

# **Teaching under China's Market Economy: Five Case Studies**

## **Review of Literature**

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## **Introduction**

This project investigates changes in education under China's market economy, focusing on the teaching and living conditions of teachers. Special attention will be paid to the labour rights issues and employment conditions. The overall intent of the research project is to contribute to the improvement of the status of teachers in China and the recognition of their human and trade union rights.

Four key questions guide this study:

1. What are the current social, political, and economic contexts within which teaching takes place in China?
2. As China has transformed from a socialist planned economy to a market-oriented system, how has teaching changed?
3. What are the challenges and opportunities for Chinese teachers under China's market economy?
4. What are the working conditions and professional support for teachers, including workloads, pay, job security, employment, per-service and in-service training, access to professional development, issues of unionization and professionalism. How can we make teaching in China more equitable and socially just?

To help us address these questions, a case study approach is adopted, because the methodology enables a focus on the particularity and complexity of a single case to understand an activity and its significance (Stake, 1995). Examining a particular case will cast light onto something other than the case, that is, the case study will be conducted so as to understand the unique conditions, challenges, and experiences of teachers in each case context, for the purposes of developing indicators of the wellbeing and status of teachers. This study will employ literature review, document analysis, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews. The first phase of the study involves preparation and review of literature related to the social, political, and economic contexts within which education and teaching take place.

## **Context**

Following China's joining the WTO in 2001 and the subsequent completion of its market opening pledges in 2006, China has entered the age of market economy. Fuelled by forces of economic globalization, China has experienced an unprecedented economic liberalization,

industrialization, urbanization, and privatization, which redefined the relationship between the state, the market and other non-state sections (Fang, 2007; Lo, 2007; Mok, 2005). With a “massive, protracted, and unexpected economic upsurge” (Brandt & Rawski, 2008, p.1) in the past thirty years, China’s economy has become the second largest in the world after the United States in terms of gross domestic product.

It is also likely that China runs the largest education system in the whole world. In 2008, the country had an enrolment of 103 million elementary students in 300,000 schools, 55 million junior secondary students in 58,000 schools, and 45 million senior secondary students in 30,806 schools (Ministry of Education, 2009). Meanwhile, there were 29 million students studying in 2,663 universities and colleges. This system is seemingly supported by the largest teaching force in the whole world. The Ministry of Education also reports that in 2008 China employed 5.6 million full-time elementary teachers, 3.5 million junior secondary school teachers, 1.5 million senior secondary school teachers, and 1.2 million university and college teachers. Hence, understanding the experience of Chinese teachers becomes a strategic plan in understanding the situation of the planet’s teaching force.

It is well documented that teachers in China have had a long-honoured standing in the past and teaching as a profession was held in high esteem. Historically teachers were listed among the five categories of those most respected by society: the God of Heaven, the God of the Earth, the emperor, parents and teachers (天、地、君、亲、师) (Zhou, 1988). As an educator and teacher, Confucius (孔子, 551 – 479 BCE) was himself venerated as a sage by generations of Chinese people. Yet despite the long and rich heritage of education in China, the formal education of teachers is a relatively modern development that emerged only at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At that time the national government developed special teacher education schools. Since then a well-developed and hierarchical teacher education system has evolved (Guo, 2005). The most prestigious level of teacher education is provided by teachers’ universities and colleges which offer four-year first-degree programs that prepare students to teach in senior secondary schools. At the next level are junior teachers’ colleges which provide two- or three-year certificate programs for junior secondary school teachers. Below these programs are secondary teachers’ schools, which offer two-year program for those who wish to teach in elementary school or at the kindergarten level.

A number of documents examine challenges facing teacher education in China (Guo 1996, 2005, Li 1999, Paine 1990). The shortage of qualified teachers has been identified as one of the ongoing challenges, particularly in rural, remote and minority areas. Another challenge pertains to public attitude toward teacher education. Some teacher education students believe that good teaching was innate, and that some teachers would never teach well even though they had received formal teacher training (Guo 1996). A third challenge relates to the focus of teacher education. Many researchers maintain that the current teacher education programs are narrowly designed, with rigid curriculum, excessive focus on subject training, and insufficient emphasis on teaching methodology and educational practice (Li 1999, Paine 1990). Furthermore, the current teacher training courses are theoretical and abstract, and teaching practica are too short to provide adequate preparation for the field (Guo 1996 2005). Often lecturers focusing on subject teaching methodology (教学法) were taught by those who could not teach a specialization subject very well. Some lecturers may not have had training themselves, although they were assigned to teach methodology, and since pedagogy had a low status, anyone would be able to teach it.

