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Retrospect and Prospect of the Teacher Education Reform in China Since the 1990s

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Teacher Education Revitalization: Recent Hot topic in China

- Since the mid-1990s, TE in China has entered a period of change from quantity-oriented to **quality-oriented TE**. But since 2017, China began to talk about TE revitalization, and a series of policy documents have been issued for **TE revitalization**:
 - *Opinions on Deepening the Reform of the Teaching Force Construction in the New Era in an All-Round Way* (CPC Central Committee & State Council, 2018)
 - *The Action Plan for TE Revitalization (2018-2022)* (MOE & other four government departments, 2018)
 - *The Plan for Stronger Teaching Force of Basic Education in the New Era* (MOE & 7 other government departments, 2022)
 - *The Plan for Collaborative Improvement of TE Quality* (MOE, 2022)



Questions to Ask

- Observing the recent trend in China, one may ask:
 - Why China began to talk about TE revitalization after over 20 years of quality-oriented TE reforms?
 - What is the goal of the TE revitalization?
 - What kind of measures have been taken to revitalize TE?
 - Can the measures taken revitalize TE?
- To answer the above questions, we need to put the current TE revitalization policies against the background of the TE reforms since the 1990s.



TE as a Lever for Educational Quality and Equity ——Perspective for observing TE Reform in China

- ❑ Quality and equity is a constant topic in modern education. Due to the recognition of the significance of TE for education, TE has been treated as a lever for educational quality and equity in more and more countries.
- ❑ China is no exception. TE is closely related to and influenced by the discourse and policies of educational quality and equity in China since the 1990s.
- ❑ Changes in the TE reform policies of China since the 1990s can be explained in terms of discourse of educational quality and equity.



Contents

1. **Historical basis of the TE Revitalization**
2. **Societal Context of the TE Revitalization**
3. **Policy Initiatives for the TE Revitalization**
4. **Prospect for the TE Revitalization**



Phases of TE Reforms in China

- ❑ TE in China from 1949 until 2017 can be divided into two phases :
 - quantity-oriented TE (1949 to the beginning of the 1990s)
 - Quality-oriented TE (mid-1990s to 2017)
- ❑ Quality-oriented TE (mid-1990s to 2017) can be further divided into two periods in terms of the way of dealing with educational quality and equity
 - Focus on TE quality through system restructuring (mid-1990s to 2005)
 - Binary focuses on TE quality through capacity building and TE for equity (2005 to 2017)



1.1 Focus on TE Quality through System Restructuring (1990s to 2005)

□ Reform background:

- Economic system: transformation from planned economic system to market economic system since 1992 required a corresponding TE system to the new economic system
- Teacher market: moving toward an overall balanced relationship between supply and demand, with structural shortage in terms of districts and subjects.

□ Reform goal: Focus on improving educational quality through TE quality improvement

□ Reform path selection: learning from the west

- Idea: Teaching professionalism
- Structure: toward an open TE system



1.1 Focus on TE Quality through System Restructuring (1990s to 2005)

- **Reform measures:** system restructuring regarded as a pre-condition
 - Structural Reform of the Preservice TE System
 - **Opening-Up of Teacher Preparation System:** from a closed and exclusive TE system to a diversified and open TE system
 - **Upgrading All TE to the Higher Education Level:** from “3-level” to “2-level” system with secondary normal schools to be abolished
 - Construction of a Lifelong Learning System for Teachers
 - **Continuum:** institutional integration of preservice and in-service TE institutions
 - **Networking:** utilizing Internet to establish a lifelong learning system for teacher development by connecting the existing various TE opportunities.



1.2 Binary Focuses on TE Quality through Capacity Building and TE for Equity (2005 to 2017)

□ Reform background:

- Societal development: national strategy for constructing an innovative country and building a harmonious society
- Educational development: dual tasks of improving educational quality and promoting educational equity

□ Reform goal: binary focuses on improvement of TE quality and promotion of educational equity through TE (not in TE)

□ Reform path selection: contradiction; digestion and absorption

- Idea: professionalization and de-professionalization
- Structure: began to reflect on learning from the west and re-discover the advantages of traditional TE (Normal Ed tradition)



1.2 Binary Focuses on TE Quality through Capacity Building and TE for Equity (2005 to 2017)

□ Reform measures :

- Improving TE quality through capacity building
 - Constructing a **standard-based TE quality assurance system**
 - Promoting **practice-oriented TE**
 - Expanding **Graduate-Level TE**
 - Reforming the **teacher certification system**
- Promoting educational equity through TE: strengthening the construction of the rural teaching force
 - Implementing the **Free Teacher Education policy (FTE)**
 - Implementing **Designated MEd. Scheme for Rural Teachers**
 - Implementing “**National Training Programs**” for Teachers and Principals, tilting toward the underdeveloped areas



