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**Rural Teachers in China: A Student Perspective**

BY

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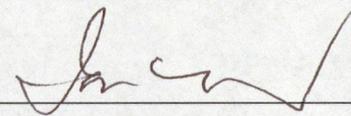
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## ABSTRACT

This study examined and reflected viewpoints of 11 former rural students on rural educational issues in general and opinions that they hold of the values of rural teachers and rural teaching in particular within a certain cultural and social context of the People's Republic of China. By observation and analysis from a student's perspective, the study hoped to reveal the situations of rural teachers and rural teaching in China from a fresh vantage point and this has been borne out by the remarks of the respondents interviewed.

Analysis and results of this exploratory study have been built up on the basis of interviews with 11 participants, to whom the researcher directed a wide range of questions from demographics to all kinds of teacher related issues (composition, quality, pressures, retention and training). The information elicited from these interviews provided the bulk of the data underlying the conclusion for this paper. Meanwhile the researcher's personal rural experiences as a rural student herself provided the background for the analysis of the data as well. Such experience helped make sense of the data through comparison and contrast as well as enabled the researcher to echo with insider's point of view to some questions. The study has used a critical theoretical approach to examine what these former rural students have experienced in their early schooling and how their teachers impacted on their learning. A certain distinctive Chinese cultural and ideological context has also been taken into consideration in the literature review.

Specific to this study, the researcher has made the hypothesis that the declining opinion held by the public of the value of rural teachers and rural teaching as a profession was one of the major reasons that accounted for the dilemma of teacher shortage and teacher quality in rural schools in China. Therefore how much we value our rural teachers and how much rural teaching means to us has become the focus of this research study.

Findings of this study indicated that the perceptions and opinions that these former rural students hold of rural teachers have experienced fluctuations

due to contextual as well as personal factors. This was organized in a three-phase model in the conclusion with regard to the fluctuation in how the public value teachers.

Common to all the respondents in this study, rural teaching was not attractive, nor in their opinion, attractive to rural talents in general compared to other professions beyond the rural areas. Indeed it was even less attractive than some of the occupations requiring less skill. If this image of the rural teaching profession continues to be stereotyped and rooted in people's values, rural teaching will inevitably confront a gloomy future.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

Teachers have been accorded great importance and sometimes high status in all societies and throughout human civilization. This is because “the role played by teachers is an essential one for the progress of moral and cultural values as well as for economic and social progress, as it is through education that everyone can make full use of his/her abilities and intellectual capacities (UNESCO&ILO, 1984).” In classical Chinese educational tradition, in particular that associated with Confucius, this importance has been very high (Chapter II). Within a contemporary global context, this notion has been extended. And thus it is important in contemporary societies to assure teachers of a status in accordance with, on the one hand, the essential role played by teachers in the progress of education and, on the other hand, the importance of their contribution to the development of man and society.

However, it was suggested in a report of the Joint ILO/UNESCO Committee<sup>1</sup> that “the morale of teachers, almost universally, is currently low.” As well, “the status of teachers in the relative employment hierarchy still remains low or, in some instances, has actually deteriorated in recent years (ILO/UNESCO, 1997).” The situation may be due to various reasons, for example, social factors and structural factors varying from region to region. It is therefore important, objectively, to identify the underlying reasons for that situation.

In China today, a central educational issue is how to educate its huge rural population. The need to handle well the relationship between the booming economic growth and a huge rural population has made the role of teachers especially meaningful and valuable. But teachers in China are no exception to

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<sup>1</sup> Joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers

the observation by international organizations as ILO/UNESCO. In the past several decades, teachers' status in China has experienced changes. While dynasties change, expectations of the role of teachers largely remain the same, though some new connotations have been added. As the country is putting more emphasis in achieving sustained development by raising the educational level of its people in recent years, policies have been set in motion to improve the treatment of teachers and the teaching conditions. Yet one dilemma that most rural schools, those in poor and remote areas in particular have always confronted is that rural teachers are in serious shortage and their quality is in question. As an illustration, a report of the Chinese Ministry of Education pointed out, "[t]here are still a certain number of substandard teachers in China, especially in remote rural areas who need further education to qualify for the job."<sup>2</sup> And the problems of teacher quality, it is believed, will be compounded by a teacher shortage (DeYoung, 1991:79).

Specifically for this study, the researcher has made the hypothesis that one of the main underlying reasons for the dilemma of teacher shortages and teacher quality in rural schools in China lay in the declining opinion that the public holds of the value of rural teachers and rural teaching as a profession. Therefore how much we value our rural teachers and how much rural teaching means to us has therefore become the focus of this research study.

This study explores former rural students' perceptions and opinions on rural educational issues in general and how they valued their rural teachers and rural teaching in particular. Through observation and analysis from the viewpoint of former rural students, the study hopes to reveal the situations of rural teachers and rural teaching in China from a fresh perspective, which has been borne out by the remarks of the respondents interviewed.

Analysis and results of this exploratory study have been built up on the basis of extensive interviews with eleven participants, to whom the researcher directed a wide range of questions on demographics, family background, rural school conditions and changes, teacher related issues such as composition,

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<sup>2</sup> <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/>, July 29, 2001

quality, pressures, retention and training, and the respondents' observations, comparisons and expectations. The study uses a critical theoretical approach to examine what these former rural students experienced in their early schooling and how their teachers impacted on their learning. A certain distinctive Chinese cultural and ideological context is also taken into consideration throughout.

### **Research Questions**

In the study, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. What and how can students' stories reflect their perceptions of Chinese rural teachers in terms of teacher status and impact of teachers' quality on them?
2. How did these perceptions evolve?
3. How did the cultural and ideological perspectives of students function in giving voice to their perceptions of their rural teachers?
4. What was the role of rural teachers in the physical growth as well as the mental and moral development of their rural students?
5. Does the overall quality of a rural teacher have anything to do with their teaching practice and the learning of their students?
6. What were the qualifications required of rural schoolteachers? What qualifications did they aspire to obtain? How did they obtain those qualifications, or at least the necessary resources to achieve such qualifications?
7. How can we promote rural teacher morale and status in China given the present day context?

### **Assumptions**

The major assumptions underlying this study are that:

1. The perceptions of the students are considered very important in enhancing our understanding about the relationship between students' expectations and the role of rural teachers.

2. The findings of the study may be of practical value to teachers, educators and policy makers in their efforts to improve the situation of rural teachers and rural schools in China.
3. As adults aged 23 and up, the participants in the study have within themselves a recognizable influence of their past experiences in rural schools.
4. The perceptions of respondents at the time of data collection accurately reflect their attitudes and experience at the time of their rural schooling.
5. The cross-cultural experiences of respondents involved in the study allow them to be sensitive about cultural differences. "They are likely to either contrast their impressions with their previous experience or are especially likely to note things that others might take for granted (Krothwoth, 2002)."

### **Limitations of the study**

Limitations are inevitably inherent in the study, particularly because it is done from the single perspective of students. Any study of this kind may be potentially judged as emotionally biased, perceptually limited, too personal, subjective and ungeneralizable (Martin, 1985). Such limitations certainly apply to this study. Howell (1970: 32) suggests that in qualitative research of an ethnographic nature, subjectivity may be viewed as an advantage, since it permits the researcher to delve into a particular question and explore its ramifications for the study topic to an extent not possible with quantitative methodologies. Personal and subjective features allow the researcher to track not only superficial and quantifiable information, but also the meanings between the lines or behind the words spoken.

Next, the data collection and analysis are limited by the researcher's sense of values and her involvement and personal blinders. Thus, interpretation of the collected data might also be biased and fragmented. Some measures have been taken to reduce this limitation. First, the selection of the respondents was

based on certain criteria (general selection questions). Second, structured interviews were designed in such a manner as to elicit responses in as open and meaningful a manner as possible. Third, the interaction between the researcher and the respondents involved has been carried out in both a formal and an informal manner; follow-up steps also have been taken to ensure the validity of the data collected when required.

The sampling strategy of this study limited participants to those who are now in Canada and those who used to excel in their academic studies. In a sense, they might not be representative enough for all rural students including those who stayed behind China and those who even didn't get a chance to move on to college. But on the other hand, the researcher also believe participants in this study, by pondering upon their academic or professional success and their cross-cultural experience, might be able to give their rural schooling a deeper thought as well as a better understanding from more than one perspectives and thus provide us feasible suggestions for the improvement of rural teachers.

Another limitation of this study came from the definition of "rural teachers." "Rural teachers," as a term, might cover all professionals who work in the rural education field. In this study, "rural teachers" applies mainly to primary and secondary rural schoolteachers.

### **Significance of the study**

This research study of rural schoolteachers in China is timely and practical both in the context of the present day situation in China and in the broader global context. In the past several decades, tremendous changes have taken place in China and China stands in the world today as an important economic power with ever-growing strength. But the fact that the education of its people has lagged behind its economic growth has proven to impede the overall national progress. The need to promote education among its rural population that amounts to 80%<sup>3</sup> of the total Chinese population has become particularly crucial and urgent. Thus

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<sup>3</sup> The rural population in China is at present not up to 85% and it is estimated to be around 60%, according to Dr. Cheung, an economist (<http://www.peopledaily.com/>, 2002).

this study, which aims at reflecting issues concerning rural teaching team, is actually dealing with the central issue in education in China in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. This study may also prove to be of practical value to teachers, educators and policy makers in their efforts to improve the status of rural teachers and the situations of rural schools in China.

This study is an examination of rural schooling in China from a student's perspective. Teachers themselves were not directly involved in this study. The use of students' voice could thus serve effectively as an intermediary between the general public and Chinese rural schoolteachers, a relatively marginalized and silent social group. In this way not only teachers and their images can be brought into the public eye, but also can the opinions and values from the standpoint of students be learned. The former rural school students selected to participate in this study are already adults now working in various professional fields. Thus what really matters is not just what they remembered but also how they viewed their experiences with their teachers and what kind of meanings they have attached to those experiences.

To enhance understandings about the gap between students' expectations and rural teachers' qualifications, the results of this study may also potentially promote a more constructive teaching and learning environment in rural China.

One might also hope that this study may help the Chinese public in adjusting their expectations of Chinese rural teachers and therefore in raising their awareness of the need for facilitation and support for those teachers so that improvement may be possible. Most importantly, the development of the public awareness may lead to social justice for the countryside in China.

The study in contributing to the knowledge of rural education in China, may contribute as well to the knowledge of rural education in the third world developing countries. Ideally, it will trigger more and further exploration and analysis on the theme of teacher impact on students within a rural context.

## **Definitions of Terms and Acronyms**

The following definitions are operative for the purpose of this study:

**Structured interviews** – The structured interviews are face-to-face interviews which are based on a set of specific researcher-directed questions and a ‘general plan of enquiry’ (Babbie, 1986:247), but which allow for flexibility of content and direction based upon the respondent’s predilection and the interviewer’s intuition about how the line of enquiry fits into the research paradigm and purpose. A combination of structured and open-ended questions is employed (Doell, 1990).

**Constant comparison method** – The constant comparison method is used to discover whether there exists congruence and the degree of congruence in the respondents’ interpretations about the same questions. Notes, the resulting transcriptions and participants’ free writings will be analyzed. Specifically, for each of researcher’s interview questions and follow-up questions, all participants’ responses to each question will be reviewed. Each response will be carefully transcribed and categorized by question (Erickson, 1986; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Using interpretive content analysis (Baxter, 1992; Krippendorff, 1980), a systematic approach for examining text, the researcher will examine responses for common themes.

**Rural education** – According to the definition by the UNESCO, in a broad sense, rural education is defined as the education of rural population in the service of rural economy and social development in order to constantly raise agricultural productivity and promote urbanization of rural areas. For many developing countries, rural education can be defined as education for rural people to obtain knowledge and working skills, awareness of modern citizenship and entrepreneur skills at the transitional phase from agricultural to industrial civilization when rural and urban areas coexist and farmers are under disadvantaged conditions.

**Rural teachers** – Rural teachers, as a term, originally should cover all professionals who work in the rural education field. In this study, rural teachers applies mainly to primary and secondary rural schoolteachers, given the consideration of the rural schooling of respondents involved in this study and the differences between rural teachers of basic education and rural teachers of professional training.

**Minban teachers & Gongban teachers** – see Appendix A.

**UNESCO** – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**ILO** – International Labour Organization

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

#### **On status of Chinese Teachers**

In this part of the chapter, first a review of important traditional classics in Chinese history is attempted as they represent the main theme of education in Chinese ideological and cultural context. A discussion of the status of teachers during the Cultural Revolution will then follow because it is believed during that period teachers' dignity was most seriously challenged than ever before and it is also because this political upheaval marked a turn in education in China and has had impact on most of the interviewees involved in the study.

#### ***Chinese Traditional Classics on Teachers***

This review of important traditional classics in Chinese history tries to confine itself to topics concerning teacher roles and responsibilities. Among these ideas, writings from Confucian canon stand out and require more detailed attention. Most subsequent schools of thought in Chinese educational history have adopted or expanded the school of Confucianism. Some important scholars in the respect will be mentioned, including Confucius 孔子, Mencius 孟子, Xun Zi 荀子, Zhuang Zi 庄子, Mo Zi 墨子, Han Yu 韩愈, Wang Yengming 王阳明 and Zhu Xi 朱熹 etc. To examine these traditional ideas, it is necessary to bear in mind that in all these writings, whether of the ancient period, or those of the Neo-Confucians of the Song, the aim of education was clearly stated as moral-political (Huang, 1994). And this review, to some extent, establishes the foundation for the interpretation of the former rural students' experiences.

The role and responsibilities of teachers in the teaching-learning process is one of the major concerns of these traditional classics. These ideas may be usefully grouped into four categories:

### Importance of teachers in the teaching-learning process

In the Confucian tradition, the importance of teachers is obvious. No matter what objectives education is supposed to achieve, teachers are the primary means. The central importance of teachers in the process of acquiring knowledge as well as mental and physical growth is frequently mentioned throughout Chinese history. For example, Xun Zi 荀子, a Confucian philosopher, exalted the teacher as follows:

If a man is without a teacher or precepts, then if he is intelligent, he will inevitably be a robber; if he is brave, he will be a brigand; if he has ability, he will be a troublemaker; if he is a researcher, he will be interested only in strange phenomena; if he is a dialectician, his arguments will be absurd. But if he has a teacher and precepts, then if he is intelligent, he will quickly become learned; if he is brave, he will quickly become awe-inspiring; if he has ability, he will quickly accomplish whatever he undertakes to do; if he is a researcher, he will quickly push his investigations to their conclusions; if he is a dialectician, he will quickly solve every problem. Thus a teacher and precepts are the most important treasures a man can have; to be without a teacher and precepts is the greatest of misfortunes. The man who lacks a teachers and precepts exalts his original nature; he who has a teacher and precepts emphasizes self-cultivation. (Creel, tr.: *Xun Zi*)

Confucius (551-479 B.C.) was highly respected as an educator. Because of his outstanding accomplishment in his teaching career, Confucius is respected as the first real teacher in Chinese history and a saint by ordinary people. He was given many titles, such as Su Wang 素王 in academic field, “the person who stipulates and executes laws in the name of majesty yet without an emperor’s crown.” According to *Xue Ji* 学记 (On Learning), one of the most important articles in *Book of Rites* (*Li Ji* 礼记), teachers’ political and social positions should

be upraised. As teachers are regarded as being critical in civilizing people, teachers are therefore critical in running and stabilizing the country. Thus teachers should be chosen with particular caution and those presently teaching should constantly raise their qualifications through continuous learning.