However, professional competencies are seen by many as the core of the development of quality teaching (Cochrane-Smith & Zeichner 2005, Zeichner 2006). Such factors have led to China's teacher education programs neglecting to educate their student teachers in actual teaching skills, with many teachers arriving in the classroom with little teaching experience (Guo 2005). This is also reflected in the little time given to reflective and collaborative practices and the social foundations of education. The pre-service teacher is simply seen as an apprentice to the master teacher (Li, 1999). Zhou (2002) has called attention to the outdated system of post-secondary education built on the Soviet model, and he calls for more internship, and new curricula, a call mirrored by Qi et al. (2004) who argue for new models based on initial post-secondary education (three or four years) followed by one year of teacher education. Paine (1990) sees the need for teaching to become less teacher-centred and more interactive. Curriculum and program changes are not the only solution, however. The social status of the teaching profession once so highly thought of and respected (Li, 1999) needs to be reclaimed through renewed professionalism (Guo & Pungur, 2008; Zhou, 2002). This aspect implies not only pedagogical knowledge and skills, gained through quality initial education and continuous professional development, but also professional autonomy, ability to exercise control over

teaching process, safe work environment and security of employment as well as necessary resources.

Under this context, the remaining literature review will focus on the following areas:

1. Curriculum reform in response to the market economy and the impact on teachers: Since China has undertaken a number of educational reforms related to curriculum and teacher education, it is important to have a comprehensive review of such changes and examine to what extent such reforms have been a requirement of and a response to the market economy, and to what extent such reforms have impacted on teachers.
2. English education and English as a global language in China: Globalization and market economy pressures many nations to adopt English as a business and global language. We will examine how English education in China has responded to such pressures and what kind of challenges it poses on teachers.
3. Minority education: This section of literature review examines to what extent education in minority areas has been further marginalized by China's market economy.
4. Disparity of education in rural and urban areas particularly with regard to the well-being of teachers: One outcome of globalization and market economy is the widening gap between urban and rural areas. We will review relevant literature to examine how this has manifested in China.
5. Migrant workers and their children's education: The integration of world economy requires the mobility of people across national boundaries as well as within nation states. It is important to examine the challenges and opportunities facing the education of migrant children as well as migrant teachers.

### **Curriculum Reform in China and Its Impact on Teachers**

In the early 1980s, Chinese government made a historic decision to shift China's economic system from the planned economy to the market economy (Guo, 2010; Feng, 2006). The dramatic change of the economic system initiated consequent changes in political system towards decentralization and democracy. The rapid social, economic, and the political development in China called for fundamental changes in education. To improve the educational system and its quality as well as to prepare Chinese citizens for an increasingly global society, the Ministry of Education in China released the Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline (pilot version) in June 2001 and officially started the most unprecedented basic education reform

in Chinese modern education history: the New Curriculum Reform (NCR). After the planning and piloting stages, the new curriculum is being implemented in all grade schools in China and it anticipated to involve 474,000 schools, 10 million teachers, and 200 million students by 2010 (China Education and Research Network, 2010).

The philosophy underpinning the new curriculum is “for each student’s development” (Zhong, Cui, & Zhang, 2001) and it calls for transformative changes in many aspects of Chinese basic education, including curricula structure, curricula standards and content, pedagogy, the development and use of textbooks and resources, curricula assessment and evaluation, curricula administration, and teacher education and development. The governmental policy Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline (pilot version) specifies the following six objectives of the New Curriculum Reform:

1. Develop a comprehensive and harmonious basic education system. Change the function of curriculum from knowledge transmission to helping students become active lifelong learners;
2. Construct new curriculum structure. Change the subject-centered curriculum structure into a balanced, integrated, and optional curriculum structure to meet the diverse needs of schools and students;
3. Reflect modern curriculum content. Reduce the difficulty and complexity of the old curriculum content and reflect the new essential knowledge, skills and attitudes that students need to be lifelong learners. Strengthen the relevance of the curriculum content to students’ lives;
4. Promote constructivist learning. Change the passive learning and rote learning styles into active and problem-solving learning styles to improve students’ overall abilities of information processing, knowledge acquisition, problem solving, and cooperative learning;
5. Form appropriate assessment and evaluation rationales. Curriculum assessment and evaluation shifts from its selective purpose to improving the quality of teaching and learning. A combination of formative and summative evaluation approaches is required in the new curriculum; and

6. Promote curriculum democracy and adaptation. Curriculum administration is decentralized toward a joint effort of central government, local governments, and schools to strengthen the relevance of the curriculum to local situations.