Effect of the Reforms from mid-1990s to 2017

- **TE quality improvement:** still a long way to go
 - The overall quality of teacher student intake is not so high: excellent high school graduates did not choose TE as their major
 - The qualifications of TE institutions are uneven: high level normal universities tried to escape from TE + high level comprehensive universities did not want to be involved in TE+ large number of secondary vocational school were involved in kindergartens TE
- **TE for educational equity:**
 - Recruitment of quality teachers for rural schools through FTE are just a drop in the bucket. (quantity problem)
 - Quality Improvement of in-service rural school teachers led to low level of educational equity due to uneven qualifications of TE institutions. (quality problem)



International Context

- ❑ **Globalization is in the midst of transformation**
 - **Globalization**: although the global goods trade has flattened and cross-border capital flows have declined sharply since 2008, globalization is not heading into reverse. Rather, it is entering a new phase defined by soaring flows of data and information——**digital globalization** (Mckinsey, 2016).
 - **Deglobalization**: the capitalist countries such as the US and UK, which were once the flag-bearers of globalization, have become the initiators of a new wave of de-globalization. The reversal of their attitudes towards globalization has led to a wave of de-globalization spreading from some developing to developed countries.
- ❑ **Certainty among uncertainty**: **more intensive international competition!**



Domestic Context

- **Political change:** Convening of the 19th Congress of the CPC (2017)
 - Judgement of the principal contradiction facing China in the new era: contradiction between the people's growing need for a better life and the unbalanced and insufficient development (*better life for all*)
 - Presentation of new goal: from building a moderately prosperous society to **a great modern socialist country**
- **Educational policy:**
 - **Policy documents:** *The 14th Five-Year Plan of the National Economic and Social Development of the PRC and the Outline of Vision 2035* (2018); *Modernizing Education in China 2035* (2018)
 - **Policy orientation:** Building a **high quality education system=equity with quality** (integrating quality and equity, not as binary focuses)



- ❑ Four policy documents provide an overall vision and blueprint for the TE revitalization in China at present and for the time to come.
- *Opinions on Deepening the Reform of the Teaching Force Construction in the New Era in an All-Round Way* (CPC Central Committee & State Council, 2018)
- *The Action Plan for TE Revitalization (2018-2022)* (MOE & other four government departments, 2018)
- *The Plan for Stronger Teaching Force of Basic Education in the New Era* (MOE & other seven government departments, 2022)
- *The Plan for Collaborative Improvement TE Quality* (MOE , 2022)



The Opinions on Deepening the Reform of the Teaching Force Construction in the New Era in an All-Round Way (2018)

- ❑ Based on the understanding of the extreme significance of teaching force construction, It puts forward the following opinions to build a **highly qualified, professional and innovative teaching force**:
 - Investing in enhancing teachers' ideological and political quality and strengthening the moral and ethical development of teachers
 - Vigorously revitalizing TE and continuously improving teachers' professional competence
 - Deepening the comprehensive reform of teacher management and effectively rationalizing the institutional mechanism
 - Continuously improving teachers' status and treatment to make teaching a truly enviable profession
 - Effectively strengthening the leadership of the Party and making every effort to ensure that policy initiatives are put into effect



The Action Plan for TE Revitalization (2018–2022)

- In order to implement the Opinions, MOE & 4 other government departments jointly issued the Plan:
 - Action to comprehensively promote **teacher ethics education**
 - Action to upgrade the **level of teacher preparation**
 - Action to improve the **quality of rural school teachers**
 - Action to improve the **quality of teacher student intake**
 - Action for innovation through “Internet + TE”
 - Action to build **experimental zones for TE reforms**
 - **Action to build high level normal education (TE) bases**
 - Action to optimize **the teacher educator workforce**
 - Action to build **TE disciplines and specialties**
 - Action to build a **quality assurance system for TE**



The Plan for Stronger Teaching Force of Basic Education in the New Era

- **Goals and Tasks:** By 2025,
- a number of **national normal education bases** will be built, a number of replicable **reform experiences** in teaching force construction will be formed, and a large number of **master's-level** primary and secondary school teachers and education leaders will be trained. (**quality**)
 - the **support service system for training rural teachers** will be improved, with national normal universities as models and local normal universities and colleges as the mainstay, and a large number of outstanding school teachers will be trained for the less developed regions in central and western China (**equity with quality**)



The Plan for Stronger Teaching Force of Basic Education in the New Era

□ 15 measures covering four areas:

- **Enhancing teachers' professional competence**: ideological and political; ethics; education of highly qualified teachers; more precise INSET.
- **Promoting a balanced distribution of quality teachers** : targeted TE programs for less developed areas; the allocation of teacher resources for compulsory education
- **Strengthening the construction of TE system**: national TE bases; collaborative innovation platform for TE; evaluation of TE institutions.
- **Deepening the comprehensive reform of teacher management**: a pilot national reform; teacher certificate system reform; the allocation of teaching staff; reform of teacher titles & management system; teachers' salaries and wages; informatization of teaching force construction.