Confucius himself stressed the importance of teachers in his notion of “teaching by example.” The moral-cultivation of teachers was considered most important in the process of their role modeling. The process of teaching coincides with the process of role modeling.

Mencius (372-289 B.C.), another Confucian philosopher, who enriched the idea of Ren 仁 (which includes being polite, broad-minded, reliable, quick-witted, intelligent, wise, brave, loyal, lenient, filial and responsible)<sup>4</sup> and a great educator himself, maintained that a teacher’s position is comparable to that of a supreme ruler.

Han Yu (768-824), a learned scholar and great educator in the Tang Dynasty has written *Shi Shuo (On Teachers 师说)*, which enjoys great popularity even till today. In *Shi Shuo (On Teachers 师说)*, Han Yu stressed the important position of the teacher by saying: “If one has confusion but doesn’t go to the teacher, the confusion will remain unsolved.” And he satirized of the declining respect for teachers in his day by saying “Sages in ancient times were highly above ordinary people in their knowledge, yet they were still humble and modest before teachers; People today are not as learned as ancient sages, but they feel ashamed to learn from their teachers. This well explains why sages are sages, and others are not.”

### Qualities in a teacher

What qualities should we expect on a teacher? Who could deserve the title of *Teacher*?

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<sup>4</sup> *Confucius*, The Beijing Museum Academy & China Educational Publications Import&Export Corporation, 1989

Teachers' qualities were mainly reflected from two aspects: personal and professional, of which both aspects exalt moral character as the basic spirit. In other words, the teacher is first a person that presents a role model for students and then an instrument of delivering knowledge. From this point of view, teachers must possess moral traits that are above ordinary people. Meanwhile, they must be learned themselves in the knowledge of the world and skilful in guiding students and imparting knowledge.

In the above I have mentioned the Confucian stress on the importance of teacher's moral cultivation in the process of role modeling. Thus good teachers are not only knowledgeable but more importantly, morally cultivated. All of Confucius, Mencius and Xun Zi stressed the importance of virtue or moral cultivation in a person, especially in a teacher. Confucius exemplified in his own practice the importance of being a personal model rather than merely giving verbal instruction. Some sayings of Confucius may help explicate this rule:

"What has the right behavior anything to do with a person's political career? If one can't stand right, how can he require others to do so?" (*Zi Lu* 子路)

"If one can behave properly, people will follow his orders even he doesn't require them to do so; if one can't behave himself, even when people are required they may not follow his orders." (*Zi Lu* 子路)

"Zi Gong asked what a Junzi (a morally noble person) should be. Zi (Confucius) answered: "those whose action goes before his words." (*Wei Zheng* 为政)

"You, my students, think I didn't teach you all my knowledge? That's not true! All that I have has been manifested to you through my performance and action." (*Shu Er* 述而)

The last dialogue best explains how Confucius showed his belief in the importance of being a personal model. When his students was skeptical that he did not open to them all his knowledge and moral beliefs, he declared that this

was not true and corrected by saying “All that I have has been manifested to you through my performance and action.” What underlies this statement is that all moral or intellectual possessions are actually in agreement with performance and action. As Confucius put great emphasis on personal moral-cultivation, the role modeling of teachers thus became particularly important.

Xun Zi in his *Conduct of People with Virtues (Jun Dao 君道)* added to this role model approach by saying that what is told should be in agreement with what is done and the end of learning is to use knowledge to serve practice.

An open attitude toward criticism and different opinions might also be grouped under the importance of a teacher’s being a role model. But this is based on the equal treatment of students in the teaching-learning process. People, all alike, tend to resist bitter yet valuable advices. Teachers, especially experienced old teachers may not be able to escape from this inclination as well. One of the reasons why Confucius could become the widely accepted model for all Chinese educators is because of his open attitude towards criticism, even from his students. Zi Lu, one of Confucius disciples was said to often put Confucius in embarrassing situations. Even so, Confucius was never seen to estrange him. Rather he complained about one of his most favored students Yen Hui by saying “Hui, is not helping me, he only says things that make me feel good.” Confucius’ disciples thus followed his model spontaneously. Thus for Confucius, having an open attitude toward criticism and different opinions ought to be one of the main qualities of a real teacher. Since Confucius never denied the fact that he was not a prophet of everything, “I am not born to know everything (*Shu Er 述而*),” it is therefore logical that even a Sage like Confucius might make mistakes. Along this line, Confucius said in *Xue Er 学而* “The real mistake is when you are aware of a mistake, yet don’t try to correct it (*Wei Ling Gong 卫灵公*).”

“Never be satisfied with your knowledge and never get tired of teaching.”

(*Shu Er 述而*) In other words, teachers should be able to maintain ever-lasting enthusiasm in learning and tireless zeal for teaching. The idea was highly valued by Confucius and is the best known Confucian maxim in present day China. Zi Gong, one of Confucius' disciples once wrote about Confucius "he is never tired of learning, that contributes to his wisdom; he is never tired of teaching, that is resulted from his benevolence or love of students. With both wisdom and benevolence, my teacher is indeed a saint (*Mencius · Gongsun Chou Shang 孟子·公孙丑上*)."

The ability to learn through teaching is also an expected quality of being a teacher. Thus teachers learn through both self-education and teaching. *Xue Ji 学记* raised the idea that teaching and learning are actually mutual beneficial.

Teachers' professional qualities are more closely associated with what the next two topics will cover: teacher-student relationship and How and what teachers should teach.

### Teacher-student relationship

What might teacher-student relationships be is perhaps the primary question in the interactions of teaching and learning.

Confucius put teachers in a place of high respect, yet he didn't promote the notion that teachers should use their conferred authority to suppress and control. Rather, the respect one should have for teachers should not get in the way of an equal relationship between teachers and students. Teachers and students should be considered equally important in the learning process and they should learn from each other. Based on this equal relationship, students are expected to question and discuss with teachers. Some of the Confucian sayings demonstrate this democratic air, such as:

"I can find a teacher among any three ordinary people. To learn from them what is right, to modify what is not." (*Shu Er 述而*)

"The youth are respectful. Who can tell that the next generations will not

surpass us?" (*Zi Han* 子罕)

"Students could also be teachers if they have got the truth of the knowledge." (*Wei Ling Gong* 卫灵公)

Confucius made teaching and learning a process of cooperation and he was himself a very good model for future teachers.

Teaching benefits teachers as well as students. Instruction is not a one-way process. By helping students solve problems, teachers often gain insights. The educational process is a process of mutual development (Rhea, A. 1997:11). But of course, this mutual development will need equal relationship as its prerequisite.

Mencius, to some extent, inherited and handed over this equal relationship or friend-friend model. But Xun Zi荀子, on the other hand, advocated a more rigid father-son relationship in this process (Yu&Xiong, 1999). In reality, two kinds of relationships coexist and are sometimes complementary to each other.

Han Yu also contributed to this topic, he said: "Learners are not necessarily less learned or having less virtues than their teachers, or vice versa. The reason is that people start learning at different times and they specify in different fields of subject."

### How and what teachers should teach

This question centers our attention on educational pedagogy and content of education. To get at this topic, we first should know that one of the basics in Chinese classical philosophy is that *Education* can change human nature, whether for good or not. Thus how and what teachers should teach are actually evolving from this basic philosophy.

### *Educational Pedagogy.*

Teachers are supposed to guide students in the circle of leaning, critical thinking and practice. But this of course demands a prerequisite that teachers are

able to do this in terms of their knowledge and personal integrity. If teachers teach while they themselves don't get at the deep of the meaning, they can only add to the confusion of their students. On the other hand, teachers not only need to master the knowledge, they also should be able to extract the essence and make it easy to follow, and to put the knowledge into practice.

The most valuable part of ancient Chinese educational pedagogy is that it regarded *learning* the center in the teaching-learning process (Yu&Xiong, 1999). Therefore, teachers should not just impart acquired knowledge to students, they should give more weight to help students in learning methods and goal setting, in other words, teachers should teach students how to learn by themselves. This learning theory is the essence of ancient Chinese educational pedagogy. Students' moral-cultivation, gains in their knowledge as well as their ability is not taught passively nor in a one-way process by their teachers. Rather, students learn by themselves under the guidance of their teachers. Therefore, the learners' self-motivation and initiatives are given the most consideration in education and in the teaching-learning process. One of Mencius' important assumptions is that "Everyone can become respectful persons or sages like Yao 尧 and Shun 舜 (Both Yao 尧 and Shun 舜 were emperors in ancient China)." This assumption fully recognized the value of education and it also embedded in it the deep belief that man could be shaped by education and have in them unmatched potentials. Zhu Xi 朱熹's "Zhu Zi reading method" also stressed students' initiatives in learning. This learning-centered pedagogy is actually the main core of teaching pedagogy. In other words, teaching should not take precedence over learning, rather, teachers are supposed to assist and guide in learning. Based on this pedagogy, specific teaching methods were evolved:

(A) *Method of Elicitation and Induction.*

Many of Confucius' practices are still looked up as models for professionals in the teaching field. His commitment to the teaching profession is also shown in his introduction of a teaching method of elicitation and induction,

which was said to be in use years before Socrates. According to *Xue Ji* 学记 (On Learning), teaching should lay stress on elicitation and induction, “Guide but do not lead” “Be strict but do not suppress” “Be open but not rampant.” Cramming is not desirable.

Mencius expanded this method and added that teachers should be able to elicit and encourage rather than impose. He stressed that people could learn through self-education. So teachers, instead of imposing their teaching, should respect students’ initiatives in the process of learning.

Another scholar worthy of mention is Mo Zi 墨子<sup>5</sup> who has raised the idea that teachers should not just wait for students to ask, rather, they also take the initiative to question, give advice and encourage. The idea of Mo Zi sounds in contradictory to those promoted by Confucian scholars who stressed that teachers should respect students’ learning initiatives. In fact, in the reality of school teaching, the two ideas are not in conflict with each other since their application actually suits different situations.

*(B) Teaching in accordance with Students’ Divergence and Natural Growth.*

Mencius also added, due to students’ divergence in terms of intelligence, moral nature as well as physical conditions, teachers were supposed to use different means in order to achieve the same ultimate aim. Teaching should also be teaching step by step or in accordance with the natural stages of development of students. To pull the seedlings of the wheat in order to help speed up their growth will only do harm to them. Most of the schools of thought had agreed on these points.

*(C) Teaching Observing the Cognitive Order.*

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<sup>5</sup> There are more than ten versions about the birth and death date of Mo Zi. The most popular version is that he was born between 468 B.C – 459 B.C and died between 390 B.C. – 382 B.C.

Xun Zi (313 B.C.-238 B.C.), another representative of Confucianism who expanded the school of thought concerning legislation and rituals, raised the idea that education should follow the cognitive order of hearing, observing, inquiring, and practice. Obviously, this idea indicates that if a teaching approach ignores this order, consequences might result. He expressed this as follows: “if one hear without observing, then one’s knowledge may be rich but not necessarily true; if one observes without inquiring, then one’s knowledge is only superficial and may be false; if one inquires without practice, one may still feel confused even when learning diligently (Ru Xiao 儒效).” Mo Zi who expounded his theory that learning was a progress from perceptual knowledge to cognition also applauded this approach.

*(D) Tension alternating with Relaxation.*

*Xue Ji* 学记 (On Learning) also mentioned that teaching was supposed to have tension alternating with relaxation. Teaching doesn’t happen only in class, extracurricular activities help open students’ vision, broaden their knowledge, foster their interests and consolidate their acquired knowledge.

*Content of Education .*

For most of the schools of thought, whether Confucianism or Daoism or the school of Fa 法家<sup>6</sup> or the school of Mo<sup>7</sup>, the content of education is after quite the same subjects – social subjects, ethics and morals, government and war. And the classics used as teaching texts were mainly The Six Classics<sup>8</sup> – the Book of Odes (*Shi Jing* 诗经), the Book of History (*Shi Shu* 史书), the Book of

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<sup>6</sup> Fa was a school of thought advocating the application of legal means to run the country and manage the people.

<sup>7</sup> The school of Mo was originated in the Autumn and Warrior period by Mo Di. The main work of this school of thought was Mo Zi, a collective work.

<sup>8</sup> Liu Jing 六经, among which the first five were classics handed down from Zhou Dynasty and compiled by Confucius and his disciples, the last one, Chun Qiu was the first chronicle written by Confucius

Rites (Li Ji 礼记), the Book of Music (Yue Jing 乐经), the Book of Change (Yi Jing 易经) and the Book of Spring and Autumn (Chun Qiu 春秋) and The Four Books (Si Shu 四书) – The Great Learning (Da Xue 大学) and The Mean (Zhong Yong 中庸) are two chapters from the Book of Rites, together with The Analects (Lun Yu 论语) and The Mencius (Meng Zi 孟子).

Although Confucian classics remained central for most dynasties, its limitations lie in that they neglected the natural sciences and the application of technology. Thus the fact that the school of Mo also attempted to transmit knowledge of natural sciences and logic is of particular importance. But the Mo school of thought hasn't become part of the Chinese educational mainstream and has been ignored for thousands of years. This resulted in a withering of progress of Chinese science and technology until the advent of modern China.

The works of Zhuang Zi 庄子<sup>9</sup> (369-286 B.C.) promoted the understanding and observing of the laws of nature, including the natural laws relating to man's mental and physical growth. Although *Zhuang Zi* was never used in teaching texts in school curriculum, its content can to some extent, be regarded as being supplementary to Confucian philosophy.

The Fa school of thought, whose representatives were Shang Yeng 商鞅(390-338 B.C.) and Han Fei Zi 韩非子(280-233 B. C.), had emphasized legal institutions. This school of thought placed more stress on educating people to be primarily legally conscious rather than morally conscious. Since Han Fei Zi raised the notion that man is born selfish, he didn't think it effective to resort to moral tools for civilizing people. Thus he thought a more rigid legal education should be imposed.

In addition to the above points, education was understood as not to be implemented just in the school of a narrow sense, and knowledge was not just

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<sup>9</sup> Zhuang Zi (369-286 B.C.) was the representative of Daoism after Lao Zi 老子.

what was written in books. The society as a whole was a school and the ultimate objective of education was to cultivate students to adapt themselves to and serve this society. The Daoists and proponents of the Fa school of thought might go a bit too far that they totally were against school education. The former advocated returning to nature for learning while the latter favored social education. If taken into consideration of the theoretical and cultural ground on which they have got reason for existence, it can be discovered that they were actually only partial negation of Confucian thoughts.

In conclusion, traditional classics ranging from the Confucian school of thought to the successive Confucian varieties have had significant influence in Chinese society. They were once consolidated, expanded, opposed, hindered and resumed again. But one fact is undoubtedly still true that the Confucian canon remains at the centre of the Chinese ideological and cultural context. Due to geographical isolation and slow progress in information technology, this influence remained longer in rural areas than in urban areas. As we shall see, one of the interviewees is from an area where ideas from the Confucian school have remained pervasive. Such traditions are still valued and permeate in all possible aspects of people's lives, including their views of school and education.