These six objectives indicate the scope and complexity of this reform and represent a radical departure from traditional Chinese education. The changes demanded by the new curriculum are clearly not easy to make for all educators in China because it involves transformative changes in their understanding of teaching and learning, in educational pedagogies and relationships, and in their identities. Teachers are required to become thoughtful and tactful pedagogues with the capacity of thinking, introspection, reflecting, accepting and appreciating the complexity of the new curriculum and its application to their situations. For Chinese teachers, who are traditionally trained and developed in an examination driven and competitively selective atmosphere under an elitist education system, these changes are not easy and natural, but have to be deliberately appreciated, guided, and sought in both pre-service and in-service teacher education programs.

The New Curriculum Reform has had tremendous impact on teachers in many different ways. In her interpretive study of understanding Chinese teachers' lived experiences in curriculum change, Guo (2010) investigated what the curriculum change meant for teachers as well as how the dramatic change affected teachers' wellbeing. For many teachers, she summarized, the curriculum reform in China meant tremendous pressure, dilemmas, ambivalence, constraints, as well as other psychological and pedagogical struggles in the process of new curriculum implementation. It also meant a new development process for Chinese teachers' professionalism, including forming new understandings of curriculum, rethinking the purposes of education, and developing new strategies to enhance pedagogical relationships and instructional efficiency. Being constrained and controlled by National University Entrance Exam, Chinese teachers were going through this unlearning and relearning process within the unchanged exam-based evaluation system.

In addition, a lot of teachers felt they had become unqualified based on the new curriculum standards and felt depressed because of the insecurity of their employment status in schools. Many teachers were stressed about the lengthy working hours and heavy workload due to the required professional development courses/workshops. Typically these workshops were either completely lectures or "divorced from reality" (Guo, 2010, p. 210), suggesting a linear

movement in copying curriculum-as-plan into teaching practices. Teachers who participated in these types of PD sessions quite frequently experienced disappointment, failure, dissatisfaction, and loss in practice and eventually turn to the old ways of teaching. Their voices and feelings were not fully recognized or appreciated in the process of curriculum administration and implementation.

Another challenge facing all teachers is that their capabilities, experiences, and pedagogic wisdoms accumulated through prior educational practices are undervalued (Guo, 2010). Teachers long for meaningful ways to maintain their self-esteem in new personal and professional identities and to deal with the conflicts between the new roles established by the new curriculum and their identities rooted deeply in traditions. Consciously and unconsciously, they constantly reflect on who they are, what they can do within the current school and social structure, and how much they would like to invest in implementing the new curriculum. Identity change has been identified as the most difficult challenge for teachers during this dramatic curriculum change (Guo, 2010; Wang, 2006). In China, a society characterized by its strong collective social culture with a very long history, identity has always been defined as being collective instead of individual. Teachers' need of maintaining a collective identity cannot be ignored and devalued, as it reflects the cultural and social traditions. However, it is equally important to recognize that the emphasis of collective teaching identity comes at a cost of suppressing teachers' individual needs, wants, and desires. This reality causes intolerable contradictions between what teachers are expected to do and what they want to do as individuals.

### **English Education in China and Challenges for Teachers**

English, the first language of about 400 million people in Britain, the United States and the Commonwealth, has become the dominant global language of communication, business, aviation, entertainment, diplomacy and the Internet. Over a billion people speak English as their second or foreign language. These second- and foreign-language speakers of English include millions of migrants and school-age students (see Faltis, 2006), over 560,000 international ESL university students in the United States (Open Doors, 2006) and over 137,000 in Canada (OECD, 2003). About a billion others in the rest of the world speak English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The estimated users and learners of English in China and India alone number over 533 million, more than those in the United States, the UK and Canada put together (Kachru, 2005).



Since its open-door policy in 1978, China began a transformation from planned economy to market economy. English serves as a requirement of and response to market economy. In 1998, the Ministry of Education official in charge of foreign language education, Cen Jianjun, stated that the goal for the English education in China was not an educational issue *per se*, but an issue pertaining to China's economy:

Foreign language teaching is not a simple issue of teaching. It bears direct influence on the development of China's science, technology, and economy, and the improvement of the quality of reform (Cen, 1998, cited in Cai, 2006, pp. 3-4).

If a nation's foreign language proficiency is raised, it will be able to obtain information of science and technology from abroad and translate it into the native language. Ultimately this will be turned into production force (Cen, 1998, cited in Cai, 2006, p. 3).

The Chinese government sees that promoting the learning of English as paramount in the nation's attempt to become competitive in the global market. In large cities such as Shanghai, the economic capital of 'foreign language' is highlighted:

To develop world-class foreign language teaching programs in Shanghai is a prerequisite for turning the municipality into a world-class international metropolis (Shanghai Curriculum and Teaching Material Reform Commission, 1999, p. 3).

