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An Analysis of Chinese Community Education Policy

PAN Xiaoqing^{[a],*}^[a]Beijing Normal University, Center for International and Comparative Education, Beijing, China.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

Based on the systematic review of the government- issued regulatory documents related to community education using the leading Chinese data base of WanFang, the article maps the terrain of community education in china from 1992 to present. It is found that community education in China has experienced a fundamental change from being responsible merely for out-of-school ethic education for primary and secondary school students before 21st century to training and education activities for adults in need of them under social transformation. In addition, it grows from mere community education committee responsible for its work to a comparatively complete system capable of rallying necessary human and material resources to ensure its function. The changes of community education policy were directly motivated by the domestic socioeconomic development in the past 30 years and the global educational notion of lifelong learning and building a learning society. Finally, the problems such as the absence of national laws and some others in current community education in China are discussed.

Key words: Community; Education; China; Policy

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INTRODUCTION

The community education in china is not a totally new story in China. As early as in the mid- 1920s and early 1930s, some patriotic Chinese intellectuals dedicated to

change the backward situation in rural areas had carried out some pilot educational programs in rural china, this experimental programs originally designed and implemented to save china from being a backward country through education means was later recognized as the preliminary development of Chinese community education for the theoretical inspiration and valuable experiences from their practices. Since 1978, with the implementation of open-door policy and economic reform, the development of community education has been gradually gaining its momentum with social transformation taking place in the past 30 years. Questions remain as to the course of the development in modern China as well as the motivation and rationale for the development.

To find answers to these questions, this thesis analyzes the community education policy by studying the regulations available at Wan Fang regulation data base, one of leading data base in China. Using “community education” as a key word, one can locate as many as 610 provincial and municipal-level regulations, 95 ministry-level regulations since 1992, 94 of which remain effective. In this thesis, only the ministry-level regulations are chosen for study because the local governments are consistent with central government in terms of the regulations they make. The ministry here mainly refers to the ministry of Education. Aside from 14 regulations which are mere repetition of certain regulation, or have no essential relevance to community education, or have lost its efficacy, 81 regulations are studied and analyzed. The systematic study of the regulation-related policy find answers to the following two questions:

What is the course of community education development since 1990s?

Why factors account for the development of community education in China?

Based on these two questions, the following articles are divided into two parts: the changes of policy and the motivations and rationales for the making of policy.

1. CHANGES OF POLICY

During past 20 years, the policy concerning community education has changed progressively and its development can be roughly divided into 2 phases.

1.1 The First Phase: 1992--2000

Though the community education began in the latter half of 1980s in modern china, it was not until 1992 that the “community education” appeared in the regulation document issued by government. Therefore, the first phase in this thesis dates from 1992 due to the availability of the document for analysis started from this year.

What characterizes the community education in this period is the role it plays in ethic education for the primary and secondary school students. Statistic shows 7 out of 11 regulation documents during this phase point out what community can do in ethic education for the youth. It lays emphasis on the effort the Community Education Committee could make to cultivate an educational atmosphere or to form an educational network to educate the young students. This not only reflects government belief in the concerted effort the society could make to help improve the school education quality and therefore improve the overall educational efficiency but also the new requirements of ethic and moral education in the new situation brought by the huge social transformation when china deepened and widened its reform and opening . The government had to make it clear the values, the characteristic traits that should be fostered among the youth against opening and reform background when china changed from planned economy to market economy, grew from a poor country to a well-off society and exposed to the dramatically different western ideology.

Besides the policy concerning the ethic education for the young students, communities were also involved in its publicizing of disease –prevention, the educational reform policies etc., functioning as a bridge between government and general public due to its advantage of being close to the community residents.

The characteristics of the community education are not only seen in the roles community education plays in society but also in the evolvement of its organization. Back in 1980s, community education committee had been established in some major cities like shanghai and Tianjin, which later spread to other cities. (Xu, 2000) It is stated in the 1992 document issued by the State Education Commission(renamed Ministry of Education in 1998) : The participating consciousness has been strengthened in every aspects of city, many cities have established community education committee, and the community education system has been improved.”(SEC, 1992) The emergence of the CEC indicates the formalization of community as a social force in education and began to play a role in education then. it was not until 1995 that the encouragement of the establishment of the community education committee was clearly stated in the regulation

issued by the State Education Commission : “ some capable places should gradually establish and improve the community education committee made up of enterprises、 public security agency, neighborhood community and student parents representatives .” (SEC, 1995)

As we come to the conclusion to the first phase, it has to be pointed out that community education never dominates the policy so far in the first phase, it is more of a component part or a point mentioned in a certain policy rather than a major composing part of the policy in which it appears. It is a phase during which community education was not seen on the agenda of the central government.