### ***Teacher Status during the Cultural Revolution***

The importance attached to education and teachers has been long held highly in Chinese society. But these classical views, Confucianism in particular, met an unprecedented attack in contemporary China during the ten-year Cultural Revolution when old habits, old customs, old ideas and old culture were to be completely destroyed in the name of reviving the new revolutionary spirit.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, hereafter referred to as the Cultural Revolution, was a mass campaign of enormous dimensions launched in 1966 by Mao Tse-tung (the founder of the People's Republic of China and the longest serving Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party). It lasted for almost a decade until 1976. Though only a blink in the whole of Chinese history, the Cultural Revolution has had a profound influence in the ideological and cultural

realm and continues to cause controversial discussion and documentation even today.

In some ways it was similar to what advocates of Post-modernism in Western thought attempted in the philosophical, cultural and ideological field. During the Cultural Revolution, authorities in all fields were challenged and clichéd ideological dogmas were to be cast away. Inevitably, under such circumstances a teacher's status no longer remained authoritative in the clashes between the old and the would-be new culture. The situation for teachers became even harsher when Mao Tse-tung released his "May Seventh directive" that, the dominance of "bourgeois intellectuals" in the school system should not be allowed to continue.

The Cultural Revolution in Chinese contemporary history would constitute the most important experimental educational reform experienced by Chinese people during the twentieth century. The campaigns in the educational realm actually began with the Socialist Education Movement (1962-65) with "an emphasis on restoring ideological purity, reinfusing revolutionary fervor into the party and government bureaucracies, and intensifying class struggle (Joseph, 1991)." The Socialist Education Movement continued into the Cultural Revolution period and was paired with a thorough reform of the school system and the Mass Education Movement. Five of the interviewees, now more than 35 years old, lived through and remembered that ten-year decade that marked a turn in Education in China. In order to provide the perceptions of these interviewees with a more thorough background, it is necessary to review the changes in Chinese education during that period.

#### The educational reform during the Cultural Revolution

During the Cultural Revolution, schools were considered the primary stage to initiate revolution and students were organized into Red Guards and mobilized to carry out the revolution. There is general agreement that "few educational reforms during the 20<sup>th</sup> century were as far-reaching and generated so many changes in such a short period of time as the 1966-1976 Chinese Cultural

Revolution.”<sup>10</sup> Its influences were not only reflected in the structural changes of the educational institutions but also, more importantly, in the attitudes of people toward education.

*Changes in admission policy.*

In response to a petition by a group of revolutionary middle school students, the Central Committee and the State Council issued a joint notice on June 13, 1966. The decision was made to abolish the old system of entrance examinations and enrollment of students in higher educational institutions. The admission to higher educational institutions should be based upon the recommendation of the workers, peasants and soldiers. Only those who combined both academic ability and correct political character were considered “best students.” The policy as such undoubtedly opened accessibility to those social sectors previously disadvantaged in educational opportunities. But the academic qualities of such students were often questionable. On the other hand, this policy was also an effort to reduce or eliminate the gap in educational inequalities and inequalities in many other aspects of rural-urban life. The eliminating of that gap has been a slogan for Chinese Communist society since before liberation.

*Integration of labor work into education.*

Mao had a firm belief in “doing then knowing.” He wrote:

Whoever wants to know a thing has no ways of doing so except by coming into contact with it, that is by living (practicing) in its environment.

(Mao Tse-tung, p.299)

Students were assigned physical labor either on the farms and factories or on the school’s experimental field once or twice a week. In rural schools, workers and farmers were even invited to give lectures and tutor in practical work (Han, 2000: 116). In a sense, it was argued, this change in education somehow altered

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<sup>10</sup> *Selected Moments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century*, [http://fcis.oise.utoronto.ca/~daniel\\_schugurensky](http://fcis.oise.utoronto.ca/~daniel_schugurensky)

the traditional relationship between educated elites and the humble working class and gave both a chance to learn from each other. This reform, however, meant even more to rural students because they no longer just learnt book knowledge but connected their learning with practical needs. The skills and techniques then acquired by the rural students proved useful in the later development of rural areas.

#### *Changes in the content of education.*

The content of education of the pre-Cultural Revolution era was officially criticized as having a bourgeois tendency and divorced from proletarian politics, production and practice. Teachers and students should only concentrate on those parts of the textbook that had practical value and classroom study should be oriented towards social, political and production needs.

#### *Governance of schools.*

The administration of schools was moved from the hands of those classified as bourgeois intellectuals to committees made up of local workers, soldiers, peasants and to those students and teachers who were active members or sympathizers of the Revolutionary movements. Although many members of the school administration lacked academic credentials, it was argued, they provided practical knowledge and judgment that was supplemental to previous management.

#### *Reforms in teaching method and curriculum.*

The dull and ineffective teaching methods in the classroom were openly challenged. Teachers who couldn't make their classes attractive would very likely have difficulty with maintaining order. As for students, they were given much greater room in the classroom for discussion and debate. "Democratic meetings" were held regularly to help improve the quality of teaching and studying. The curriculum no longer stressed only abstract theories, but also the application of these theories to the real world. New textbooks were compiled with the

assistance of a curriculum committee that consisted of faculty members, students and working people.

### The changes in the relationship of teachers and students

In Chinese traditional values, a teacher, simply by bearing the title, should receive respect, because the title carries with it the noble nature of the teaching profession and the ultimate goal of education. This notion stands unchallenged in tacit recognition for most of Chinese history and remains true even today. Although students may often in some way seek an equal relationship with teachers, they accept teacher's authority more than challenge it. During the Cultural Revolution teachers probably met the fiercest challenges from students in the last three thousand years of Chinese history. This was manifested in several ways.

#### *Rising student role.*

The students were applauded for taking the "vanguard" role during the Cultural Revolution in order to carry out revolution thoroughly and successfully, which was a great mission entrusted to them by Chairman Mao Tse-tung. The rising student role in this movement was a natural result of Mao's revolutionary need. They were to be the defenders of Mao's thought in the "vanguard" of the revolutionary forces against emerging revisionism. They were to carry Mao's message to all the people of China and to lead the attack on the "bourgeois" authorities in education (Singer, 1971: 14). Schools were seen as the very ground for the spreading of ideology and thus relatively easy to use to "sweep away the old in order to bring forth the new." On the other hand, Chinese students, revolutionary in their nature, a fact commonly demonstrated in revolutionary movements in Chinese history, were easily mobilized to join many destructive and pointless acts.

Students were empowered by Mao in a variety of ways. For example, they were given much greater rooms for speech and revolutionary actions. They put out big character posters questioning school authorities and their educational

policies. They openly criticized teachers or school management suspected of having a “bourgeois” tendency on any issue with no fearing of punishment afterwards. This was a good chance to unfetter their enthusiasm even to such an extent as turning revolution into sheer violence and bitter physical persecution. As William A. Joseph has written, few of the youthful participants really understood the ideological meaning of the Cultural Revolution, and in their hands “the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie degenerated into gang wars, joyrides, souvenir hunts, and orgies of destruction (Joseph, 1991).”

*Declining teacher status.*

Knowledge is the power held by teachers. But during the Cultural Revolution, knowledge, not politics, was considered a poisonous weed that was said to imprison people’s revolutionary spirit and thus should be cast away. Instead, class struggle against the enemies of socialism should remain the Party’s first priority. Intelligentsia who stressed academics was attacked as taking a “white line” against the great goal of socialism.

'Monsters and Demons' (*niugui sheshen*) was the term used to vilify specialists, scholars, authorities and 'people who entrenched themselves in ideological and cultural positions' during the Cultural Revolution. After the publication of the editorial "Sweep Away All Monsters and Demons" in *People's Daily* on 1 June 1966, and after it was rebroadcast and reprinted, the Red Guards started a huge purge which swept the country, 'dragging out' and prosecuting all those ostensibly fitting the description.<sup>11</sup>

Reflected in the schools, again, knowledge was linked to capitalism. One primary student’s diary was published in which she constantly criticized her teachers. One college candidate was nationally praised because he turned in a blank examination paper.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Landsberger, <http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/mad.html>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.iun.edu/~hisdcl/q387/cr.htm>

Given such ideological circumstances, teachers were almost completely deprived of their power endowed with knowledge. Maltreated teachers in schools of all levels in China were not rare during the Cultural Revolution. Once people were dragged out as “evil spirits,” they were forced to wear caps, collars or placards identifying them as such or shaved half the scalp (*yin-Yang tou*). Some of them were sent to remote places to learn from working people and to remold themselves. “May Seventh Cadre Schools” in some villages were set up for the purpose of reeducation of cadres and intellectuals. Others were imprisoned in what was generally called a “cowshed (*niupeng*).” There were also many who lost their lives. If Confucius lived to that day, he would have had no chance to escape persecution. Confucianism was believed not fit with the goal of building a socialist country, and he was criticized for trying to use education to restore a slave society, which was definitely intolerable for a socialist country as China.

#### *Disruptive classroom order and discipline.*

The changes in the relationship of teachers and students were also given direct play in the classroom order and discipline. Students, even pupils in primary school, began to adopt a critical attitude towards their teachers and scrutinized teachers’ behavior (Han, 2000). Open questions, discussions and debates went on in the classrooms. Teachers, on the other hand, were no longer able to derive power from their teaching position alone. They were forced to improve their teaching methods and had to encourage students’ involvement in class discussions.

However, students with their newly gained freedom, uninhibited by authority of any kind, in many cases went wild and abused their power, hurting teachers bitterly. Classroom order and discipline deteriorated in most cases. Teachers often wouldn’t risk restoring order because they might be given unwanted labels, although in some cases they did mobilize students to bring peer pressure on the disruptive students.

By 1968, all schools, from primary to tertiary, were shut down, and not resumed in some cases until 1971. Revolutionary students and teachers were

required to participate in the tide of “sweeping away the obstacles on the socialist road and for purifying the school system.”

However, not all teachers were victims and not all students were abusers of power. Rebel teachers had challenged the pre-Cultural Revolution education system and demanded reform. On the other hand, those students with “black” family background or who focused their attention on study were labeled as henchmen or lackeys of bourgeois roaders. But to all people, whether labeled red or white or black<sup>13</sup>, the movement left deep psychological wounds. Numerous teachers, as well as intellectuals who survived the harsh life and persecution of the Cultural Revolution in China, learnt the lesson that they had better step back from politics even at the expense of losing the power and respect that was previously paid to them unconditionally.

#### Impact on Education in rural China

In contrast to a great deal of suffering in urban education, rural education to some extent benefited from the mass education movement of the Cultural Revolution.

#### *Mass Education Movement.*

The Mass Education Movement<sup>14</sup> seen largely as the extension of pre-Cultural Revolution promise to eliminate the three gaps (between rural and urban areas, between mental and manual labor, and between workers and farmers) featured rapid expansion of rural school systems, increasing enrollment of rural children into schools of all levels and fundamental changes in curriculum and teaching approaches. Because the primary goal of the movement was to

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<sup>13</sup> “Red” and “Black, ” terms referring to political and ideological attitudes prescribed by Maoist doctrine. Usually juxtaposed with “expert,” the term was seldom used in the 1980s. “White” was usually used to refer to those who cared less about politics and often outperformed others in academics.

<sup>14</sup> The Mass Education Movement was launched around the foundation of P.R.China and was said to be mainly out of political reasons.

establish an egalitarian socialist society to be achieved through universal education all over China, it was at once appealing to the large rural population.

Rural children benefited from education during this period in three ways. Many primary schools were widely set up in rural villages, and the number of junior high and senior high middle schools also increased during the mass education movement. So there was no need to reject any child for lack of space. (Han, 2000) Schools were free; therefore parents were willing to send children to school. Also, schools were operated on a more flexible timetable to suit the local needs. All these changes resulted in a big increase in the enrollment of students. It was said that for the first time in history all children in rural China had the opportunity to go to primary school and the great majority of children had the opportunity to go to middle school and high school (Han, 2000).

On the other hand, curriculum previously denounced as divorced from real needs in rural China was reformed to cover more practical industrial and agricultural knowledge. Rural youth learnt one or more skills that enabled them to make a living and benefited rural development afterwards. Because of the political climate at the time, teachers had to improve their teaching approaches accordingly.

Teacher shortages and teacher quality were obstacles posed to the Mass Education Movement although government and media had helped by calling for the return of the educated and trained teachers to their hometown. However, the arrival of educated youth contributed to the needs of rural education.

#### *Educated Youth in the countryside.*

In the "up to the mountains and down to the villages" (*shangshan xiaxiang*) campaign, putting aside the Party's real purpose behind the acceleration of the relocation program in 1968 -- an attempt to bring the Red Guards under control and to halt the intense factional struggle and civil strife following the suspension of college entrance examinations, millions of urban youth (secondary school graduates and students) were mobilized and sent to rural villages and to frontier settlements. In these areas, they had to build up and

take root, in order to be reeducated by the poor and lower-middle class peasants into "new-style, cultured peasants. "

While some 1.2 million urban youths were sent to the countryside between 1956 and 1966, no less than 12 million were relocated in the period 1968-1975; this amounts to an estimated 10% of the 1970 urban population. In principle, the program called for lifelong resettlement in the rural areas, but toward the end of, and in particular after the Cultural Revolution, many were finally able to find jobs or to be transferred back to the cities. A great number of them, however, had resigned themselves to their fate and decided to remain.<sup>15</sup>

The life in the countryside was harsh for these educated youth and later they had a bitter attitude towards this campaign due to their inability to return to cities. But, officially they were seen as conveyor belts for technology transfer, as bringers of new knowledge. In some way, such educated youth did bring changes in the composition of rural society. However, many peasants living in the areas where urban youths were resettled resented their arrival. They often saw the youngsters from the cities who in their eyes did not amount too much in terms of labor power, as a threat to their own survival. The relationship between educated youth and local people was once intense.

Due to the new college admission policy during the Cultural Revolution, high school graduates had to work in rural areas or in a factory for at least two years before becoming eligible for college. So rural students who had studied at urban high schools also had to return to rural areas. The influx of educated youth, of both rural and urban origin, into rural areas changed the educational structure and talent base of the rural population (Han, 2000). A number of these educated youth made use of their skills and worked as teachers, medical professionals or technician.

The efforts that have been made to restore teachers' reputation and qualification in the post-Cultural Revolution years have not been enough to erase

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/xf.html>

the influence of the movement on the population at large. In reality, teachers are treated as common people, no longer too high to reach.

## Rural Education in China

### **Brief History**

Rural education started in China from a very early time. Rural schools were said to be in existence in China as early as the Western Zhou Dynasty 西周 (1046-770 BC). A record of different categories of schools can be found in *Xue Ji* 学记 (School Record). From the period of *Chun Qiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Period 770- 476BC), private schools appeared quite prosperous in the cities as well as in the countryside. Mengxue 蒙学, a kind of career that aimed at spreading language and religious classics was even widespread in Sui 隋(581-618 AD) Dynasty and Tang 唐(618-907 AD) Dynasty. Until Ming 明(1368-1664 AD) Dynasty and Qing 清(1636-1912 AD)<sup>16</sup> Dynasty, schools of different kinds were even complete in rural areas. Ancient Chinese rural schools were said to be born out of the influence of Confucian classics. For example, the idea of regarding people as the base for a nation or of giving emphasis to teaching and learning were Confucian ideals.