China's admission into the World Trade Organization in 2001, Beijing's successful hosting of the Olympics Games in 2008, and Shanghai's hosting of the 2010 World Expo have seen a major acceleration of provisions and planning on behalf of foreign languages in general and English in particular. The recent English curriculum reform is strongly influenced by economic globalization forces as the nation attempts to shape their education systems to provide those skills needed in the growing global economy. Over the last 30 years the spread of English has increased in China, affecting education at all levels. In January 2001, China decided to make English compulsory in elementary schools from Grade 3 upwards. The Chinese Ministry of Education issued a document entitled "Guidelines for Promoting English Teaching in Elementary Schools" (Ministry of Education, 2001). It replaced the focus of the 1999 curriculum on receptive skills like reading, with a new emphasis on the productive skills for interpersonal

communication (Ministry of Education, 2001). A new English language curriculum for senior secondary schools was published in the People's Education Press in April 2003 (Ministry of Education, 2003), notable for including both a 'humanistic' and an 'instrumental' aim of English education (Wang, 2006), thereby reinforcing moves away from learning four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing to develop intercultural abilities and to present China to the world in English (Ministry of Education, 2003).

At the university level, English is a compulsory subject in its entrance examinations, and university students with non-English majors who fail College English Test Band 4 (CET4) do not receive their university diplomas. CET4 is also a prerequisite for admission to graduate schools. Recently China has even issued a historic policy calling for the teaching of some major university disciplines such as information technology, biotechnology, new material technology, finance and law through the medium of English (TESOL, 2006). By 2005, approximately 176.7 million Chinese were engaged in English learning (Graddol, 2006). Private tuition and part-time study of English flourish. A perfect example was Yu Minhong's 'New Oriental School' (新东方学校), which was established in 1993 with fewer than 30 students. By the end of 2006, however, the number of students had soared to 4 million (New Oriental website); from a private school with investment less than 200 thousand yuan, to an educational enterprise with a total capital as high as 50 billion yuan (Zhou, 2003).

English has become a requirement for descent employment, social status, and financial security in China. College graduates with competence in their own discipline plus good English skills are more likely to find employment than those who lack such skills in foreign enterprises, joint ventures and cooperatively run enterprises, which offer highest starting salaries (Gao, 2009; Yang, 2006). Attracted by the opportunity to find employment, by the high salaries in these enterprises, and by the high social status, students are motivated to learn English. English is also a precondition for promotion, and many professionals invest heavily in English language learning because it is used as a yardstick to measure general competence (Xie, 2004). For example, an associate professor of Chinese was denied promotion because she failed the English examination. One administrative assistant in a technology company in Beijing stated that his desire to improve his English was to achieve social mobility and get better pay: "those with a good command of English usually have more choices and chances...to be promoted to an upper level of the society" (Li, 2009, p. 214).

The English curriculum reform creates tensions for English teachers. One of the tensions is whether teachers should teach English for the exam or teach for the purpose of interpersonal communication. As mentioned above, English is a prerequisite for university entrance. Recently, a pass in English exams is a prerequisite for secondary school entrance, which becomes increasingly significant. Admission to a good secondary school almost guarantees an automatic admission to a good university. Study abroad students in large cities like Shenzhen spend all three high school years cramming for the Scholastic Achievement Test and Test of English as a Foreign Language (Jiang, 2009). These exams require students to have a large amount of vocabulary, grammar skills and reading comprehension skills. Many teachers tend to focus on these skills in their teaching and ignore students' communicative competence. Students' scores on the exams influence teachers' merit increments. Many teachers tend to work overtime to prepare their students for the exams. Furthermore, classes are relatively large (more than 50 students) so students seldom have chance to speak. This makes it difficult to implement the curriculum from the central government to stress oral English (Orton, 2009). Another tension in Chinese English education reform and development is education equity (China Daily, 2009). Currently there is no equal allocation of education resources, such as public investment, teachers and school facilities. Some key middle and secondary schools in urban cities have better resources and the most qualified teachers, with bachelors' or masters' degrees in English major. Some of these teachers have many opportunities for professional development, including opportunities to go abroad for further English training. These schools can afford to invite English-native speakers as their teachers. In other schools, particularly in rural areas, there are few English books and materials and a shortage of qualified, practicing English teachers. These teachers tend to have little training in English education and limited opportunities for professional development.