The Plan for Collaborative Improvement of TE Quality

- **Purpose:** supporting a group of weak normal universities and colleges in the less developed regions of central and western China to improve the overall standard of TE, in order to train high-quality school teachers for less developed regions.
- **Measure:** Arranging high-level normal universities to provide support to weak normal universities and colleges in the form of grouping teams and by means of training key faculties, introducing high-level talents, building disciplines and specialties, building capacity for basic education services, and enhancing institutional planning and management capacity, etc, and to promote the sharing of quality resources such as management, curriculum, platforms and experts among institutions.



The Goal of TE Revitalization

- to construct a high quality TE system to create a high quality teaching force for a high quality education system
 - **high quality teachers**: ideological and political quality, professional ethics and pedagogical competence (Important dimensions)
 - **High quality teacher education system**: **an open, collaborative and linked TE system**, with
 - normal university & colleges as the main body,
 - high-level comprehensive universities participating,
 - teacher development institutions as the tie,
 - and high-quality primary and secondary schools as the practice bases.



Main Measures for TE Revitalization

□ Improving the status and treatment of school teachers

- *The Teacher Act* (1993) stipulates that “an average teacher salary should not be under or over the average **salary of civil servants**”, but teachers’ **actual income** was lower than that of civil servants for a long time.
- To improve teachers’ status, the *Opinions on the Teaching Force* emphasizes that it is essential to enhance teacher quality and steadily improve teachers’ status and treatment simultaneously, and proposes that “**the actual income levels** of local civil servants will be taken into the overall consideration when approving the total amount of school teacher’s performance salary”.



Main Measures for TE Revitalization

- Improving the status and treatment of school teachers
 - Article 38 of the Draft Revision of the Teacher Act: The average income level of teachers in primary and secondary schools and kindergartens should be no lower or higher than the average income level of local civil servants, and should be gradually increased.
 - On 20 February 2020, the General Office of the State Council issued *the Opinions on Deepening the Reform of the Education Supervision System Mechanism in the New Era* to strengthen the supervision of local governments in fulfilling their responsibilities in education. The supervision of teachers' salaries is one of the important tasks.



Main Measures for TE Revitalization

□ Implementing accreditation of TE programs

- Although TE related standards were set up for TE quality assurance system by 2015, most of the standards were not effectively implemented.
- In 2017, the MOE issued *Measures for the Implementation of TE Program Accreditation in General Higher Education Institutions*, and has started the accreditation of TE programs since 2018.
 - **basic ideas** : student centeredness, output-orientation and continuous improvement
 - **a three-level monitoring and accreditation system** for TE programs (Level 1=monitoring; level 2=qualified; level 3:excellent) .



Main Measure for TE Revitalization

□ Constructing normal education bases

- *The Plan for Strong Teaching Force* clearly proposes to support the construction of a number of national normal education bases to create a front-runner and leader in the high-quality TE system .
- **Financial support:** The central government has decided to construct about **50 normal education bases** and invest no more than **100 million RMB** in each base **during the 14th Five-Year Plan period**(2021-2025), which is the largest investment at the national level in the new century in major special projects for higher education, specifically geared towards the construction of normal universities and colleges and TE programs.



Main Measure for TE Revitalization

□ Constructing normal education bases

- Content of the base construction: focus on
 - **TE Infrastructure**: strengthening the construction of **professional competence development centers** for teacher students and **TE programs**
 - **TE Reform**: deepening **TE reform** and promoting the construction and application of **ICT in TE**.
- construction of the normal education bases is integrated with the implementation of *The Plan for Teacher Education Collaborative Quality Improvement*: each base selected has the responsibility to support weak normal education institutions.



The Key to TE Revitalization

- ❑ The main factors that have led to the education reform goals not being achieved as expected:
 - Micro factor: low level of TE as professional education
 - Meso factor: low status of TE (elite HE institutions' reluctance to invest in TE)
 - Macro factor: low status of school teachers (affecting teacher student intake and TE quality)
- ❑ Conditions for the TE revitalization :
 - Necessary condition : enhancing the status of school teachers and TE (external condition: government + society)
 - Sufficient condition : improving the level of TE as professional education (internal condition: higher education institutions)



Cautiously Optimistic Prospect for TE Revitalization

□ Reasons for optimism:

- The two-pronged approach of upgrading the status of TE (external guarantee) + professionalizing TE (internal construction) captures the key to revitalization.
- Shared attention from the ruling party(the Central Committee of the CPC) and government(the State Council) provides political and administrative guarantee for the implementation of the reform.

□ Reasons for caution:

- Lack of legal safeguards
- Implementation is the key



Thank you for your attention !



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