Zhang Jian 张謇 (1853-1926 AD) is respected as the first person who started contemporary Chinese rural education enriched in content through several governmental and legal reforms in the late Qing dynasty (i.e. the Constitutional Reform led by Kang Youwei 康有为(1858-1927 AD) and Liang Qichao 梁启超(1873-1929 AD) in 1898). He proposed the idea that education and enterprise be developed side by side. He also promoted local autonomy and established “village education” in his hometown.

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<sup>16</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dynasties\\_in\\_Chinese\\_history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dynasties_in_Chinese_history)

Western rural education experiences were also introduced into China at the time of the New Culture Movement<sup>17</sup> from countries like Denmark. Comparison with those countries made China aware of its backwardness in rural education. In 1919, Yu Jiaju 余家菊(circa 1900-2000) published two important articles, *Crisis in Rural Education* (乡村教育之危机), and *The Meaning and Direction of the Rural Education Movement* (乡村教育运动的涵义和方向). These two works created an opportunity for more and profound rural educational studies. As a result, more and more organizations began to investigate rural educational issues and implement related experiments in certain villages.

Yet the real landmark for the school of rural educational thoughts in China is the establishment of the “Xiaozhuang experimental rural normal school” by Tao Xingzhi 陶行之 in March 1927. Along with the operation of the Xiaozhuang school, Tao Xingzhi also edited *Rural Education Editorial* 乡教丛讯 and *Rural Teachers* 乡村教师 as well as organized “Rural Education Association 乡村教育同志会”. Zhao Shuyu 赵叔愚(1888-1927 AD) and Fu Baochen 傅葆琛(circa 1900-2000) were also among those Chinese educators who attempted to reform Chinese society and Chinese education by focusing on rural education and rural development. According to a statistics in 1935, the rural villages for educational experiments were more than 193 places.

### ***Outstanding 20<sup>th</sup> Century Educational Thinkers and Their Rural Theories***

Among educators in modern China, Tao Xingzhi 陶行之, Yen Yangchu 晏阳初, Liang Shuming 梁漱溟, and Huang Yanpei 黄炎培 are considered representatives of those that made particular efforts to improve rural education.

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<sup>17</sup> The New Culture Movement, which started in the early republican period around 1916 and continued through the 1920s, aimed to introduce western concepts in China, such as democracy, equality and liberty; also a new style of writing and the latest science and technology of the time.

Each in his own way helped in the formation, consolidation and expansion of the school of rural educational thoughts in China. In the following, I shall discuss each in turn.

Tao Xingzhi 陶行之 (1891-1946) who graduated from Teachers' College, Columbia University in 1917, was dedicated to educational practice the whole of his life for the poor and ordinary. He was honored as "People's Educationalist" by Mao Tse-tung, the first founder of the People's Republic China. His famous *life education theory* has won him a great fame in China. The origins of his educational thought and practice can be seen in Dewey's pragmatic educational theory as well as in some traditional Chinese educational schools of thought, such as Mozi, Xunkuang and Yenyuan.

But what makes Tao Xingzhi a central figure for the concern of this research are his rural education theories and related social practice. Tao Xingzhi founded Xiaozhuang Experimental Rural Normal School (or Morning Village Normal School) in March 1927. This was seen as a symbol of the real establishment of rural educational theories. The school not only was designed to train rural teachers in his philosophy, but was also designed to become the center of all political, social and economic activity in an effort to renew the village itself. His rural educational theories put great stress on the leadership role of teachers and made teachers the decisive factor in the reconstruction of rural life. His theories can be summarized by three points:

*Rural school should be made the center piece for the reconstruction of rural life.*

Tao requested that city-based normal schools open branch schools as well as model primary schools in rural areas. To illustrate this request, he stated:

From my point of view, rural normal schools have the responsibility to train rural teachers and ultimately to reconstruct rural life... if we wish every rural normal school graduate to be able to handle their future responsibilities to reconstruct rural life, we must, prior to his leaving school, train him for such practice by making full use of all

knowledge. This arena for practice is the rural village right before us and is where our school locates... We shouldn't take it for granted that as long as we have moved our school down to the rural areas, our school has in itself become a rural teachers' school. It will never become a real rural school to train teachers unless our students can take the responsibility to reconstruct the rural life confronting us.<sup>18</sup>

*Rural teachers as a whole are the soul of the rural life reconstruction movement.*

Tao Xingzhi believed the ultimate success of rural life reconstruction must rely on the fostering of a contingent of rural teachers. Accordingly, efforts must be taken to break the barrier of tradition and by every means possible be directed to the creation of a contingent of rural teachers. More importantly, he added to the traditional teacher's role great responsibilities as a leader. He has given explanations in his *Local Education and Rural Reconstruction* (地方教育与乡村改造) by saying, "[e]ducation aims at social reconstruction and teachers are real leaders in this movement". He also added "if teachers gain people's trust and respect, schools will be alive; if schools are alive, so is the whole society. If every such teacher establishes a primary school as the center for the reconstruction of rural communities, and normal schools as the leader for all the schools, such a result can be expected within no more than a decade."

To foster qualified teachers with a spirit of leadership, Tao Xingzhi suggested five requirements: farming skills, a scientific mind, a spirit of social reconstruction, a strong body, as well as an aesthetic interest. Only when the teachers meet the five requirements should they be regarded as capable of being the soul of rural communities. This point helps in clarifying what Tao Xingzhi wanted to illustrate on the difference between the function of a rural normal school and that of an ordinary normal school.

Tao Xingzhi even raised possible solutions for the problem of maintaining teachers working in rural areas. As a way to keep a stable teacher force in rural

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<sup>18</sup> Tao Xingzhi, *Moving Teachers' Education down to the Rural Areas* 师范教育下乡运动, 1925

areas and to make them enjoy their work, Tao Xingzhi once proposed a model of “wife-and-husband school”. This solution provides a valuable possibility for today’s school administration as well as rural policy makers, especially in dealing with education in remote and poor rural areas.

*Village autonomy was proposed by Tao Xingzhi as the organizational form for rural reconstruction.*

To back rural educational practice with organizational support, Tao Xingzhi proposed a utopian model of village autonomy. He once submitted a report to the provincial government, in which he requested that the village where Xiaozhuang normal school (Morning Village Normal School) was located be made totally an experimental field for educational practice. All the villagers and staff should be trained in the school. He also advocated full participation in the rural reconstruction movement by the village population by raising their awareness, by uniting them, thereby constructing a new society.

The ultimate goal of Tao Xingzhi’s theory of village autonomy was to reduce the gap between the development of politics, economics and education and to empower the populace for full democracy and thus a powerful country.

Tao Xingzhi’s rural educational theories and practice laid a foundation for the establishment of a school of rural educational thought and triggered the systematic study of rural issues in modern China.

Yen Yangchu 晏阳初 (1893-1989) and his Mass Education and Rural Reconstruction Movement. Yen Yangchu, also named James Yen, was dedicated to Chinese mass education<sup>19</sup> and rural reconstruction movement all his life. He received his childhood education in a church school and later went on to Yale University in America. His spirit of devotion and his perseverance in his rural career resembled that of a missionary. Even Mao Tse-tung expressed great

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<sup>19</sup> Mass Education here differs from the movement launched by Mao Tse-tung in that it stressed on the education side only without much politics involved.

admiration for his “devotion with a religious spirit in the mass education movement.”<sup>20</sup>

Immediately after graduation from Yale University in 1918, he volunteered through the National War Work Council of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) to do welfare work among the 200,000 Chinese laborers behind the Allied lines.<sup>21</sup> There he witnessed with his own eyes the miseries suffered by illiterate Chinese laborers. There in France, for those common Chinese laborers, he worked out a simplification of the Chinese language that was to be the basis for the whole scheme of mass education that followed (Buck, 1945). From this point on, he began to devote to a life career of contributing to the education of his fellow countrymen.

After he returned to China, he conducted education among the common people and carried out reforms in rural areas in Dingxian County, Hebei Province. Around 1930's, He initiated and cooperated with other experts in organizing the General Chinese Mass Education Promotion Organization (Ping Min Jiao Yu Cu Jin Hui or Ping Jiao Hui). The mass education movement in 32 cities throughout China was very successful. Later the experiences were even spread to other parts of the world. His lifetime pursuit of the betterment of the life of peasants in developing countries won him world reputation and numerous awards, including the Copernican Citation as one of ten outstanding "modern revolutionaries" of the world together with Albert Einstein, Henry Ford, John Dewey and others in 1943, and the U.S. Presidential End Hunger Award for Lifetime Achievement in 1987. Mrs. Pearl S. Buck commented on his experiences of this period:

Twenty-five years ago James Yen and his friends saw the problem of their own country, a country where three fourths of the people were illiterate, at the mercy of disease, badly governed. They asked themselves how, in a generation, this could be changed. They set themselves to answer their own questions. War struck before the work

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<sup>20</sup> Mao Tse-tung, Collections of Yen Yangchu, p.400

<sup>21</sup> James Yen's biography by the Magsaysay Award:

[www.rmaf.org.ph/rmafweb/documents/Awardee/Biography/yjy01bio.htm](http://www.rmaf.org.ph/rmafweb/documents/Awardee/Biography/yjy01bio.htm)

was complete but the tests had been made and the plan is ready to put into action, not only all over China, but everywhere. It could be of inestimable value in the southern part of the United States, in parts of South America, in Cuba, and in Puerto Rico, above all perhaps in Africa, India, the countries of Southeast Asia and anywhere where there were people who are hungry and illiterate and badly governed (Buck, 1945).

Mr. Yen promoted his rural reconstruction movement and made the rural population as his main concern. His contributions to rural education can be summarized by his four-fold rural reconstruction method:

*Theories of relying on rural mass education to save the country.*

Based on traditional wisdom that people are the fundamental base for a nation and only when this base is strengthened will the nation be kept in peace and prosperity, he combined Confucian thought with Christian and Western democratic thought, and gave Chinese classics new meaning. He believed:

Our country was brutally partitioned by the western invaders after the Opium War. China has become a fat colony for them. But why did this happen? Because we lost our base. We have ignored our most important job to educate people, build people and enrich people. Without a strong base, how can we expect a powerful country?<sup>22</sup>

And thus, to consolidate this fundamental base, Yen raised the educational objectives of eliminating illiterates and empowering people. But who was composed of the main body of “people?” To Yen, it was obvious that more than 85% rural population must be made the priority in this mass education movement. In his *The Mission of the Rural Movement* (农村运动的使命), he proposed: The mission of the rural movement lies in the reconstruction of the nation; the center in the reconstruction of the nation lies with the rural youth... Education is the key in the entire cause.

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<sup>22</sup> Yen Yangchu, *Ten Tenets for Rural Construction Movement* 改造乡村运动十大信条

*To find, to create and to inspire.*

“To find”, means to find the potential in those ordinary people. “We are not super heroes who can defeat everything, nor are we Jesus. We are only people’s friends. Without the active and conscious participation of millions and millions of ordinary people, we can not succeed in our rural reconstruction career.”<sup>23</sup> “Only by standing side by side with our people can we gain respect and trust from them and promote our ideas to them.”<sup>24</sup> “To create,” refers to using effective theories to develop “mental or brain minerals.” He has repeatedly stressed that Chinese peasants, which accounted for more than 85% of the total population were not impossible to teach but were without proper teachers. Nor were they with no wisdom but without the chance to learn. China was actually a country with tremendous human resources, waiting to be tapped or released, so “[t]he purpose of this mass education movement is to tap the mental potential and develop human resources.”<sup>25</sup> “To inspire,” means to inspire people’s self-consciousness through enlightenment, on the basis of equality. This principle has reflects Yen’s personal political belief that we should oppose violent social revolution but advocate social reform through long-term educational activities.

*Four types of education and their content.*

Yen’s Rural Reconstruction Movement promotes an integrated program of education, livelihood, public health and self-governance, which targets the interlocking problems of illiteracy, poverty, disease and civic inertia found among peasants in developing countries.<sup>26</sup> To beat illiteracy, liberal arts, language learning in particular, were the most effective tools. Specifically, he worked out three versions of “A Chinese textbook of a thousand characters” respectively for civilians, peasants and soldiers, as well as self-instruction materials and readings for ordinary people. The second measure was skills training. To develop rural productivity and build up rural economy and finally to remove poverty, he

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<sup>23</sup> Yen Yangchu, *Ten Tenets for Rural Construction Movement* 改造乡村运动十大信条

<sup>24</sup> Yen Yangchu, *Ten Tenets for Rural Construction Movement* 改造乡村运动十大信条

<sup>25</sup> Yen Yangchu, *Ten Tenets for Rural Construction Movement* 改造乡村运动十大信条

<sup>26</sup> From *The Ultimate Field Guide to the U.S. Economy*, [www.fguide.org](http://www.fguide.org) by Zhaochang Peng

considered skills training the right key. And this skills training should focus on modern agricultural technologies under the supervision of relevant experts. To deal with disease, hygienic education was necessary. Besides, more importantly, a public health system should be established. Concerning the problem of peasants' inertia, Yen proposed a special education for the people. Such type of education was aimed at breaking the selfishness of the ordinary people and thus fostering a unified strength. In addition to transmitting civic sense, ethical beliefs and political ideology, Yen also suggested such organizational support as establishing self-reliance organization, cooperative organization and joint cooperative association etc. for the purpose of educating the spirit of cooperation among people. Also, political power should be used in helping people attain strength to establish autonomy.

*Three types of school models.*

Yen believed school education should not be restricted only to schools in a narrow sense, but also involve social and family education in a broader sense. Based on the different characteristics of school, social and family education, the forms of education should vary accordingly.

Yen's educational theories were practical and consistent. He recommended and applied three principles throughout mass education practice – to teach the basics, to make complex knowledge easy to understand and to offer an affordable curriculum. Today's scholars believe these three principles fit the Chinese situation very well at Yen's time.

Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893-1988) and his contribution to rural education. Liang believed Chinese traditional culture should not be blamed for the backwardness of contemporary China; instead, the invasion of western culture has caused the loss of balance of Chinese culture. So he concluded: The problem of China is but cultural imbalance – very serious imbalance.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Liang Shuming, *Rural Reconstruction Theories 乡村建设理论*

He also believed the countryside represents the core of Chinese society and that rural deterioration caused by the cultural imbalance has led to the spiritual bankruptcy of rural people. In order to save China, the first and foremost thing to do should be reform and reconstruction of rural culture. The purposes of Liang's rural reconstruction theories have been well expressed in his classical book *Rural Reconstruction Theories* (乡村建设理论) in which he gave special emphasis to education and intellectuals. Generally, Liang's theories focused on the function of education in promoting economy and guiding politics, in order to root out the problem of cultural imbalance.