### **Disparity of Education in Rural and Urban Areas**

Generally speaking, China's socialist educational system is made up of "gongban" (public/government-managed) schools and "minban" (people/community-managed) schools in terms of teacher inputs, financing, and administration. Minban education refers to the formal schooling in elementary and secondary schools, where minban teachers are responsible for curricula and instruction and school management. Usually located in poverty-stricken rural areas, or economically underdeveloped districts under urban administration, minban schools are set up

with the resources contributed by individuals, households and the local communities, and are subject to educational and political authorities of the communities and grassroots governments. (Wang, 2002). In 1986, the central government provided a categorical grant to convert 200,000 minban teachers (about 7% of the total in basic education) into gongban teachers; local governments have subsequently provided a monthly living subsidy to minban teachers. Because of the costs of conversion and the unwillingness of gongban teachers to work in rural areas, minban teachers will remain the backbone of rural primary education in the near future. A practical strategy is to continue to improve the monthly compensation to minban teachers, and to provide some pension benefits to retired minban teachers so that they feel more secured and continue to work hard in rural areas.

The gap between rural and urban schools as well as minban and gongban teachers in China has long been a topic in educational research (Knight & Shi, 1996; Tan, 2003; Wang & Li, 2009; Zhang, 2007). An earlier study published in 1996 exploring the disparity between rural and urban education in China showed that rural schools have not only significantly less funding but also more decentralized funding than their urban counterparts (Knight & Shi, 1996). Another disparity between urban and rural China is reflected in the ethnic and gender discrimination. For urban-dwellers under 30 years of age, no significant difference was identified between men and women's education. Rural women, however, are generally at an educational disadvantage. People with ethnic minority status are also at an educational disadvantage position in rural areas "despite the policies of positive discrimination" (p.115).

Moving to the market economy does not seem to bridge the gap between rural and urban education in various aspects. For example, a recent study exploring the quality of compulsory education in West China identifies a big gap between West rural and urban schools (Wang & Li, 2009). The data shows that some rural elementary schools fail to achieve the basic requirement of the curriculum standards; and students in rural schools perform significantly poorer than their urban counterparts in various subjects including math, English, and Chinese language arts. The urban/rural disparity is also reflected in their attainment of education that rural school students, both elementary and high school students, have high dropout and low graduation rate. Teaching quality is identified as the main factor contributing to such a big discrepancy between urban and rural education. Rural teachers, compared to urban teachers, are poorly trained and have less

opportunity for professional development and support. Rural schools also have fewer leading teachers, and are more likely to have insufficient number of teachers than urban schools.

Other aspects related to such regional disparity includes that rural teachers tend to be senior in age and less motivated in further education (Bao, 2006; Wang & Li, 2009). Many rural teachers have to teach subjects that are not consistent with the major that they studied at universities or colleges, while such phenomenon in town and city schools is minimal. In rural schools, research and teaching reforms are hard to develop and put into effect because leaders of town and countryside do not understand the importance of development of teaching research in these schools.

Teacher's wellbeing had also been investigated through the examination of their mental health (Gao & Yuan, 1995; Liao & Li, 2004; Zhang & Lu, 2008). These studies showed that although the rates vary, in general, surprisingly high percentages of teachers were diagnosed to have psychological problems. These problems included, but not limited to, depression, anxiety, disturbance of interpersonal relations, and problem of employment behaviour. Considering the widely dispersed findings presented in the existing literature regarding Chinese teachers' mental status, Zhang and Lu (2008) quantitatively synthesized and systematically reviewed teacher's mental health research in China since 1994 using meta-analysis. Their analysis showed that rural teachers, in comparison with urban teachers, have more severe mental disorders. They conclude that the following factors are primarily contributed to the high diagnostic rate of teachers' mental disorders: first, rapid changes in the social and political environment in addition to social transition of different types bring teachers great shock. The second factor relates to the intensified conflict between different cultures and values and the abrupt change in cultural philosophy. A third source of mental pressure on teachers comes from changes in the educational teaching system and high expectations on teachers. The constant change of information technology and the development of mass media cause teachers anxiety that they are falling behind. This is further aggravated by high competition in their teaching.

The research exploring the impact of the transition from planned economy to market economy in China has also focused on the reform of teachers' employment system, namely from the traditional "Tongyi Fenpei" (TF, unified placement of all graduates) to "Jiaoshi Pinren Zhi" (JPZ, a free contract employment system). In the 1980s, some western scholars had already noticed the problems of the regional brain drain and possible inequity in education as a result of

the 1985 educational reform in China (Bakken, 1988; Lewin & Xu, 1989). They therefore advocate for the teacher's "contract of employment". Since the 1990s, Chinese researchers have also paid attention in this field and their studies revealed educational inequality, particularly between urban and rural schools (Bao, 2006; Yuan, 1999). Niu (2009) reviewed the existing literature related to such reform of teacher employment system and concluded that although the transfer on teachers' employment system from the traditional TF to JPZ enhanced teachers' motivation and working efficiency, it has nonetheless resulted in brain drain of veteran teachers. This consequently led to the huge gap of teaching quality between rural and urban regions. Rural teachers, compared to urban teachers, not only have lower salaries (sometimes paid in arrears for a long time) and no bonus, worse medical care service, and less funding and training opportunities, but also teach more students, in larger classes, with fewer resources and work in worse conditions. Due to such disparity, rural schools suffer from "brain drain". That is, rural veteran teachers outflow to urban schools.

