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## **Fundamental Features of Chinese Educational System**

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*"If you do not know, learn; if you know, teaches"*

*Confucius*

### **1. Introduction**

China, as the Asian giant has general characteristics in their educational, economic, cultural and social system that make it different from the rest of the world, as we know is the most populous country in the world with approximately 1.312 billion people, representing 20 % of world population. According to some official sources this country has more than 318 million students throughout the education system (from initial postgraduate level) and approximately 15 million teachers.

A peculiar feature that distinguishes the Chinese educational system is that it is very diverse within the same country in cultural terms, economic development and educational activity.

We must not fail to take into account the cultural, technological and educational development China dates back to 5000 years ago, making for many years stages of technological breakthroughs, showing as examples the invention of the compass, printing, paper, gunpowder and other important technological discoveries. That is why some authors determine that it was the most advanced civilization in the world in terms of technology in approximately 1400.

China has strongly influenced the language and culture of many Asian countries like Japan, Korea and Vietnam, particularly through their writing system and philosophy of Confucius.

From the earliest times of Confucius, China significantly given a role to education, based primarily on the moral education of Confucius. This education is based primarily on respect for social hierarchies and sacrifice

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of individual interests on behalf of collective interests. It educates children to identify with and respect belonging to a group or community, such as family, clan or village.

Very important also in the teachings of Confucius it is what is known as the "five relations":

- 1- the emperor or ruler and subject,
- 2- between father and son,
- 3- between husband and wife,
- 4- between older brother and younger,
- 5- among friends

All this with the aim of prioritizing moral education based on respect for social hierarchies and collectivism.

Something that is hardly known in the West as education is that in China between 600 and 900, the Chinese state creates the first examination system in the world, used to select state officials. This test is also known as: Chinese imperial examination system was extended until 1905, consisting of a series of tests that were used to select candidates for government officials.

But in the nineteenth century they began to emerge outside the system of education criticism in which most of the population was illiterate and had a lot of poverty, as a result of elite mandarins in his much was corrupt. It was also criticized the examination system that was based on rote learning and backward thoughts.

One of the factors influencing the teaching of China in the nineteenth century was precisely Japan's invasion of China (1894-1895), which resulted in the defeat of the latter by Japan but at the same time made to upgrade the Chinese culture with Western knowledge, extracted from the Meiji Restoration (1868) in Japan which consisted of the premise of "learning from the West," especially in the modernization of the economy and technology.

That is why in China in the early twentieth century began to create a modern educational system taking as an example the beginning the Japanese system as a model and later served as a reference the US, France and Germany. They also began to influence the revolutionary ideas, especially Marxism that brought attention to young Chinese intellectuals who went to study in foreign universities.

The new model for the Chinese Communist government for education was that of the Soviet Union, which influenced with great weight in reforming higher education. Private schools were put under state control, with the aim of expanding education in the village, providing greater control and spread communist ideas.

Following the failure of the "Great Leap Forward"<sup>1</sup>, Mao began a proletarian cultural revolution with the aim of imposing their thinking as the main ideological force in the country. In 1966 the Chinese Communist government carried out what is known as the "Cultural Revolution" (1966-1976) since the concern was the difficulty existed to transmit the communist ideals through the educational system. The main objective of the "Cultural Revolution" was to use the educational system to move to whatever feudal-capitalist representing pre-revolutionary values and replace them with proletarian values.

All this brought the intellectuals were replaced by workers and farmers in decision-making in the education system. The theory that schools were dominated by bourgeois intellectual knowledge and that this was due replace practical knowledge that is derived from the occupations had.

He was given much importance to teaching practice and the ideal would be to be learned from the workers, peasants and soldiers. In this sense the students and teachers were sent to the factories and the countryside to learn. Schools were closed several years creating a very difficult situation. After a chaotic period of stagnation in the early 70s the number of primary and secondary schools began to grow rapidly turning to increase enrollment at both levels.

Admittedly, although the Cultural Revolution made in the early 70s significantly lowered the quality of education in China, and was harshly criticized this reform in later years, also he promoted access to groups most disadvantaged situations, such as rural areas.

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<sup>1</sup> The Great Leap Forward was a campaign of economic, social and political measures implemented in China by the Communist Party of China (CPC) between 1958 and 1961, with the aim of transforming China's agrarian economy into a communist society through rapid industrialization and collectivization. This campaign produced the Great Chinese Famine, according to estimates killed between 18 million and 32.5 million people

## **2. Structure of the Chinese education system and the socialist market economy**

In 1949 with the formation of the People's Republic of China the Chinese Communist government released the official ideology through education, as the education system that was created in the 1950s was characterized by strict central government control in several aspects were lesson plans, administration, curriculum, textbooks, the allocation of places in universities and in the workplace. That is why all institutions of education from basic to higher were under the supervision of the Party and the Government.

It should be noted that by pleading the PRC (1949), 80% of the population was illiterate (Hannum, 1999) and that only between 20 and 40% of school-age children attended school. It is admirable progress in school enrollment over the past 50 years have been impressive.