In practice, Liang has proposed a school system that abandoned the western style but adopted the real demands of rural people. The three models of school were Cunxue 村学 (village school), Xiangxue 乡学 (community school) and Xiangnong Xuexiao 乡农学校 (community rural school). The former two models stressed the establishment of morality and a spirit of self-independence, while the latter was modeled on administrative measures as well as legal tools. In terms of structure, education receiver and content, there was not much difference to be found between the two kinds of schools. For the Cunxue 村学 (village school) and Xiangxue 乡学 (community school), there were school buildings, teachers and courses, which was quite similar to that of a regular school. The only difference lay in that schools set up classes according to the kinds of pupils they had. Usually three types of classes would be offered: education for adults, education for women and education for children. Since 1935, Liang has also borrowed from Tao Xingzhi's experiences – he encouraged pupils of higher grades to teach pupils of lower grades.

Liang also agreed with Tao Xingzhi's life education theories. He tended to view the whole society as a school. So in addition to school education in rural areas he also organized a series of supplemental units such as cooperative societies for technical training and fostering of cooperative spirits, self-defense teams for military training and village security, as well as the development of a rural improvement society for the building of a morally pure rural culture.

Liang's schools had an extensive social function and his educational theories were tested through practice.

Huang Yanpei 黄炎培 (1878-1965) won fame by promoting pragmatic and technical education. He established Chinese Professional Education Association (中华职教社) in Shanghai in 1917, which was considered one of the earliest organizations devoted to developing rural education.

"I firmly believe and thus conclude that the most difficult situation confronting China today is the life of her people. To thoroughly solve this problem, education is the only choice". Yet at the time rural education was not only ignored but also "[failed] to arm farmers with proper life skills"<sup>28</sup>. Rural life was built on the basis of the rural economy. Thus, the promotion of rural education should start from improving productive skills and creating chances for prosperity. So Huang proposed that economy and education develop side by side, instead of developing the economy before education as advocated by Confucius.

Based on this guiding principle, he stressed the promotion of family craftwork and proposed the setup of a school for teaching family craftwork. He also arranged an agricultural experimental field for farmers, introducing them to the use of quality grain seeds, training people in raising fish and poultry and demonstrating new farming tools as well as pesticides. After farmers saw obvious benefits from such practical learning, they gradually followed the guidance spontaneously. Huang once made a frank comment: only when people see good results will they follow your way"<sup>29</sup>.

To offer farmers what they wanted was considered the most outstanding feature of Huang's rural education theories. Obviously, he put life skill training in the first place and literacy second.

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<sup>28</sup> Huang Yanpei, *Rural Education 农村教育*, preface

<sup>29</sup> Huang Yanpei, *Some experiences on rural reconstruction gained through practice at Xugongqiao for six and half years 从六年办的徐公桥得到改进乡村的小小经验*

Moreover, he attempted to spread his rural education ideas to the whole country. For example, he set up experimental areas for vocational education. The implementation of vocational education involved very meticulous plans. Through thorough investigation, he identified the most beneficial and rich natural resources of a particular area. Then he took steps to guide people to rationally use these resources and produce benefits. He also proposed ideas on supervision and funding.

Huang's rural education attempts seemed more down to earth than many other reformers and thus were welcomed and accepted quickly by the farmers.

### ***Chinese Rural Teachers***

There is a dearth of studies on the subject of Chinese rural teachers in the available literature on rural education in China. Rural teachers in China are often merely mentioned as one of many components that affect students' learning or educational reforms. Yet it is still very necessary to assess the current knowledge concerning rural teachers and thus identify the gaps and difficulties in their preparation and organization.

### **Western Scholarship on Rural Teachers**

Western scholarship in the field of rural education research, though also limited, has touched on various aspects of rural teaching and learning from diverse perspectives and has used many methodological approaches. While some are describing situations in the urbanized countries, there are always common characteristics and similarities for rural educational issues across the world. It is thus advisable to review and thus gain insights of the rural educational issues from western scholarship. In related to problems of teaching professionalism, educators, rural and non-rural alike, focused on issues associated with role-set of teachers, social status of teachers, public opinions of teachers, features of teacher market, preparation and organization of teaching workforce as well as quality of teachers. These issues in most of the cases

interweave and together bring impact on teachers. A few writers dealing with rural teacher topics within rural context are worthy of mentioning and will be cited throughout as they become relevant.

The role-set is no unified, smoothly functioning guide for performance, but rather a cluster of changing, often conflicting pressures to which she (the teachers) must try to adapt (McPherson, 1972). In *Small Town Teachers*, McPherson found that the tensions and anxieties of the teachers in her school “derived far more from internal conflict within the teachers’ role-set than from conflict among the expectations of the different statuses they occupied.” And the primary aspect of the teacher’s role-set revolved around the dominant relationship between teacher and her pupils as being “a disciplinarian, a director of learning, a industrious worker, and as one deserving just and equitable treatment (McPherson, 1972).” Around this aspect of role-set of the teacher, Willard Waller (1932) in his classic work *The Sociology of Teaching* had provided such insights,

He (the teacher) must understand adolescent roles, and live vividly roles of his own not wholly incompatible with the roles of adolescence. (Willard Waller, 1932)

However, such requirement on teachers leads to a role conflict as well.

He (the teacher) can teach... and remain essentially adult, but to do that he must interpose between himself and his students an immense distance, and then the teacher-pupil relationship becomes one of dominance and subordination in its strictest form. If the teacher is to control understandingly it must be by the sacrifice of some of his own adulthood. (Willard Waller, 1932)

Besides,

It is not only that the teacher must have social traits which enable him to enter a little way into the society of boys, but that these same traits exclude him from the society of men. (Willard Waller, 1932)

In his *Voices from the Classroom*, Wilfred B. W. Martin (1985) thoughtfully examined the experience of all aspects of schooling including teacher-student relationships and teacher's influence. What I considered the uniqueness of this work was that he examined the role of teacher from the perspective of the students. For example, students advised "[T]eachers should take courses to improve their attitudes toward students (Martin 1985)."

The maladjustment of the teacher in his teaching roles is also reflected in his internal contradictions.

They are hired to carry light into dark places. To make sure that teachers have some light, standard qualifications for teachers have been evolved. Not only must the teacher know enough to teach the youngsters in the school competently according to the standards of the community, but he must usually, be a little beyond his community. From this it follows that the teacher must always be a little discontented with the community he lives in. The teacher is a martyr to cultural diffusion. (Willard Waller, 1932)

The teacher goes out with a vigorous idealism, determined to pass his values on to others, eager to find his own place in the give and take of the universe. But he finds the world without comprehension of his values, unready to receive them, interested in coarser things managed by duller, harder men...The Messianic spirit dies, his own grasp upon his ideals is enfeebled, and he sinks into a stubborn and unreasoning discontent. (Willard Waller, 1932)

To interact with students on a daily basis, the moral requirements that go with school teaching are thus extremely important. The core of the teacher's self-image was its moral obligation (McPherson, 1972). In other words, "the most complete ineffectiveness as a teacher does not always constitute a valid ground

for dismissing a teacher from his position, whereas detection in any moral dereliction causes a teacher's contract to be broken at once (Willard Waller, 1932)."

To discuss the role-set of teachers, it is inevitable to uncover the issue of teacher stereotype because usually the stereotype influence and sometimes even determine the opinions the public hold of teachers. As Willard Waller pointed out,

In analyzing the opinion people have of teachers, it is necessary to reckon with the teachers stereotype which partly reflects and partly determines that opinion. This stereotype apparently represents a caricature of the methods used by the teacher to maintain control over children, and of the personality worked out by the teacher as a solution for the problem of control. (Willard Waller, 1932)

McPherson (1972) has also noted the effect of the established stereotype by saying,

The negative stereotype of the elementary school teacher has importantly influenced the ways teachers act, the relation between teachers and the community, the process of recruitment into teaching, and the expectations to which teachers must respond. The fixity of this stereotype tends to reinforce the holding of idealistic expectations even while day-to-day role-playing pushes one toward more realistic expectations. (McPherson, 1972)

While teachers are generally expected to be role models for the students, the low social status held by teachers is not an unusual topic in literatures.

Concerning the low social standing of teachers much has been written. The teacher in our culture has always been among the persons of little importance, and his place has not changed for the better in the last few decades. (Willard Waller, 1932)

The low social standing of teachers is reflected from many aspects of teachers' lives. The stereotype of teachers being meekly paid and the tension between high expectation imposed on teachers and low opinion of the public on teachers in great part tell the story. Waller no exceptionally pointed to this.

It has also been argued that the social standing of any profession is a pretty accurate mirror of its economic standing, and that therefore the low financial rewards of teaching are a sufficient cause of its being considered one of the less honorable pursuits. (Willard Waller, 1932)

In *Voices from the Past: The Personal and Professional Struggle of Rural School Teachers*, Robert S. Patterson pictured the experience of rural school teachers in Western Canada around 1930's, which unfortunately remains true in quite some places even today. He noted,

People expected competence and virtue in their teachers. Yet at the same time, these qualities were undermined or compromised. (Patterson, 1986)

A further element in the popular prejudice against teaches, for the disrespect in which the profession is held amounts to that, is that "teaching is quite generally regarded as a failure belt (Willard Waller, 1932)."

Unjust or no, the low social standing of teachers, and the belief that teaching is a failure belt among the occupations, which is part of that low standing, contribute much to make the personnel of the profession represent a lower gradus of the general population than would otherwise be the case... (Willard Waller, 1932)

Willard Waller (1932) had very wisely deciphered this teacher status issue by pointing out,

It is sometimes proposed to remedy the low social standing of the teaching profession by making teaching a real profession. Let it be known that teaching is a difficult art, and one that requires years of expensive training, say those who argue for this remedy, and the people will esteem their teachers accordingly. As a part of this program, it is usually proposed to increase the amount of teacher training necessary for obtaining a teaching position. This savors a little of the curative principle of "the hair of dog that bit me." For it is partly the failure of teachers to register as human beings which accounts for the low opinion which their contemporaries have of them, and this failure to make an impression as human beings is partly due to the fact that the narrow social and intellectual training of teachers has destroyed some of their essential qualities of human beings. Perhaps the solution is to be found in the very opposite procedure; perhaps what will do the teacher most good will be for him to have an opportunity to take leave of his profession... (Willard Waller, 1932)

The social handicaps of teaching plus unfavorable working conditions "shut out many individuals of pronounced character who would be very useful in the schools if they could be induced to take up or to continue teaching (Willard Waller, 1932)." Although the severity of problems related to rural teachers is not as worse as ten years ago, teaching in rural is generally considered "physically, emotionally, and professionally demanding (Patterson, 1986)."

This necessitated not only abiding physical deprivation or inconvenience, but also considerable emotional strength (Patterson, 1986).

Just as teachers faced social isolation and loneliness they also encountered professional isolation and neglect. There was no readily available source of professional help for teacher of the rural one-room school (Patterson, 1986). Inadequacies of their preparation and the support system further dismay the quality of teaching workforce.

The concern of quality of the teaching force was perhaps the most noted (Toni Haas).

Research findings on the preparation of teachers were dismaying. Poorly prepared students entering the teaching profession, and being greeted there by inadequate programs with little opportunity to either gain a deep understanding of content areas or wide experience in a variety of real life classrooms, depend heavily on programmed curriculum and texts to survive their first several years (and perhaps continue this pattern throughout their career) (Toni Haas, 1991).

As one example of strategies for quality improvement, Toni Haas provided comments on teacher preparation program,

... preparation particularly important for training rural teachers includes course work directly related to rural school teaching, exposure to a course in rural sociology, practicum or student teaching in a rural setting, experience in teaching two or more grade levels in the same room, and an emphasis on multicultural issues of schooling. (Toni Haas, 1991)

In his *Rural Education in Urbanized Countries*, Jonathan P. Sher overtly criticized the limitation of the teacher training program in OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries in 1980's, which still represents the problems we confront today.

... so few institutions in the OECD countries intentionally train teachers for rural service (or promote teaching strategies especially relevant to rural teaching, e.g., cross-age instruction, community education, outdoor/environmental studies, and experiential learning) that there is very little to be said... (Sher, 1981)

Sher also pointed to the necessity of such teacher preparation program.

...even if such good training cannot make a person ill suited to teaching into a brilliant practitioner, it can still serve two functions: helping teachers having the right natural attributes to realize their full potential, and preparing potential teachers for the realities of the schools and communities in which they will be working after graduation. (Sher, 1981)

Ivan Muse in "*How Well Do We Prepare Teachers for Rural Schools?*" proposed a model for the best teacher-training program by saying,

And the best teacher-training program – for all concerned – provides opportunities for future teachers to experience, early on, the values and rewards of both urban and rural teaching. Then they, while still future teachers, can decide in which kind of school and community they, both professionally and personally, are better suited to direct their careers. (Muse, 1991)

Afterall, the strategies particularly used to improve the quality of the rural teaching force in countries with their own distinguishing cultural, economical, geographical features still need meticulous study since the results are not always satisfactory.

As the key steps in improving the quality of education, how to attract and keep quality teachers becomes the priority of rural schools. This further strengthens the notion that "[C]onditions of the workplace and quality of the workforce were of equal concern (Toni Haas, 1991)."

In recounting the old story of educational reform in America in 1980s, Toni Haas discussed the issues of attracting and keeping qualified teachers in rural schools.

The 1980s reports agreed that changing education depends on teachers and asserted that better teaching would result from improved working conditions, more compensation, better training and more rigorous certification requirements (Toni Haas, 1991).

Keeping teachers in the workforce was also a concern and simple salary increases, it was feared, wouldn't be sufficient (Toni Haas, 1991).

Undoubtedly, attention should also give to motivator variables that decipher the reason why teachers do what they do. This necessitates the very study of the teacher labor market.

Dwight Hare (1991), Timothy Collins (1999) have provided a thorough analysis of problems of the teacher labor market. In *Identifying, Recruiting, Selecting, Inducing and Supervising Rural Teachers* Hare suggested,

There are two essential variables of the teacher labor market in rural and small schools: distance from a college with a teacher education program and distance from an urban area. To fully understand staffing and teacher training in rural and small schools, one must understand the role these two play in teachers' deciding where they will teach. (Hare, 1991)

To secure a relatively stable rural teaching workforce, quite some scholars suggested feasible means such as careful recruitment of rural teachers at the preservice level, alleviating psychological effects of isolation by remedying the unsatisfactory working conditions.

If active efforts were made to seek out and train rural people interested in becoming teachers in their own or other rural communities, much of the later recruitment problems would be eliminated. (Sher, 1981)

Once we begin to identify our existing teachers and their motivations, we may more effectively recruit those teachers we want and need. When we understand, for example, that many of our teachers were also our students and we understand why they now teach for us, we can begin to identify who want teaching for us in the future. (Hare, 1991)

Colleges must take more of a role in recruiting students who demonstrates the characteristics of successful rural teachers. (Collins, 1999)

Concerning improvement of the working conditions, Sher noted,

Some of these conditions simply “come with the territory” and remain beyond the control of government action. Others such as poor facilities may be possible to remedy in theory but not in practice (for example, because of limited funds). However, there is nearly always something that can be done to make an inherently difficult situation more tolerable... government policy cannot alter the fact that a certain school is located a hundred miles from the nearest town of any size, but it can provide teachers with the time and the means to make enough trips... (Sher, 1981)

In a word, despite respective situations, the teacher labor market should commonly consider three “C”s – teacher characteristics, conditions and compensation (Sher, 1981). The following excerpts from a 1979 study of teacher transfers in Western Australia make some widely applicable points:

There was considerable agreement about factors that encourage teachers to stay. School facilities, staff relationships, the challenging nature of the job, climate and recreational facilities were commonly given favorable ratings (Deschamps, Beck et al)<sup>30</sup>.