### **Chinese Minority Education and Teachers**

The recent economic, social and political changes in China not only impact Chinese society in general, but especially its over 106 million minority population (Beckett & Postiglione, 2010), including teaching profession, teachers, and teacher welfare, particularly due to the rapid change in market economy. For example, there seems to be a consensus that in north-western China, teaching is referred to as an honorable profession with few benefits. Minority teachers are believed to work harder with fewer or no benefits resulting in high teacher turn-over rate, which impacts students' educational development negatively (Chang & Lu, 2006). A review of recent literature reveals that teacher shortage, low salary, heavy workload and poor housing are some of the major issues of concern and calls for career incentives, improved recruitment strategies, restructured training programs, mentoring programs, salary increases, and better work conditions (Postiglione, 2002).

There is ample evidence in the literature suggesting that shortage of qualified minority teachers is a serious issue in China (Ma, 2009; Pan, 2009; Tsung, Wang, & Zhang, 2011; Zhou, 2011). According to Zhou (2011), many teachers who are in the teaching force in Northwestern China's Gansu are not qualified to teach. A majority of teachers in Dongxiang County, for example, are graduates of a local secondary level normal school. Scholars cite several reasons for such shortage. Qualified teachers are unwilling to teach in minority areas in the west because

there is no incentive in place. The few who accept teaching positions there quickly transfer to county and/or urban area schools where there are better benefits (Wen, 2009). According to Pan (2009), even the graduates from rural areas look for opportunities in developed eastern part of the country than going back to teach in their hometowns. In fact, many graduates of teacher training programs would even rather look for part time work in the cities than taking up teaching as a profession in their rural hometowns (Yu, 2005). This leaves rural schools with almost no teachers with post-secondary education (Pan, 2009).

What else contributes to the teacher shortage? Many factors such as the aging teacher work-force, heavy workload, work conditions, few training opportunities as well as salary and housing seem to be the biggest contributors. For example, according to Pan (2009), more than half of the teachers in some rural minority schools are over 40 years of age with weekly teaching load of over 20 hours. Poor work environment and work-related stress contributes to a high teacher turn-over rate among minority teachers (Chang & Lu, 2006; Li, 2004; Lu & Chang, 2006; Zhou, 2011). Many minority teachers live in poor mountainous areas where there is no transportation (Zhou, 2011). It takes some teachers about an hour to walk to work. Additionally, they also have heavy farming responsibilities where they must work on the land allocated to them (Zhou, 2002). Schools are often cancelled during harvest seasons because teachers are not available to teach (Pan, 2009).

Minority teacher's salaries, particularly of those who work in poor rural areas, are very low. State hired gongban teachers are only paid their base salaries. Substitute teachers are paid less even though they do the same work. Non-state hired minban teachers earn only half the salary of the state hires. Over 57% minority teachers in Gansu, Northwestern China, earn less than 1000 yuan (\$120 US) a month, 24.4% of whom earn less than 230 yuan monthly (\$30 US) (Chang & Lu, 2006). According to Li (2004), the Chinese government has taken series of measure to improve the situation by making some substitute teachers permanent and raising the salaries of the non-state hired minban teachers. However, there is still much to be done. Teachers have very few medical benefits. Some teachers sigh that they cannot afford to be sick. Based on the 2001 Urumqi survey on the work and living conditions of higher education minority physical education instructors, Li (2004) reports that minority physical education assistant lecturers in Urumqi earned average base salary of 660 yuan (less than \$100 US) a month; lecturers earned 840 yuan (about \$110 US) a month, associate professors earned \$920 yaun (about \$130 US) a

month, and full professors earned 1,200 yuan (about \$190 US) a month. They earned 60-100 yuan extra for each course hour they taught. This resulted in average household income of 470 yuan (about \$60 US) a month for a family of four. This statistics becomes more illuminating when the minority teacher's salaries are viewed in comparison to the salaries of Han teachers in the developed eastern areas of China.