1.2 The Second Phase: 2000-Present

Compared to the first phase of community education including only 11 regulation documents, the second phase seems to be more prosperous for it contains as many as 70 documents, which might be an indication that the community education has gained much more attention in the new century. The first national conference on community education convened in Beijing in 2001 marked the community education has stepped out of the previous status as being a supplementary and dispensable education and came to be recognized as an education of strategic importance. The central government started to take a lead in the community education development, with the ministry of education in charge of its overall development and other related ministries and departments working in cooperation. The 2001 conference laid the foundation for the future development of community education by setting forth the aims, tasks, and nationwide development plan in the future. What constitutes the community education in the first phase continues and works into the second phase. But what differentiates the second phase from the first phase aside from its changes in status and scale of practice mentioned before? The study of the policy shows the differences are mainly seen in the following aspects: aims, activities and resources.

1.2.1 Aiming to Build A System of Lifelong Learning

At the turn of the 21 century, the community education aims to meet the ever-increasing learning requirements of the community members, which, on one hand, reflects the people’s willingness to enhance self-improvement to enjoy a better life quality as china entered a new era of building an all-round well-off society in the new century; on the other hand , it also reflects the economic development has placed a higher demand on the labor forces who , in turn , have to learn and upgrade their knowledge and skills in order to survive and contribute in the new economy . But what remains a lofty but meaningful to all is that the new goal of community education to build a system of lifelong learning and enhance the development of a learning society through establishing various learning organizations either by family, neighborhood, or enterprises to ensure learning taking place in the new century.

1.2.2 Diversification of Targeted Groups and Educational Activities

Bearing these new aims, community education began to witness the diversification of groups benefiting from community education. In sharp contrast with mainly school students as targeted group in the first phase, community education during this phase was extended to a variety of people including children, young students, adults (laid-off workers, in-service workers, immigrant workers), released prisoners, senior citizens, etc. Though Community education in the new phase remains a major educational force responsible for ethic education for the primary and secondary school students, it takes more consideration of satisfying the learning curiosity of community residents to improve their life quality, but the most noteworthy is the role it plays in adult education. It is clearly stated in the document that “community education should extend to the grassroots level of society to meet the education and training demands of community residents, especially those who have left school and working unit so as to effectively make up for weakness in our education system.” “Currently, the community education should serve as a new growth point for adult education, emphasis should be laid on the education and training for those the community residents place an urgent demand on while the formal school education has not yet been able to offer. In this way, we can create a new space for adult education.” (MOE, 2001)

The training and educational activities also diversifies in this new phase. For the young students, community education both plays its traditional role in ethic education and creates the out-of school practice platform for young students. Apart from this long-term and stable service, the community also carries out anti-drug or web-addicts prevention campaign to educate the young students. For the adults, the community education is responsible for the employment-oriented skill-training for laid-off workers and for the in-service training for workers. Notably, immigrant workers make an important targeted group of adults. The training and education for them varies: urban life adaptation training, legal education (for example: right-defense education) and skill training. In rural areas, the community education is responsible for the practical skill-training for the famers. Aside from these, there are also various educations such as science education, productivity health education, literacy education and safety education etc. for the community residents: young or old, male or female, poor or rich etc.

The community education in this period covers people of all ages, people of both urban and rural background; includes educational activities for healthy growth, working skills, life-quality oriented leanings. Comparatively speaking, community education stated in policy has become all-inclusive while maintaining its focuses.

1.2.3 Rally of Supportive Material and Human Resources

In the 2001 document, it postulates four tasks for the future development of the community education, some of which has been mentioned in the forgoing paragraphs. For example: the education extended to all people and the establishment of learning organizations. The other two major tasks are the exploration and use of community education resources; the establishment of management and operation mechanism for community education. What policies does government make in ensuring the implementation of these two tasks? A review of the policy shows: as for the educational resources, the school facilities, the cultural facilities, facilities are made to open for the community education when they left used. In addition, the well-evaluated national natural preserve has to serve as the base of community environmental education. The to-be-evaluated first-class national museums are expected to provide educational programs to the community if required. Besides, the Open University assumed the responsibility in community education. It helps to establish the training school (or educational center) in communities of different levels. Through the making of this policy, Community education was entitled to sharing the facility and services provided by other departments and educational institutes of the society.

The development of community education also relies on human resources for they make the team of both management and education. It is stated in the 2001 document: “the pilot study in the designated community should combine with those of workers union, communist youth league, women’s association and care-for-next generation committee (known as *guangongwei* in chinese)...the priority should be given to the work of forming volunteer’s team who can play an important part in community education.” (MOE, 2001) The documents issued in the following years states the active role of the youth league as volunteers in the community, the participation of the enterprises in community vocational training, and the high-quality science and technology teams responsible for the work in this aspect and the old generation’s participation in the education of the youth. From the policy review, we may see people from the different organizations, departments join the community education. They are the people with different experiences, ages, and capabilities. Just as the community education targets all people, the people responsible for the community education also varies.