Thus it is also important to bear in mind that,

... not all compensation is financial and that not all teachers select schools on the basis of salary. There are myriad of non-economic reasons why some teachers are attracted to rural schools. Five of these

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<sup>30</sup> P.A. Deschamps, T.M. Beck et al., *Teacher Transfers, Studies in Rural Education, Number 2* (Perth: Education Department of Western Australia, 1979), p.23

crop up with some regularity in the literature and in rural education forums: family ties; a sense of mission; easy access to natural and recreational resources; status within the community (if not within the profession); and considerations of quality of life. Teachers often have personal incentives such as these, which has little relationship to the government incentives offered. (Sher, 1981)

The above review has provided a general look at the studies and main researchers in relation to rural teacher issues.

### Literatures on Teachers in Rural China

When we turn back to examine the side of Chinese rural education, we can see western educators or writers with studies or writings concerning Chinese rural education appears thin and limited to those specialists on China (Hawkins, Munro, Seybolt, Hook etc.) and those who have had some knowledge of China through short visit to the country.

Suzanne Pepper (Chinese name: 胡素珊), a Hong Kong-based American writer in her *China's Rural Education Reform: Consequences, Remedies, Prospects* has given a good in-depth discovery and analysis of the problems resulted from the educational reforms in China in 1990s. Concerning rural teacher related issues in China, she especially noted the question of rural teachers' status and salaries.

Teachers, unable to sustain their livelihoods, now had no choice and began looking for other work. Some quit the profession altogether. Others took second jobs in order to make ends meet. (Pepper, 2001)

Given the disarray in rural finances, the State Education Commission had to acknowledge that, "no proper solution has yet been found for the problem of low Minban teachers' pay..." the promise to equalize incomes between Gongban and Minban teachers has proved as elusive as the aim

of bringing rural Gongban teachers' treatment up to the level of public employees generally... ((Pepper, 2001))

In addition, some papers on Chinese rural education were co-products of some western professors and their Chinese students, for example, *Elementary School Education in Rural China* (Luo& Wendel, 1999) and *The Reform of Rural Education in China* (Wang&Jacobson, 1993). They also have touched upon some aspects of rural teacher dilemma that confronted educational reform in China. Luo and Wendel have spared some length on the student-teacher relationship in the classroom as well as the role of the principal and teachers in rural China. Wang and Jacobson mentioned the strategies China is applying to improve the quality of rural teacher workforce.

... the central government formulated a strategy to "dig the potential" of the existing teaching workforce. The intention of the strategy is to keep the existing qualified teacher workforce stable while gradually improving the skills of the Minban teachers... government established teaching awards for excellent teachers in the hope that exemplary rural teachers would remain and work to raise the quality of others... At the local level, in-service training is considered the essential element for change, and courses were organized to broaden Minban teachers' knowledge and to improve their teaching techniques. "Invite-in" teachers and "model teaching" are commonly used training devices... (Wang&Jacobson, 1993)

On the Chinese side, quantities of reports and researches on rural issues could be found in Chinese educational journals, government reports, Internet websites, newspapers and internal documents. Chinese scholars and writers have also produced papers and articles on issues and prospects of Chinese rural education. Yet again, few have given focus to rural teacher issues. But to the researcher whose interest is to understand all aspects of Chinese rural education, these resources definitely should not be ignored. The most recent book *From a most populous country toward a country with greatest number of*

*human resources* (从人口大国迈向人力资源强国, 2003) which was the product of collective strength of nearly a hundred experts has depicted a grand picture for China's development through complete utilization of her human resources. And in the book, rural teachers have been placed on a strategic high level, because "the problem of quantity and quality of teachers will pose to be the major bottleneck for the sustenance and development of national education."

Organizations such as UNESCO and World Bank also greatly contributed to the literature. The joint effort of UNESCO and ILO in *Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers* (1966) as well as World Bank's *China: Issues and Prospects in Education* (1985) have provided the comprehensive global perspective on educational issues in the developing world. Teachers were put under special focus in these two books and most importantly over a hundred recommendations and strategies in coping with teacher issues were given, which of course should be applied to rural teachers as well. Just to mention a few points for illustration sake,

Working conditions for teachers should be such as will best promote effective learning and enable teachers to concentrate on their professional tasks. (UNESCO& ILO, 1993)

Adequate grants or financial assistance should be available to students preparing for teaching to enable them to follow the courses provided and to live decently; as far as possible, the competent authorities should seek to establish a system of free teacher-preparation institutions. (UNESCO& ILO, 1993)

Steps should be taken with a view to achieving international recognition of teaching credentials conferring professional status in terms of standards agreed to internationally. (UNESCO& ILO, 1993)

Issues concerning rural teachers certainly feature the most complicated and most important subject areas for educational research. The lack of international literature in the area might be due to several reasons.

The isolation of Chinese language and culture pose the most obvious barrier for the necessary exchange and communication among researchers of China and other countries on the subject. English papers on rural education in China tend to appear superficial. As few western researchers normally could read Chinese publications, most of them must rely on the translator's interpretation.

Rural education in China has displayed too many regional varieties. From East to West, from hinterland to cities to coastal area, from Hong Kong to Taiwan to Mainland, no consensus of opinions could be reached without dealing with distinctive social, economical and geopolitical features of the specific area. This definitely has made the already complicated issue even intriguing.

The current Chinese society has confronted a myriad of serious problems of all kinds. Although the strategic position of rural education in a society is already agreed upon, such long-term goal will always be placed next to the more immediate problems and solutions. The public and researchers thus also comparatively ignore rural teachers as a subject area for study.

In summary, the study of Chinese rural teachers at present stage is seriously underdeveloped. While little national and international scholarship is available on the subject, the neglect should by no means suggest that research and writing on Chinese rural teachers lacks scholarly interest. We would argue exactly the opposite is true. Understanding and communication on the subject of rural teachers in China should be enhanced and promoted. This is one of the objectives of this thesis.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Design

This study examines and reflects the viewpoints of former rural students on teachers and on teaching in a rural setting within certain cultural and social context. According to Van Maanen (1988), “direct matter-of-fact portraits of studied cultures are needed.” This study intends to reflect on the rural teacher related issues from the perspective of former rural students. It is my hope that conclusions derived from this study will lead to more critical awareness and thought on the motives of Chinese rural youth with respect to rural teaching as a potential career choice.

The data collection and analysis has been done over a period of eight months. The data was gained mainly through structured interviews in person. Interview questions are predetermined and the interviews all follow a certain pattern. Tools such as telephone and emails were also used in follow-up questions and responses in cases where it was impossible to arrange for face-to-face interviews. These data collection methods determined the extent to which this research can be considered reliable and resourceful.

This study uses qualitative approach. Researchers in this line try to understand how individuals perceive the meaning of the world around them and seek to view it through their eyes—how people understand their world and their surroundings (Krathwohl, 1997). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) noted, “People act not, however, according to what the school is supposed to be... but rather according to how they see it...the way students define schools determine their actions.” The perceived reality is just as important as objective reality because, as Krathwohl has argued, to the individual, that *is* reality.

It was felt appropriate to view rural teacher issues from the perspective of students. This perspective, however, informs what will be studied and how it will be studied (Creswell, 1997). A realistic approach was used to get at the

subjective reality of students' narratives. Wilfred B. W. Martin (1985) emphasized two features of this approach. One is the idea that a person must be able to empathize with the perspective of others and thereby gain insight into the meanings, which those others have for different social objects in their environment (Martin, 1985).

The second feature is that one must not forgo objectivity. Although it is barely possible, if not impossible, to least involve the researcher's values in interpreting students' viewpoints and meanings to some extent. Awareness of this limitation permits the researcher to guard against the undue influence of her personal bias and to attempt to give students' observations and reflection the greatest possibilities.

### **Data Gathering: Sources and Processes**

As the researcher has decided to utilize qualitative methodology from the outset of the study, the main emphasis has been given to a qualitative orientation as a point of view in generating data and analyzing. It was also deemed efficacious to employ an interview strategy with selected respondents due to logistical considerations and time constraints.

In identifying respondents suitable for the study, the snow-ball method (Miles and Huberman, 1994) was used, as opposed to a random sampling strategy. Selection criteria have been set prior to the study in order to identify and screen for the right interviewees. The first two potential interviewees are acquaintances with the researcher. Through them, six more participants were recommended and then another five more participants emerged.

The initial contacts with all potential interviewees were made through telephone calls to ask for willingness to participate in the study and to arrange for a proper time and place for the interview. During initial talk over the phone, brief introduction and objectives of the study were also given.

Pre-determined selection questions (see Appendix B) helped sift the interviewees who are considered resourceful and good speaker for the study. While data was collected mainly through interviews, other resources such as

documents, casual dialogues on informal occasions as well as a final piece of free writing were also contributors to the data collection. Casual dialogues between respondents and the researcher occurred whenever there was chance to do so. The researcher mainly took the role of a listener and observer and noted down as detailed as possible the dialogue content immediately afterwards. These dialogues contributed to the development of questions for formal interviews and established a necessary rapport with interviewees.

All interviews were conducted by the researcher personally over a four-month period from December 2002 to March 2003 in the Chinese language. As arranged, interviews occurred at the respondents' home or office. There were also cases where interviews were carried out in a neutral place that was considered comfortable for both participants and researcher. Interview times ranged between one and half hours to two hours. All interviewees willingly collaborated with the researcher during the interview process and in the follow-up work as well. Depending on the availability and location of respondents, one to two interviews were completed on a given day. In cases where the researcher felt it necessary to get at clarification or significance yet to be touched by interviews, the initial interview was followed up with telephone communication and emails. Of the original thirteen potential respondents, eleven interview records were adopted for final data analysis taking into account of factors such as sensitivity, knowledge, insight and authenticity.

The information was both tape-recorded and noted down in the form of key points during interviews with participants' consent. Based on given open questions and closed questions, participants were also encouraged to extend their thinking on topics of their interests.

The use of the Chinese language (mandarin) appeared appropriate since Chinese is the first language of all the participants and thus helped both parties understand from a Mainland Chinese cultural perspective. Transcriptions of all selected eleven interviews were put down on paper right after the meeting. To achieve accuracy and reliability, the researcher sent the English-version

transcription to some participants for clarification and consulted language experts as well.

Following the protocol of the ethics review, the identity of each respondent was coded to ensure anonymity. This was explained to respondents at the outset of each interview.

Demographic data were gathered as part of the researchers' question bank in order to establish a profile of the participants interviewed.

One thing to be noted is that the data collection and analysis are limited by the researcher's sense of values and her involvement and personal blinders. Thus, interpretation of the collected data might also be biased and fragmented. Some measures have been taken to reduce this limitation. First, the selection of the respondents was based on certain criteria (general selection questions) instead of the researcher's personal likings. Second, structured interviews were designed in such a manner as to elicit responses in as open and meaningful a manner as possible. Third, the interaction between the researcher and the respondents involved has been carried out in both a formal and an informal manner; follow-up steps also have been taken to ensure the validity of the data collected when required.

As the sampling strategy of this study limited participants to those who are now in Canada and those who used to excel in their academic studies, in a sense, they will not be representative of all rural students including those who stayed behind China and those who even didn't get a chance to move on to college. But on the other hand, the researcher also believe participants in this study, by pondering upon their academic or professional success and their cross-cultural experience, might be able to give their rural schooling a deeper consideration as well as a better understanding from more than one perspectives and thus provide us feasible suggestions for the improvement of rural teachers.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis of the data involves utilizing a constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Verdi, 2001) to crystallize themes from notes,

transcriptions and participants' free writings. The analysis work consisted mainly of two parts: compilation of a profile using the demographic information obtained and a description and interpretation of the anecdotal data provided by the respondents in the purposive sample.

The constant comparison work is reflected in the researcher's attempts in discovering whether there exists and the degree of congruence in the respondents' interpretations about the same questions. Notes, resulting transcriptions and participants' free writings are analyzed. Specifically, for each of researcher's interview questions and follow-up questions, all participants' responses to each question are reviewed. Each response has been carefully transcribed and categorized by question (Erickson, 1986; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Using interpretive content analysis (Baxter, 1992; Krippendorf, 1980), a systematic approach for examining text, the researcher examined responses for common themes.

Meanwhile the researcher's personal experiences as a rural student herself provided the background for the analysis of the data as well. Such experience helped make sense of the data through comparison and contrast. More importantly, the researcher's personal experiences also allowed her to be able to echo with an insider's point of view to some questions.

Again, "objectivity was abided in data analysis in a sense that one doesn't let personal values get in the way of understanding the values of others and definitions which those others give to particular situations (Martin, 1985)."

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The results of data analysis consisted of mainly three parts: the demographic data, derived from all selected interview records with participants with which the researcher aimed to see if socioeconomic status, gender, parents' education, age and social movements would make much difference in students' perceptions; descriptive data about how students perceived the things and issues in connection with their past rural schooling, rural teachers in particular; and these former students' observation and thoughts about present and future situations concerning rural education in China.

#### Demographic Data

**Table I**      Years Since Rural Schooling

Years in Rural Schools	Years Since
1984-1996	6
1983-1995	7
1980-1992	10
1978-1989	13
1975-1987	15
1974-1986	16
*1974-1979	23
1970-1981	21
*1970-1972	30
1964-1974	28
1944-1956	46

Source: Interview Data

\*the two participants had less than ten years in rural schools. The reason to include them in the study is based on the need for comparison and contrast in opinions.

Table I showed that the rural schooling of respondents had spanned from before Liberation (1949) to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century -- the period covered major social movements such as the Founding of the People's Republic of China, the Cultural Revolution, the Reform and Opening. While changes in perceptions were expected due to significant social changes, it was noted that respondents' attitudes toward rural education and their perceived rural reality have not undergone equally significant changes with the elapse of time. This will be given more detailed description in the later sections of this work.

**Table II**      Education of Respondents

Education	Frequency	Percentage
Post-doc	1	9%
Doctorate	3	27%
Master	2	18%
Baccalaureate	5	45%

Source: Interview Data

Table II has given us a glance at the level of education the respondents have had reached. According to any criteria, they are among the highly educated.

**Table III**      Respondents' Present Professions

Professions	Code of Respondents	Frequency
Graduate student	Lily, Hua,Guoqing,Xi Linyong, Shanshan	5
Researcher	Changping	1
Freelance	Jingyang	1

Professions	Code of Respondents	Frequency
School Admin. Personnel	Weihe,Tiane	2
Retiree	Jinyun	1
Artist	Meilan	1

Source: Interview Data

**Table IV**     Respondents' Professions Prior to Coming to Canada

Professions	Code of Respondents	Frequency
Student	Hua,Xi Linyong	2
Doctor	Changping	1
Engineer	Jinyun,Tiane,Shanshan	3
Teacher (college level)	Lily,Jingyang,Weihe	3
Entrepreneur	Guoqing	1
Artist	Meilan	1

Source: Interview Data

**Table V**     Respondents' Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency
Male	8
Female	3

Source: Interview Data

Table I to Table V showed that the majority of respondents have been in rural schools for more than 10 years, while none of them chose to teach in rural schools either in the past or at present. According to the respondents, they did not become rural teachers themselves as they all excelled in their academic performances in rural schools and had a chance to receive higher education. The implication is that those who became rural teachers might not have done very

well in academic work in schools. This may also indicate that the higher the education these former rural students attained, the less likely they would be to choose to teach in the countryside. The age and gender in this case didn't seem to make much difference in the respondents' decisions.