According to Guo (1995), monthly salary of the minority substitute teachers in Hexi Prefecture of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region ranged from 45 yuan (about \$6 US) to 227 yuan ((about \$30 US), averaging at 81 yuan (about \$11 US). All substitute teachers in Dongba, Ma'an, Du'an counties earned less than 60 yuan (less than \$9 US) a month. Most substitute teachers work short-term only for several months of the year. Zhang's (2008) survey of Weiyuan County in Gansu Province revealed that substitute teachers' monthly salary there ranged from 40 to 80 yuan (about \$5-10 US), over 70% of whom earned 40 yuan, which is the salary that some teachers earned for over 20 years. The same researcher reported that the average monthly salary of the 9,936 substitute teachers in 172 townships in Guangxi Autonomous Region was 81.6 yuan (about \$11 US) and the average monthly salary of the substitute teachers of Yunnan was 113.99 (about \$13US) (Zhang, 2008). In some places, up to 75% of the minority substitute teachers also shoulder dual roles: teaching and farming (Shang, Liu & Liu, 2008), dramatically lower than the salaries of state-hired full-time teachers (W. H., 2010). Worse yet, although minority substitute teachers do the same work as their state hired teacher counterparts, they do not have medical insurance, unemployment insurance, retirement benefits, or housing allowance that the latter do, leading to resentment and high teacher turn-over. We are urged to ask what contributions teachers live and work in such conditions can and are making to western region educational development and how such conditions impact their teaching quality (Shang, Liu & Liu, 2008).

Despite the central government's call for teacher welfare improvement, minority teachers in poor minority areas also live in poor and no housing condition. Limited budget allows for housing allocation for only two-teacher households. A majority of the teachers in poor minority areas, however, are in single teacher household situation and are therefore excluded from such housing allocation (Zhou, 2002; Zhou, 2008). Zhou's (2008) survey of rural teachers' living conditions shows that a majority of schools have no housing arrangement for teachers. Most teachers live in poorly built unsafe old classroom-turned-into-houses with minimum furniture.



Years of neglect of mostly mud-brick and wooden houses are also structurally damaged and make terrible living condition.

Furthermore, rural minority teachers have heavy work load that includes non-teaching jobs. This happens in situations where schools are dually supervised by the Bureau of Education and town/xiang government. This is problematic because while the bureaus of education assign teaching tasks, town/xiang departments assign additional non-teaching tasks such as managing employment services, surveying rural surplus labourers, and registering labourers for various training programs, which teachers must also perform successfully. Otherwise, they must forfeit part of their wages. There is also additional work such as cleaning, gardening, and campus security watch expected of these teachers (Ma, 2009). Needless to say, not many people want to be teachers in such condition and those who take up teaching positions in rural minority areas do transfer to urban areas with better benefits leaving the rural schools for substitute teachers (Li, 1999; Pan, 2009; Yu, 2005). As a result, the vacated and/or unfilled positions are filled with substitute teachers.

### **Migrant Workers and Their Children's Education**

Migrant workers are temporary workers from China's rural areas working in its urban construction industry, manufacturing, food and domestic services, providing a source of abundant, cheap, and exploitable labour for China's economic boom. According to China's National Bureau of Statistics, in 2005 about 150 million migrant workers moved to cities from rural areas in search of jobs, and the number will reach a total of 200 million by 2015 and 250 million by 2025 (Fan, 2008). The floating population in China is claimed by some to be the largest in human history (Fishman, 2005). According to Jordan and Düvell (2003), migration is "a requirement of, a response to and a resistance against, global institutional transformation and integration of the world economy" (p. 63). While globalization has contributed to the widening gap between the northern and southern countries internationally; within China it has exacerbated the gap between China's east coast and western regions. As a result, many migrants are moving to China's coastal cities, such as Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Beijing, and Tianjin.

In fact, China managed to resist against globalization until 1978, when the late Chinese leader Deng Xiao-ping launched the "open door" policy which shifted China to a socialist market economy. The first step in Deng's reform was to liberalize the agricultural sector by introducing the household responsibility system in replacement of the collective commune. The agricultural

reform did not trigger immediate migration *per se*, but the surplus labour resulting from the reform provided the necessary supply which fuelled future migration. Measures were also taken to reform the industries in encouraging joint ventures with foreign companies, but foreign direct investment did not take place until the mid-1990s when Deng made a trip to south China and proclaimed a bold shift toward market economy. Following Deng's south China trip, China is experiencing unprecedented economic liberalization, industrialization, urbanization, and privatization – all are required by economic globalization. In particular, following China's joining the WTO in 2001 and the subsequent completion of its market opening pledges in 2006, the China market was forced to open for market penetration and deepening of service industries (Fang, 2007). China's reform era coincided with a new stage of globalization when the integration of world economy required China's cheap labour, abundant natural resources, and a gigantic consumer market. Many people claim that China has become the largest world factory.