But since the late 70s this educational system was heavily criticized for being too centralized. After the death of Mao and the new government of Deng Xiaoping, it begins to link education change with economic and social development in China and given a vital elementary education as the modernization of the country contribution importance. (Beech, Jason. And Brailovsky, Daniel)

Xiaoping's new government initiated a series of economic reforms aimed at building a "socialist market economy" under the criteria of the educational reform should be closely linked to the economic reforms in the country. In this sense it takes place a decentralization of power to smaller levels of government and reducing the rigorous controls exercised by the government over the schools.

In 1985 the Chinese government issued a document entitled "Decisions of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on Reform of the education system." Educational decentralization in China followed international trends of the 80s and 90s, where the central government retained only the power to define the fundamental guidelines of general policies and to monitor and evaluate their results, delegating the responsibility for the administration of education local authorities in the "lower levels"<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Given the size of China's education system and the country in general, the concept of "lower levels" is rather unique when compared to other systems. The top level is the central or national. In a second tier of government the country is divided into 32

The reforms initiated in the Asian giant in the mid-1980s involving a big leap with respect to the principles that guided educational policies and the type of policies that were implemented in previous years. This jump or great change can be manifested as follows

- 1- a country closed to open to the world and the ideas and international influences on education (and other areas) country;
- 2- from a socialist to a "socialist market economy" economy, which in educational terms involved in the governance reform of the educational system tending towards decentralization and privatization of the system;
- 3- philosophically the Maoist ideology that promoted the sacrifice of individual interests on behalf of the collective good is weakened and is being replaced by policies that promote each individual seek his own, with the idea that the collective is the sum of the parties if all seek their own good this will result ultimately in the common good.

Should be noted that with this reform the central government does not provide all the funds needed for the development of educational services, local governments have to resort to alternative sources of financing, such as local taxes as one of the fundamental sources of emphasizing That way individual responsibility and local initiatives thus reducing the importance of the central state in the provision of social services.

According to a recent UNESCO study, a comparison of 16 countries was conducted in terms of internal equity, the result was that China is the country where there are major differences between regions in terms of spending per student. According to the report, the region within China that spends per student allocated 16 times more resources than less spending. (Beech, Jason. And Brailovsky, Daniel)

China is in the process of changing its growth model to one in which education has a greater relevance, and in 2012 allocated more resources to rural schools, as well as in remote and poor areas.

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administrative units: 22 provinces (23 if Taiwan is included), five autonomous regions (related to the most important ethnic minorities) and four municipalities under the direct administration of the central government (Beijing, Tianjin , Shanghai and Chongqing). These cities, given its size and importance, have a similar range to the provinces. Finally there are two special administrative regions (Hong Kong and Macau), who maintain a large degree of autonomy from the central government and in many ways, including control of the education system, have similar characteristics of an independent state.

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The Chinese authorities had planned to increase the education budget to 4% of GDP by the end of 2000, but that goal could not be met until 2012.

Despite the advantages of this decentralization, there are also some disadvantages in terms of the vast differences that exist within China in terms of economic development, because the regions and districts had more resources to finance and expand its educational offerings, not the case in the poorest places had serious difficulties including payment of teachers.

The government planned a minimum number of students that each school was to enroll for free and above that amount to schools authorized to enroll students who will be charged a fee. Schools could also charge for textbooks, uniforms and tutoring, and other extra services. In this case education came to stop being free and parents had to pay large fees to enroll their children in schools. All this resulted in some less affluent parents withdraw their children from the education system.

Somewhat contradictory was that although a limit is established in the fee charged schools, practical life this limit was not respected; consequently some regions and sectors of the population enrich while another part was harmed in educational policies based by the same principle of not discriminate any social group or region.

As part of the decentralization of education, the state encouraged the civil institutions and citizens for the creation of schools, including institutions of higher education, an education starting in China domestic market, where several non-state actors have established what is known as educational institutions "minban" managed by the private sector or individuals, generating a considerable expansion of such schools.

But although the private sector in the field of education is growing its offerings in the market is lower compared with the public education sector. For example the 2 million students enrolled in private primary schools represent approximately 2% of the total enrollment. (Beech, Jason. And Brailovsky, Daniel)

### **3. The Structure of Education System in China**

The structure of education system in China is the following:

<b>Type of Education</b>	<b>Duration</b>
Preschool Education	3 years
Primary Education	6 years
Basic Secondary Education	3 years
Superior Secondary Education	3 years
Higher Education	2-3 years (for technical/vocational education)
Higher Education	4 years (Bachelors)
Distance Higher Education	Through radio and television
Masters	2-3 years
Doctoral	3 years

A different aspect of Chinese education system relative to other countries is the weight given to the selection examinations for entry to the different levels of education. This selective process comes from the time of Confucius when aspiring to public office had to go through these tests. We must also say that families give a vital importance to education and therefore these tests because it is a key to access social standing requirement, this results in a lot of anxiety in young children and families.

These tests have been criticized for relying primarily on memorizing certain data that are necessary to pass the exam, thus losing the educational process quality. However already today it has become more flexible and elementary and junior high schools are required to admit students of their territories without entrance exams, however upper secondary schools (including vocational) make their entrance examination He directs the school.

