.
10. Interview with Ministry of Education officials on September 17, 2003 in Beijing
11. This was explained to me by Prof. Shi Weiping of the East China Normal University during an interview on September 25, 2003. He gave me a copy of an unpublished paper on the subject titled: "Development and Change of Vocational and Technical Education in china since 1949"
12. Li Peng, op.cit
13. For more see, G. Balatchandirane, Rajiv Ranjan and Sreemati Chakrabarti, "Basic Education and Economic Development: A comparative Study of Japan, China and India", *International Studies* 38:3, pp. 229-275
14. Laws of the People's Republic of China 1983-86, pp. 250-253
15. Beijing Review 41:40
16. Interview with MoE officials, September 17, 2003 in Beijing
17. Katrin Wilman and Gunter Schucher, "Facts about and Development in the Rural Education of the PRC", *China Aktuell* (Hamburg, IFA) 5/2005
18. "China Embarks on Basic Education Reform" ,(People's Daily) www.edu.cn/20011029/3007230.shtml
19. This study was funded by the Ford Foundation
20. 'The State Council Resolution on Strengthening Rural Work' (September 20, 2003) is a document in Chinese language which was provided to me by the MoE in Beijing. It was translated into Chinese by my student Debashish Chaudhury for which I am grateful.
21. UNICEF office in Beijing provided me two (until then) unpublished documents which were titled UNICEF Doc. 2002 and UNICEF Situation Assessment, 2003
22. Hu Angang, "12-year schooling will benefit entire nation", [www. Edu.cn/20010101/21788.shtml](http://www.Edu.cn/20010101/21788.shtml) (China Education and Research Network)

23. A substantive assessment of Project Hope is in Samuel C. Wong, "Project Hope and the Hope School System in China: A Re-evaluation" , Education Policy Analysis Archives, Vol.7, Number 28, September 7, 1999 (a peer reviewed electronic journal)

References (in addition to the ones in the End Notes)

1. Basic Education in China, Department of International Cooperation and Exchanges, Ministry of Education, The People's Republic of China.(year not mentioned)
2. Educational Statistics Yearbook of China, 1990
3. Country Report on Education for All in the People's Republic of China. Ministry of Education, PRC, January 2000.
4. Jing Lin, Education in Post-Mao China (London: Praeger) 1993
5. June T. Dreyer, China's Political System: Modernization and Tradition (Hampshire: Macmillan Press) 1996(Section on 'Education')
6. Ka-Ho Mok, "Education Policy Reform" in Linda Wong and Norman Flynn (ed.) The Market in Chinese Social Policy (Hampshire: Palgrave) 2001
7. Wang Libing, Basic Education in China, Zhejiang University Press and Homa and Serkey Books, New Jersey, USA), 2010
8. Zhang Ning, "A Conflict of Interests: Current Problems in Educational Reforms" in Andrew Watson (ed.) Economic Reforms and Social Change in China (London and New York, Routledge) 1992

ICS MONOGRAPH :

Kishan Rana & Patricia Uberoi, India's North East States, The BCIM Forum and Regional Integration

OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES (New):

- # 1- **ICS-IIC Roundtable** on the Brookings Report: "Addressing the US China Strategic Distrust"
- # 2 - **Y J Sithara Fernando**, "China's Relations with the Indian Ocean Region"
- # 3 - **Madhavi Thampi & Nirmola Sharma**, Catalogue of Materials Related to Modern China in the National Archives of India Part One (Special Collections)
- #4 - **Manmohan Agarwal**, Comparing India and China's Economic Performance since 1991
- #5 - **Y J Sithara Fernando**, China and the Cooperative Architecture in the South China Sea: Prospects and Problems
- #6 - **Joe Thomas Karackattu**, India–China Economic Relations: Trends, Challenges and Policy Options

ICS ANALYSIS:

- No.12.** July 2013 **Emerging Trends in Chinese Investments in Bangladesh: Challenges and Opportunities**
- No.11.** June 2013 **China and the Federalism Question in Nepal**
- No.10.** June 2013 **The Recent Violence in Xinjiang and China's Ethnic Policy**
- No.9.** May 2013 **Rising and Shining: The Coming Bloom in Indo-Japanese Economic Relations**
- No.8.** April 2013 **China's Military Power**
- No.7.** March 2013 **Self-Immolations, the Tibet Question and the Way Forward**
- No.6.** August 2012 **China and the Revival of the World Economy**
- No.5.** May 2012 **The US-China "Strategic Distrust": Perceptions from New Delhi**
- No.4.** May 2012 **Chinese Reactions to India's Agni-V Test Firing**
- No.3.** April 2012 **Bo Xilai's Exit : Some Interpretations**
- No.2.** April 2012 **China, India and the Indian Ocean Region: Need to Move from Balance of Power to Cooperation**
- No.1.** November 2011 **Postponement of the 15th Special Representative-level Talks: Possible Causes and Implications**

ABOUT ICS

中国研究所

Focused on CHINA since 1969

<http://icsin.org>

The Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi, one of the oldest multi- and interdisciplinary research institutes on China in India, seeks to promote research in areas of history, culture and literature, society, international relations, the economy and polity of China and East Asia. It leads public discourse with regard to India-China relations and facilitates new research in diverse areas. Its chief objectives are to build a national network of China and East Asia scholars, enter into international collaborative programmes for comparative research and expand the frontiers of the study of China in India. It seeks to provide informed and objective inputs in policy formulation through its various publications.

These include:



COLLABORATIONS



中国现代国际关系研究院
CHINA INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (CICIR),
Beijing



CHINA INSTITUTE OF
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
(CIIS), Beijing



SHANGHAI ACADEMY OF
SOCIAL SCIENCES (SASS),
Shanghai



云南省社会科学院
YUNNAN ACADEMY OF
SOCIAL SCIENCES (YASS),
Kunming



INSTITUTE OF FAR EASTERN
STUDIES (IFES), Moscow



SHANXI UNIVERSITY OF
FINANCE & ECONOMICS



HARVARD-YENCHING INSTITUTE



GUANGDONG RESEARCH
INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL
STRATEGIES, GuangDong

MULTILATERAL COOPERATION



BCIM
(Bangladesh-China-
India-Myanmar)
Forum



RIC
(Russia-India-China)
Trilateral Academic
Conferences



BOAO
Forum for Asia
(BFA)

ICS EVENTS



CONTACT ICS

ICS Training Programme & Internships : careers@icsin.org

Institutional Collaboration & Exchange : info@icsin.org

China Report Subscription :

<http://chr.sgaepub.com>



8/17, Sri Ram Road, Delhi-110054, INDIA.
Tel: +91-11-23938202, Fax: +91-11-23830728,
E-mail: info@icsin.org, www.icsin.org

Registered Under the Societies Registration Act XX1 of 1860