Indeed, over the past 30 years, China has experienced “an economic miracle” (Dutta, 2006, p. xii), and a “massive, protracted, and unexpected economic upsurge” (Brandt & Rawski, 2008, p. 1). In 2010, its economy became the second largest in the world after the United States in terms of gross domestic product. Despite the claim that the Chinese enjoy more freedom than at any time in recent history (Jiang, 2008), China is also facing unprecedented challenges, including rising unemployment, socio-economic disparity, corruption, environment degradation, and lack of social safety net (Cheng, 2008). In particular, despite the fact that migrant workers have made indispensable contributions to China's booming economy, their social and political status remains low. They work for long hours, and possibly at the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs, however, they have been “underpaid or even unpaid after months of hard work” (Lo, 2007, p. 138). In some places, the overdue or defaulted payments to migrant workers have become an important factor for social instability (Xiang, 2004). In their adaptation to urban life, migrants face multi-faceted barriers (Guo & Zhang, 2010). As institutional and economic barriers have denied migrant access to affordable public housing, many of them live in “migrant enclaves,” which are officially regarded as “slums or shantytowns with chaotic land use, dilapidated housing, severe infrastructure deficiency, intensified social disorder, and unsightly urban eyesore” (Zhang, 2005, p. 250). As a result, a new urban underclass consisting of migrant workers has been gradually developing in many Chinese cities (Solinger, 2008).

While many migrants are temporary sojourners, some of them bring families to the cities. One prominent issue facing migrant families concerns migrant children's access to education (Liang & Chen, 2007; Lu, 2007; Zhu, 2001). Given the transient nature of migration, it is difficult to assess how many migrant students there are exactly in China. It is estimated that approximately 20 million migrant school-aged children have accompanied their parents in relocating to cities in China (Wong, Chang & He, 2009). Despite China's education law to provide equal access to nine years compulsory education for all school-aged children in China, migrant children are often deprived of such opportunities because they do not have urban household registration. Research shows that migrant children are much less likely to be enrolled in school compared to local children (Liang & Chen, 2007). Liang and Chen also point out that temporary migrant children suffer most during the first year of migration when school enrollment rate is only 60 percent. It usually takes them five years to reach parity with local students in school enrollment. To enter public local schools, until recently migrants are required to pay a number of extra fees, including "education endorsement fees", "temporary learning status fees", usually in the range of thousands. Furthermore, there are substantial regional variations regarding migrant children's education. Surprisingly, migrant children in more coastal regions and in destinations with high levels of development and high concentration of migrants (e.g., Shanghai, Guangdong) tend to experience more barriers to education because local governments in these regions are more likely to impose more rigid control measures as a way of deterring settlement of migrant families (Lu, 2007). As Zhu (2001) explains, the local governments are concerned that if they provide the financial support for migrant schools, such actions might lead to a drastic expansion of the migrant population which would create further burden for them.

It is evident that public schools are neither accessible nor affordable to migrant children. Their only option has been to enroll their children in unlicensed, under-funded and inadequately staffed schools specifically for migrant children (Irwin, 2000; Kwong, 2004; Woronov, 2009). It is estimated that there are between 200 and 300 migrant schools in Beijing alone (Inwin, 2000). While some proprietors of such schools are motivated to provide an affordable education for migrant children, others are driven by the profit or simply making a profit, or a combination of all these reasons. Unfortunately, these schools lack the good conditions of the local public schools. Many of them are shanty schools housed in makeshift sheds, which are unsafe and

overcrowded (Kwong, 2004; Zhu, 2001). Furthermore, as Kwong notes, “Lighting is poor and air circulation inadequate. They do not have facilities for extracurricular activities, and lack clean drinking water and an adequate number of lavatories” (p. 1079). In addition, the pedagogical standards are low and do not meet government requirements. They lack qualified teachers, adequate equipment, books and other teaching materials. More importantly, they do not have the governmental recognition or support, because they are seen as an encroachment on the government jurisdiction (Li et al., 2010). Moreover, as Woronov (2004) explains, migrants and their children are often seen to embody China’s weakness and backwardness, and hence do not deserve the recognition as equal citizens to receive a free education.

### **Conclusion**

The above discussion has clearly demonstrated that China has entered the age of globalization and market economy. Despite its booming economy, there are still a number of serious issues facing China’s education, resulting from recent curriculum reform, English language education, disparity in rural and urban education, marginalization of minority education, and issues related to migrant children’s migration. These issues have had tremendous impact on teachers, including their workload, wellbeing, teaching and living conditions. This review has provided important information to help us understand the context within which this project takes place. More importantly, the five case studies will further contextualize these studies reported here and shed new light on the issues facing changes in education under China’s market economy. It is hoped that each of the five case studies will be instrumental in examining a particular case to cast light onto something other than the case. In another word, the case study will be conducted so as to understand the unique conditions, challenges, and experiences of teachers in each context, for the purpose of developing indicators of the wellbeing and social and political status of teachers.

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