When students graduate from midlevel get another exam administered by the province or municipality. But the entrance exam to the University is the strongest and competitive, but competition has been reduced by the expansion and diversification of supply. It is good to note that the reform of the 80, established the obligation of primary and secondary level and requiring compulsory nine-year education.

#### **4. Machismo in China influences Education**

Machismo in China became more evident with the policy of a "child only" or "one child policy"<sup>3</sup> in 1979. The national policy on population

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<sup>3</sup> Following the first modern census of 1953, revealing a population of 583 million people the Chinese authorities are receptive to the dominant neo-Malthusianism in the Western

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control and particularly restrictive one-child policy has contributed to the practice of Selective women for prenatal diagnosis of sex as a result of the tradition of preferring sons, both practices prenatal diagnosis of sex-selective abortion and abortion are illegal in China today.

Funny how Chinese families tend to establish a marked difference between the roles of the different genres in which men exercise a dominant role and audience, while women have a subordinate and very limited role in the private sphere. There is a prejudice for the majority of the population that the ideal woman is a devoted wife and mother who prioritizes family care over their own academic and professional development.

Has created a climate in which a lot of women are the criterion of not exceeding men from educationally, professionally and income, it is for this reason that the Chinese women represent 80% of school decersions and 65% of people of school age out of the system.

Education of children than girls, this was demonstrated in the early '90s and to date 68% of the workforce of between 15 and 19 is represented by women is preferred, which means say men of the same age had greater possibilities to continue the educational system. To all this is added that in the poorest regions where there is greater difference in educational opportunity between the sexes, there is a big difference between urban and rural population.

The foregoing is confirmed by the World Bank figures, which shows that 68% of the female population over 15 years is part of the active labor force in China, a relatively high figure compared with 58% in the US, 51% in France and 53% in Germany. Also, about one third of the rural population migrating to urban centers are women, according to several academic studies 2010, earn just a third of what the men in the same positions. They flee the country in search of better opportunities, but in the city the alternative is disastrous for them.

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population thought of those years. From August 1959, the Ministry of Public Health is campaigning for birth control surrounded by a huge propaganda effort, but with no visible effects on fertility. Demographic projections derived from demographic inertia at the end of the 1970s, if not corrected, pointing to huge and unsustainable population growth, which would prevent development programs, economic and modernization that were established at that time by the government Chinese.



## **5. Internationalization of Education in China**

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the political and economic situation in China forced a group of avant-garde Chinese intellectuals were to USA, Japan, and Europe to investigate how to develop the economy and Chinese society and democracy and give greater power to the people.

Unfortunately with the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the ideology and international environment determined the country was kept closed in the economy and in education, but in 1978 a large virage was made about the company , politics and education, conducted what is known as "reform and opening up."

With this reform undertaken by Deng Xiaoping it was again started giving importance to international educational cooperation and expressed a famous phrase: "We must send millions of highly qualified people to study abroad, to promote the development of China in various sectors. "

In recent years China's education policies have relied heavily on the assistance from international agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, European Union. These agencies have collaborated with the Government of China to promote universalization of compulsory education of nine years.

In addition to the above, the Chinese government has conducted what is called "open door" in education in order to promote exchange and cooperation with other countries in education being carried out exchanges with several countries. Thousands of Chinese studying in universities in different European countries mainly in Germany. The return of these overseas Chinese have significantly influenced the modernization of the country.

According to Zhang Xiuqin, director of international exchange and cooperation of the Ministry of Education, he says that in the past 30 years, China has become the country where the largest number of students going abroad originates. (Beech, Jason. And Brailovsky, Daniel)

Thanks to the policy of reform and opening up, the flow of trips has also invested, more and more foreigners are going to China to study and develop, attracted by the rapid pace of development of the economy, as well as the interesting history and Culture of China.

## **6. Some Final Considerations**

It can be summarized that the Chinese educational system influenced by the different political systems in the country have carried out a series of reforms that are mentioned and characterized as follows:

1- regime emperors was characterized by the participation of a small part of the population of the Chinese empire, where access to education was only for the elite, which its main objective was to seek public office.

2- communist ideologies: The objective was to increase school coverage and a transformation in teacher training for these teachers from holding classes more oriented to the daily practice and scientific knowledge.

3- socialist market economy: The latter system was the most transformed the educational, result of ideas from the West. The socialist market economy, introduced new, more flexible ways to fund education, authorizing the existence of private institutions.

The private sector in education is represented by the creation of "minban" or schools set up by individuals. One can say that the advantage that China relative to developed countries is that it has a mixed system of financing a lesser form than in developed Western countries, because the vast majority of the Chinese education system is funded by the state. Called minban created by the private sector account for only 2% of the student population.

The basis of educational decentralization in China is marked by the transformation from a communist system to the socialist market system, allowing for greater provincial autonomy in the administration of education, with the state that defines the basic guidelines of education policies and it is responsible for evaluating its results, setting the length of education, designing the issues that must be addressed and should be evaluated as students and teachers.

At the moment China is in the process of changing its growth model to one in which education has a greater relevance.

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