**Table VI**      Size & Economic Situations in Respondents' Community

Name	Community Size*	Economic Situation	Location in China
Xi Lingyong	about 10,000	not so poor	Coastal Area
Weihe	about 800	not so poor	Northeast
Jinyun		not so poor	Southeast
Tiane		not so poor	Southeast
Changping		not so poor	Southeast
Guoqing		quite poor	Northeast
Lily		quite poor	Central South
Jingyang		very poor	North
Hua		very poor	Central North
Shanshan	about 1,200-1,300	very poor	North
Meilan		very poor	Far Northeast

Source: Interview Data

\* Economic Situation was generally termed as "not so poor", "quite poor" and "very poor" by the respondents. The researcher assumed this rating came from respondents' general comparison about their home community with what they knew about the rural areas in other parts of China. No standard criteria were applied in this case. For example, some respondents would term the school condition as "good" if students were offered textbooks and basic furniture, while the same condition might be termed as "bitter" by others. Generally speaking, the data to some degree fit China's domestic social and economic situation that is unevenly developed due to historical and policy reasons.

**Table VII** <sup>1</sup>Education of Respondents' Parents

Code	Mum	Dad
Xi Linyong	Primary school level	Primary school level
Weihe	Illiterate	<sup>1</sup> Junior high level
Jinyun	Junior high level	Illiterate
Tiane	University level	University level
Changping	Primary school level	Primary school level
<sup>2</sup> Guoqing	Senior high level	Junior high level
<sup>2</sup> Jingyang	Junior high level	Junior high level
Lily	Senior high level	Primary school level
Hua	Two years primary	One year junior high
Shanshan	Junior high level	Illiterate
Meilan	College level	

Source: Interview Data

<sup>1</sup> Due to reforms in education systems from time to time, the education received by parents can only approximate to the corresponding level. For example, one respondent's father had eight years Sishu (a term for private schools in China around Liberation period in 1940's) education, in which case the researcher put it under junior high level.

<sup>2</sup> The respondents were brought up with their grandparents.

It was revealed from interview data that at least one of most of the respondents' parents received at least a junior high level of education. But perceptions about education level varied. However, there was a general rule in this study that older respondents (>40) tended to attach more importance to parents' education than younger ones (<40). Parents or grandparents all seemed to play important roles in the bringing up of respondents, exerting primary influence and imparting basic educational views to them.

**Table VIII** Background Information

Code	location & environment	local economy
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Code	location & environment	local economy
Lily	About half an hour drive from the city, with minibus transportation	Farming
Xi Linyong	On a small island along the seacoast, with boat transportation	Fishery and water transportation
Weihe	About an hour drive from the nearest city	Farming only
Jinyun	In a small town, about 2 hours drive from the city	Farming
Tiane	About one hour drive to the city	Farming
Changping	About half hour drive or 1 hour walking distance from the town	Farming and business
Guoqing	About 10 kilometers from the nearest county or 50 kilometers from the city, with two routine bus every day	Farming only
Jingyang	In the border area of three neighboring provinces	
Hua	About 4 kilometers from the town	Farming
Shanshan	About 40 kilometers from the nearest town or 140 kilometers from the city, with distance bus transportation	Farming only
Meilan		Farming

Source: Interview Data

### Students' Perceptions

Before we move on to students' perceptions, I shall characterize briefly the social context within which the respondents of this study had experienced their early rural schooling.

Seven of my interviewees coincided with the Cultural Revolution period during their rural schooling. Weihe was in high school then and he appeared to

have deeper feeling about the impact of the movement on his schooling, while the other six were still in primary school and they only remembered studying was labeled as “taking the white line” and being required to recite Mao Tse-tung’s tenets everyday. Weihe said:

I think our generation was most impacted by the Cultural Revolution. For example, some of the courses stopped during the period, like history and geography. Although school continued, we didn’t learn systematically. I only had two years of study in a real sense when I was in senior high school. Thanks to my teachers’ strictness. (Weihe)

Some of the respondents, such as Meilan and Jingyang, their families had experienced unusual experiences during those years due to their parents’ political or social positions.

Three respondents were born in the Reform and Opening years (after 1978). The social impact on them were quite different from the above seven respondents.

The last respondent who was also the oldest had his rural schooling around the foundation of the People’s Republic of China.

### ***General Depiction of Our Rural Teachers***

**Question 1.** What would you like to comment on your rural teachers during your early schooling in general? Were there any teachers that impressed you?

The following points emerged with respect to the responses to this question:

Lily used the word “humble or austere” in describing her rural teachers’ appearance. I assumed she wanted to say that these teachers were living a humble life, and they couldn’t afford to make up or they didn’t want to make up to look too different from their students.

Tiane mentioned in primary and secondary school her teachers taught more than one subject, not necessarily in their own fields of expertise. For

example, she mentioned, her music teacher taught politics and history. And her English teacher also taught Chinese. Hua and Changping echoed this point. Changping also mentioned his teachers responsible for more than one grade.

Jingyang and Weihe noticed there were Minban<sup>31</sup> as well as Gongban teachers.

Over half of the respondents mentioned the average level of education attained by their teachers was lower than college level.

When it comes to impressive teachers, almost all of them mentioned one or more teachers who stood out clearly in their memory from among other teachers.

Lily said: "At almost each stage of my study, I did have several good teachers that impressed me most." But she only gave one example of her teacher Mrs Liu who taught Chinese. Whenever she made mistakes, her teacher would say, that's OK, keep trying. Weihe said Mr. Gong Fanqing, his Chinese language teacher as well as the teacher of all his brothers and sisters liked him very much because all the children in his family did well in academics and behaved well.

Xi Linyong talked about a young math teacher who was on probation in their village at the time. I was amused when he gave a very vivid example:

I remember once we had come across some problems that we couldn't solve immediately. We several students discussed and drew on the playground, calculating and drawing in the muddy ground. He happened to pass and was stopped by us "come to have a look at this problem". He was just like one of us then. We stayed in the mud until we worked out the problem. (Linyong)

At the end, Linyong added: "Indeed, I would love to meet him again."

In these cases, these teachers were depicted as kind and encouraging. They kept close to students as if they were one of them.

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<sup>31</sup> Minban or Gongban teachers: Please see Appendix A.

But sometimes these teachers might also appear strict and tough. Shanshan described an event in his rural school days. Some students were once given physical punishment by the teacher due to their undisciplined behavior. Then he added that he actually felt that was a good teacher. The teacher was forced to punish the students as he had no other choice. The teacher also impressed him because his handwriting was exceptionally good. In contrast, he mentioned another teacher who was the wife of xiangzhang (head of the village) and mother of Shanshan's enemy. She gave him quite severe punishment as well. But they definitely felt such punishment was for the students' own good.

Weihe's teacher was depicted by him like this:

If we failed to recite the works assigned to us, we would expect a good beating. A student was once beaten so hard that his hand went swollen the next day. (Weihe)

These teachers might be also born in themselves some "quality" traits according to Guoqing, Jingyang.

Guoqing summarized:

I feel I was very lucky to have her as my instructor. She was teaching Chinese. After all, I think she had the formal training, she was quite knowledgeable in the subject and she used very effective method. I feel I really benefited a lot in learning Chinese language. I have laid a quite solid foundation for my Chinese. (Guoqing)

Changping talked about his geography teacher, "though he was a farmer and never had college education, I think he was pretty good." Jingyang mentioned one of his most impressive teachers several times during the interview. He said:

One of my primary teachers was such a gifted person in many fields. He played violin, he painted, and he could also do excellent calligraphy.

Although he was brought up in the county in a so-called bourgeoisie family, he has left in us great influence. (Jingyang)

Another was his headmaster in his secondary school.

He was a teacher of versatile talents. The teacher was not only good at calligraphy, but also knowledgeable in math, geometry and Chinese language. His teaching was always so vivid. He was not like some other teachers. He never read textbooks. Instead, when he taught traditional Chinese lessons, he always tried to bring about episodes in history. (Jingyang)

Jingyang added this teacher was also very strict with students, “almost everyday, he would give us a piece of model calligraphy and required us to practice writing.”

It’s fairly common for students in all these cases to have felt that their teachers paid more attention to them than to other students. This was quite true, for example, in Guoqing, Weihe and Lily’s cases. On the other hand, all students, academically good or not, told they were treated fairly. Tiane mentioned her first teacher in primary school like this.

I even remember her name was An Yumei. She was from Inner Mongolia. She treated me very very nice and I think her teaching was also one of the best. She was really thoughtful in her teaching of pinyin (Chinese phonetic system). She appointed me as the leader of the class and with quite some responsibilities. She sometimes even asked me to stay in her home. Her appreciation inspired me so much that I felt obliged to behave good. (Tiane)

Changping mentioned his Chinese and English teachers. They so often praised him in the class and asked him to solve difficult questions in front of the class. He said he was regarded as a model for the class. Tiane gave another example quite similar to Changping’s case. Her Chinese teacher praised her

writing by saying “if you can revise a bit, you may get it published.” Tiane said the influence of her Chinese teacher’s words even continued today.

Guoqing also depicted another kind of impressive teacher who provided advice in the key period of their students’ growth.

At the time of widespread of family responsibility system in rural China, more and more people were getting rich. This led to my thinking that moving up to universities might not be the only choice, since farming was also quite rewarding. On the other hand, I was quite interested in literatures, so I read a lot of books, a lot of extra readings. And I couldn’t focus on my study. Sometimes even in classes I did some of the readings. As a result, my academic marks went up or down, like sine curve<sup>32</sup> as described by my teacher. He noticed this and then we had a talk. He said, your interest in literatures, at the present stage, would only do good to your Chinese learning, but how about other subjects? A person only has finite energy. You should make to succeed in the college entrance examination as your priority at present. After you were admitted into college or university you had all your time reading. I think he has given key influence on this matter. On considering his opinion, I later made some adjustment. He was my math teacher in secondary school. He has observed me. (Guoqing)

To this, Tiane echoed with another of her experience. Once she pulled off the second place in a contest within the whole district.

But I had hoped to rank No. 1. and might have appeared bit disappointed. Mr. Li Chanqi, my physical education teacher said: what differences do you expect even you can beat all? This definitely reminded me that I might be too proud that I even didn’t consider the feelings of other students. That was quite true, before that I was always felt I was somebody. (Tiane)

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<sup>32</sup> sine curve: a math term

Changping also mentioned his math teacher.

He was from Wuxi city, a Minban teacher (hired locally and not on the state's payroll). He encouraged us to try college entrance examination and he said it was so worthwhile that you should try many times.

(Changping)

Weihe mentioned his English teacher, which provided us another dimension of how students valued good and influential teachers:

She was a university graduate, a very good teacher. Her teaching couldn't be too good. But not just that. I think they themselves possessed a very good quality. They certainly influenced us in many other respects as well. (Weihe)

Impressions all tended to be positive, even though some teachers resorted to physical punishment as part of their teaching method as mentioned in Shanshan and Weihe's description. Teachers' subject knowledge, their teaching attitude, their closeness with students seem to matter more than their actual education level, their Minban or Gongban status to students in these cases.

**Question 2.** Where were your teachers from?

Nine respondents replied that Minban teachers, or locally hired teachers, constituted the major part of their primary teachers. The minor part, according to the respondents was graduates from normal schools. In junior and senior high school the percentage of outside teachers increased. Only Tiane said most of her teachers were living or working locally but not originally from the local area. This seemed to indicate that the primary education was not guaranteed with the same quality of teaching as junior high and senior high school. As a rule, the percentage of local teachers decreased as the school level went up.

**Question 3.** How was the ratio of young to old teachers, women to men

teachers, and local to outside teachers in your school? Did you feel you were influenced by such factors?

Of eleven respondents, four said that in their primary school women teachers were the majority, two said they have more men teachers and the other four mentioned they had a balance of men and women teachers.

Three respondents felt that children would be influenced by the imbalance between men and women teachers. One explanation was that because children stayed in school most of the time, they definitely would behave after teacher's model. Another explanation stressed more about children's social roles in the future. Changping cited an example that some adults feared socializing with other people, which might result partly from this imbalance in their early school days. Meilan gave a very vivid description. She said: "that's for sure. It is just like mother and father in the family need to play their respective destined roles."

Tiane said a balance of men and women teachers was very important for the healthy growth of young students. Her own experience may be noteworthy here. Her school was typically female-dominated.

I had another teacher in secondary school that I didn't like at all. She was well educated, a psychology major. However, she would demonstrate terrible dislikes when she saw girls and boys being together. This actually left in me very negative impression that I felt it was a crime to get along with students of another sex. I even thought that female teachers might sometimes envy beautiful girl students. (Tiane)

Three respondents agreed on the point that the imbalance shouldn't matter much to primary school students. One of them added that this factor might become obvious in secondary school as children were growing both mentally and physically. Another respondent mentioned this imbalance might influence today's children, as they grew stronger in their self-awareness than children before.

As to teachers' age, three respondents mentioned they had more elder

teachers. As the researcher queried further whether they could have some kind of communication with these elder teachers, they said no. And two of them agreed on the point that “how can little kids communicate with elder teachers.” One respondent even stressed this by saying, “that was impossible, they were teachers and you were just little kids.”

To the other two respondents who reported they had more young teachers, the researcher made the same query again. One of them said “not much communication.”

A respondent compared elder and young teachers, and said this factor also mattered, “because young men teachers get along with our boys more easily.” Another respondent explained since we had to deal with people of all ages, teachers’ age definitely mattered.

**Question 4.** What differences did you notice between local teachers and those from outside (city or bigger community or county)?

Six respondents felt teachers from outside should be better because they might have received better education since they were given more chances in terms of education and knowledge and thus they could have knowledge of a broader base, better subject knowledge and teaching methods.

One respondent, Shanshan made a quite different comment. He talked about the “civilization level” of his teachers.

Local teachers were not at the same level of civilization as city teachers. These were reflected in their manner of speaking, the way they deal with other people. Say, city people, when there was situation to speak rude, they would avoid using that rude language. But rural teachers might not care that much. He would say directly what he wanted to say. We described it as “zhichangzi”(literally means straight intestine, here it means being direct or straightforward when describing someone’s talking manner), because they didn’t receive that much education. I think this is

something to do with one's education level. (Shanshan)

But other three respondents felt their local teachers were good enough and there actually were not much differences between local teachers and city teachers. According to Lily:

Rather, I think the differences lie in personalities. Some of my local teachers also taught very well. They were fun, humorous and they also read a lot. (Lily)

Weihe added that the differences might be getting greater nowadays, because city teachers have received formal education even from their childhood and had more contacts with all kinds of knowledge of the world.