In the following years of 2000, 2004 and 2006 respectively, the Ministry of Education designated the pilot study cities for community education. In 2012, it made the evaluation standard for community education pilot study sites qualified for demonstration. The demonstration sites helped to boost the development of the community education from urban to rural, from east to west all over the country.

2. RATIONALES AND MOTIVATIONS

It was not until at the turn of the 21st century that Chinese government began to make continuous efforts to develop community education by designating pilot study sites, holding national conferences, carrying out evaluations and choosing demonstration sites to deepen and widen the community education practice all over china through making a serious of policies. It was not until then that community education started to have its goals, focus, tasks, and plans made by government. What is the motivation and rationale behind these changes? The community education development in the past 20 years has been closely correlated with domestic socioeconomic changes in conjunction with worldwide trends.

2.1 Domestic Socioeconomic Change

At the Thirteenth National Congress of the Communist Party in 1987, the central government led by Mr. Deng Xiaoping put forth the strategic “three steps” plan in the realization of Chinese modernization. From 1991 to 2000, the country dedicated to reach the stage of a well-off society and succeeded in obtaining the goal at the end of the 20th century indicated by national GDP. As china stepped into the new development stage, the policy concerning community education also changed accordingly. In accordance with the economic level, community education was developed to meet the needs of different people, on one hand; it is developed to improve people’s life quality by satisfying the learning curiosity of people, caring for the growth of kids and youth, the health and ensuring the safety of community members in a well-off society. On the other hand, the socioeconomic change since the initiation of reform and open policy at the end of 1980 brought forth the flow of the rural immigrant workers into cities, the laid-off workers from state-owned enterprises. Together with those in need of vocational training and skill-upgrading in both urban and rural areas to meet the expectation of developed economy, they placed an urgent demand on adult education to fulfill their needs. Community education, due to its capability of making up for what the formal education fails to attend to, gained a developmental momentum in the new century.

Fundamentally, Chinese government adopted the Marx’s theory of super structure and lower structure in guiding its development. As economy, the lower structure, reaches a certain stage, the education, considered as a super structure, also changes. That explains why Chinese government started to focus on community education in the new century as it reached the economic level of a well-off society in a general sense.

2.2 Worldwide Trend of Lifelong Education, Lifelong Learning and Building Learning Society

The nationwide socioeconomic change can explain for the community education development in china to some extent. If combined with worldwide trends of lifelong

education and learning, we might better understand the goal set for the community education in the new century. The notion of “lifelong education” put forth by UNESCO in 1960s has been well-accepted by the end of 1970s all over the world. Lifelong learning goes beyond the traditional education for it helps people to cope with consistent changes throughout one’s life by constant learning throughout one’s life in a knowledge –based economy. Thus, it leads people to see lifelong leaning as necessary for survival in the 21st century. “Learning society” is another notion of importance, meaning not only adult education; instead, the society should be built for the purpose of learning and human perfection by establishing an open and multi-dimensional learning network.

Since 1993, “lifelong education” has been used in educational documents in China, signifying the beginning of the application of this educational notion into educational practices. As we know, Community is where people born, grow, live and communicate, it is where the individual learn to acquire knowledge, sharpen skill, improve ability and go through socialization. Therefore, community is an important composing part of lifelong education to meet people’s need of learning. In 1999, the “lifelong education” first joined with “community education” in the educational document. (MOE, 1999) From then on, the aim of the community education in china was set to build a lifelong learning system as well as a learning society.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Though there has been progress in the past decade, problems and challenges remain. First, though laws concerning community education are a good guarantee of its operation and development, so far, at the national level, there is no such law about community education and lifelong education. Besides, in practice, some research shows the desire of residents to learn is not as strong as expected; the resources are far from being thoroughly explored and used; regional imbalance has not yet been overcome; the financing and motivation mechanisms need to be perfected. (Ye, 2006) As we know, community education in China is now at the explorative and experimental stage. It was not until 2007 that China succeeded in conducting pilot study all over the country. It takes time to see a balanced development of community education all over the county. What is important is economy has to develop further to motivate more people to see the necessity of learning and motivate themselves to learn, which could enhance further development of community education. Economic factor, if not combined with cultural one, cannot explain satisfactorily all that is happening in China. As we can see, Community education development is largely regulated and directed by the government. Efforts and ideas from the public are comparatively low. Traditionally, china is not a country

enjoying community activities. However, nowadays the social transformation gave rise to the community joined by people of even dramatically different backgrounds. It takes time for people to have more community consciousness to be active participants in community education to transform the current situation facing China.

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