Guoqing was the only one who didn't want to give me a definite answer. He said:

If I compare them, that's actually irrational, separating from the context. I feel, with the increase of your experience and knowledge, you will have chances to see different teachers. Under such circumstances, you have formed ideas about what your teachers were or what good teachers should be. But if you use your ideal to apply to those rural teachers, that's not fair, I think. (Guoqing)

Tiane's answer was quite a special one.

I think that teachers from cities dressed up better. They usually paid more attention to their teaching job rather than fighting with other teachers for some personal reasons. They cared more about their own lives. But local teachers might care about different things...(Tiane)

For example, my chemistry teacher was a city born girl. She once mentioned Marie Curie, an outstanding Polish woman chemist and she

said she expected me to achieve as high as Marie Curie...(Tiane)

Teachers from urban areas comparatively pay more attention to developing students' interests. My interest in writing was triggered by a small praise of my Chinese teacher who said: " I feel your writing could be even better to get published." The influence of her saying so even continue today...(Tiane)

Obviously some respondents concluded from their specific experiences and some didn't, but none of them felt something was wrong if rural teachers were not as good.

**Question 5.** Have many of your teachers received formal teacher education?

The tendency was that few primary school teachers had formal teacher education, but more trained teachers appeared in junior high and senior high. And only Lily mentioned her Gongban teacher had certificate training in the town, or to put it in another way, in-service training. Five respondents mentioned that one or two of their primary school teachers might have received the formal teacher training or formal education.

Teacher shortage in some cases stood more important than the level of education teachers attained. Linyong mentioned his school had to recruit from primary school graduates and junior high students. Meilan said her school had the same situation.

Even so, Tiane and Weihe had given quite positive remarks. In Weihe's words, he actually felt his teachers, though former high school students not receiving any formal education were pretty good in terms of their teaching and subject knowledge expertise. Tiane also said:

But I think they have learned teaching and pedagogy through real teaching practice. I really thought they were good enough. Technically, they might not be qualified. But from my point of view, they knew much

more than us. (Tiane)

Although Tiane's opinion was not popular, it may induce another worthy thought, that is, whether we should weigh formal teacher education more than teachers' actual teaching in case of teacher evaluation and promotion.

Guoqing mentioned they had a junior teacher school in the county near his village, whose graduates might be distributed to the surrounding villages. This also conveyed to us an important message that the teacher training school in local area could be a very good indicator of the extent to which the local human resources were made full use of.

### ***Teacher Quality***

From respondents' general depiction of their rural teachers, we were also given some specific examples which to some extent reflected aspects of teaching. For example, Shanshan, Jinyun, and Linyong had mentioned that their teachers spoke local dialect instead of official mandarin. Shanshan said:

You see my pinyin (the phonetic system used in China) is fairly bad, that's because all my teachers spoke local dialect. They couldn't use pinyin themselves. And none of them speak mandarin. It was only until I went to university that I began to learn to speak mandarin. (Shanshan)

Hua had provided another example:

To tell you a funny thing, I am trying all the time to speak good English, but I just feel too difficult to change my accent. My English teacher in the primary school never learnt English in school. He taught himself. He told us himself that what he taught us in classroom was actually just learnt the night before. (Hua)

There were also cases such as what Tiane had mentioned about her teachers teaching subjects which didn't fit their trained specialization at all.

Concerning the issue of teacher quality, answers to the following questions may also provide us insights.

**Question 6.** How did your teachers encourage you to study hard? Did they tell you why you should study hard?

As a matter of fact, most respondents have mentioned their impressive teachers who were also very encouraging in their study, such as stories provided by Linyong, Tiane, Lily, Guoqing and Changping etc. But as to question whether their teachers have mentioned the objective or goal of study as a way to motivate students in their learning, the answers diversified in a way that quite reflected how respondents viewed teachers' teaching philosophies.

The result was quite unexpected. Only three people gave me positive answers to the question whether their teachers encouraged them to study hard to fulfill some goals. These answers were quite context bound, which included "serving people (though without fair clarity as to how to serve people)", "for higher education (basically referred to accumulating of knowledge as explained by the respondent, ...with the final aim to leave countryside by means of leaning)" and "to live a life other than on farming." As regard to the last goal, Shanshan had given me a very vivid story:

This is the only thing he (the teacher) used to encourage us. When I was in the senior high, my academic performance was, eh, almost the last one in the class. Then my teacher had a talk with me: you look so little, how can you handle farming work in the future if you don't study hard now? This was such a lesson for me. So this idea, to leave countryside became my motivation force. (Shanshan)

Although from within these respondents might have been motivated by their own desires such as to reward the family, the majority of respondents didn't remember that their teachers motivated their study by clarifying some goals.

Two of them also pointed out the contrast of the situation between now and then. Changping said:

I don't remember they ever told us anything about the purpose of studying hard. At that time, your political loyalty to the Chinese party was most important. I guess that our teachers didn't think too far beyond that. It was quite different from today's situation perhaps. In school or at home, teachers and parents will expect you to go abroad or to rank high in college entrance examination. They will give you pressures to achieve these purposes. (Changping)

...

The society needs different levels of people.... From this point of view, I think my teachers and family are right. They did not ask me to read and write with some specific aim, like to earn a lot of money, to go abroad, to become a higher officer or politician, or to be a famous scientist. (Changping)

The answers on the other hand reflected how much teachers themselves valued their own work at the time. Obviously, while they carried out their teachers' roles because they were put in that position, they didn't intentionally promote or reinforce a teaching career among their students.

**Question 7.** Did your teachers pay attention to anything other than just your academic marks, for example, moral qualities and personal interests? If yes, what were the ways your teachers tried?

Six respondents have agreed on the point that the main responsibility of teaching lay in facilitating students in their academic performance. To be specific,

three respondents restricted this academic performance to the command of textbook knowledge.

Only two of them mentioned the fostering of moral qualities, for example, to be organized to help senior people in the community or to help in the harvest season.

Two respondents attributed the development of their interests (writing and math) to their teachers. Lily said

If you had something good, or you could bring honor to the school, they would just help you. (Lily)

Linyong has provided a more detailed description.

I think my interest in science and engineering has a close connection with that young teacher in my primary school. He was teaching math. I remember at the time I was only a primary school student, but I often put in much of my effort in solving some geometry problems, like seeking the area of a shadow from a ball. And I often went to ask him. We discussed together. That gradually aroused my great interests. That was the period that I began my interests. But strangely I didn't like Chinese from the very beginning. I guess because my math teacher has aroused my interests and because he praised me for my excellent performance, which in turn made me even more motivated. (Linyong)

The other three people said their interests mainly came from family influence. And they said their teachers didn't seem to make effort in this respect.

Still other two respondents said they didn't think they had any specific interests at all, because their teachers "didn't know much themselves."

Only one respondent, Meilan mentioned her interest other than in an academic field. She loved painting. Again, the influence was not from teachers,

but from an artisan who occasionally visited the community. And she added that teachers at the time “didn’t require too much on marks. They were subject to a self-criticism meeting almost everyday.”

**Question 8.** Did you have any creative activities or social activities such as your teachers took you to visit places like museums, bookstores, scenery spots etc.? (In some other situations, the question has been raised in another way: do you remember if your teachers ever tried anything to convey to you the knowledge that might not be covered by the textbooks?)

This question served as an extended part of question seven. As in the interview, the researcher constantly found that specific questions such as this one were sometimes needed in case of planned questions.

Five respondents remembered outside tours organized by their teachers, but the trip was limited to the nearer town or revolutionary bases or natural spots. None of them ever visited museums and bookstores, for these places were assumed to be in the city, out of reach for rural children.

However, Lily has mentioned that her school actually organized other extra-curriculum activities such as singing and dancing. She said these kind of activities “were a very good chance for us to expose ourselves and not be shy any more before the public”. Weihe had a very positive story in this respect:

What I could remember quite well was my chemistry and biology teachers. They sometimes led the class to the field, so we could observe the plants very directly. In the school we also had a patch of land for experiment use. As a matter of fact, I think children grew up in rural areas would naturally know more about the plants compared to children in the city. (Weihe)

...

We also had drawing, music and physical education class. Music, for example, we learned songs and reading musical notes. In senior high

middle school, we even had a students' propaganda team. The team members were highly skilled. They had people playing accordion and Erhu (a kind of Chinese wind musical instrument). Their performances were very welcome. (Weihe)

Guoqing's answer sounded bit critical:

I don't think they made much effort in this respect. They didn't do much about this. Museums? That was impossible. Any creative works? No, I don't think so. (Guoqing)

In Hua's case, her school only had a muddy playground, which was used for basking the wheat and corn.

**Question 9.** Do you think your language abilities today has anything to do with your teachers in your early rural schooling?

Language abilities were interpreted in terms of general language ability, such as mandarin or local dialect, or the socializing language ability, or both by the respondents.

While only one person mentioned she was well trained in pinyin (Chinese phonetic system), the majority of respondents said their teachers spoke only local dialects instead of mandarin (standard Chinese) at all. The teachers either couldn't speak or didn't want to speak mandarin in the classroom teaching.

English language learning was also mentioned by some of the respondents. While in Linyong's case, his English learning was not at all satisfying; the situation in Lily's school was best described as a virtuous or favorable circle. Good English teachers, effective English teaching and English as the major contributor in the promotion rate all interconnected with each other and worked together to bring positive results.

Concerning my English ability today, special thanks should go to my first

English teacher, Ms Ma. She was from the city. She taught us to sing English songs, although such method was neither widely accepted nor popular in the countryside. But she brought the method into our school. Quite some other local teachers were also well known for their expertise in English teaching. Several years ago, I visited my junior high school again. My grade two English teacher Mr. Liu was still very well known for his English teaching. When it comes to students' promotion rate in my school, English was always the major contributor. (Lily)

Concerning language ability as a means of socializing, Guoqing said:

I guess there is little connection, because I was not able at language or socializing with people at all. I still remember even when I was already a university student, the first time I visited girls' dorm with some of my fellow students, my voice was almost trembling. I was quite nervous at the moment. That's why I think early rural education didn't bear much influence for your later life. (Guoqing)

But this actually told us something about the connection between early rural education and later socializing. Changping's explanation may provide us another side of the picture.

The language ability, oral expression ability, is not related to rural background. Many people from there can express and do social work very well. Many people from cities are also very quiet. But the broadness of knowledge and views are related to urban or rural backgrounds. (Changping)

Weihe has expressed some different point of views. He pointed to the family influences and relations between teacher education and teaching.

The influences from your teachers were certain. But I think the family played the main role in the respect. The influence from your family is fairly big. Of course there is also influence from your teachers, as well as the people you meet after you graduate from school and in work. These people around you all influence you. Did teachers purposefully cultivate my language ability? I was too young at the time. I didn't have too much idea about this. But I believe it should be so if teachers have received formal teacher education, I mean if they are graduates from teachers' college. They should be more successful in their ways of teaching. They know this, of course. (Weihe)

### ***Explanations on Teacher Quality by Students***

**Question 10.** What do you think could be possible reasons for the quality of your teachers?

To explore practical as well as historical reasons for the quality of teachers, this question was broken into two:

#### ***Influence on teacher quality from social environment and daily life***

The answer greatly overlapped with that of question fifteen concerning pressures confronting teachers. Please refer to Pressures confronting Teachers on page 89.

#### ***Influences on teacher quality from social movements like Cultural Revolution***

**Question 11.** Your early schooling coincided with Cultural Revolution, do you still remember anything that happened to your teachers?

As mentioned earlier in the section, seven of the respondents coincided with the Cultural Revolution period during their rural schooling. Weihe was in high school then and he appeared to have deeper feeling about the impact of the movement on his schooling while the other six were still in primary school.

It was agreed among respondents that social movements like the Cultural Revolution would definitely have an impact on teachers. But respondents also felt

the degree to which the teachers were impacted decreased from urban area to rural countryside, and from high school to primary school. As Weihe mentioned,

The situation in my school was actually not that serious. I remember the No. four middle school might have got much influence. But in primary school, it seemed not that much influence. In middle school, there might be students who treated teachers terribly, like forcing teachers to wear high hat or dragging them to the streets... and there were also Red Guard and red little soldier, whatever. The political and social environment definitely would have influenced teachers' quality, but I think students were the ones who received most of the influence. (Weihe)

Jingyang had comments on this issue as well,

Social, cultural and economical reasons will all influence teaching, that's for sure. For example, during the Cultural Revolution, teachers themselves wouldn't be able to receive good education and good training was also impossible. Even in today's China, according to what I have learned, teachers are still unqualified in many cases. The Cultural Revolution was indeed laying great impact on teachers. At the time I had a primary school teacher whose family background was "rich peasant". And another of my teachers when I repeated my fifth grade in the county had a family background of "petty bourgeois". Both teachers were quite capable of teaching, but their family backgrounds were all labeled as "five black groups"<sup>33</sup>. You can imagine if your family was categorized as "five black groups", how that would influence your teaching. So the problems will not only involve just one factor, instead they involve all social, political and cultural factors. Especially in China, political factors might be even crucial. (Jingyang)

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<sup>33</sup> Five black groups referred to landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, reactionist and rightist.

Hua, one of the respondents only born at the end of the Cultural Revolution didn't have much memory about this social movement at all. But based on what she had learned later she associated this movement with her teachers' quality.

When I grew up, I got to know that my teachers were once sent to remote mountainous area for reeducation. They were so young and they were in their crucial period of gaining knowledge about this world. But they were so involved in the political movement that hardly any of them had learnt anything. (Hua)

### ***Teaching Conditions and Resources***

**Question 12.** What do you remember about your rural school then in terms of school building, and learning & recreational facilities? Did you have any extra reading materials other than textbooks?

The physical conditions of the rural schools the respondents attended varied. But generally speaking they were rough and without proper facilities. For example, leaking occurred at least in five respondents' situations. In Shanshan's situation, they even had a time that more than twenty students crammed in a horse shed with only a small basket of charcoals everyday for the long cold winter. Hua's situation was no better. The classroom window was totally shut by mushy earth in winter to keep out coldness and that made the inside so dark that the class had to finish very early everyday. They also didn't have enough pens and papers at the time. To save papers and pens, they practiced writing on the ground. Jingyang's school was one-classroom straw roof building, which was used for students of all five grades alternatively. The conditions sounded better in Changping, Linyong, and Tiane's situations, according to whom the school building (bungalow) was built up in bricks and they never ran short of desks, chairs and textbooks. Weihe, as an exception was so proud by telling the researcher,

As far as I remember, my rural school was once the best construction in my village. This school was attached great importance by the villagers since remote time in history, quite some people who later became top leaders in China were sent to this school. People in the village all sent their children to school. This was almost a tradition. (Weihe)

But almost none of the respondents' primary schools had labs or reading rooms or a library. Some of the respondents thought primary schools might not need these things at all. Guoqing said in rural schools, they never knew such kind of things. From junior high school on in some respondents' cases, they began to have chemistry or physics labs.

The recreation facilities in all respondents' schools were poorly equipped. Most commonly they had a playground, which would go muddy in rainy days. In some cases, they might also have brick or cement tables for playing table tennis or simple basketball stands for playing basketball.

When it comes to extra reading materials, no respondents' schools provided them. But extra readings might come from other channels, for example, Guoping collected some from elder students or from neighbors who would dump the old books into the garbage otherwise. Changping's extra readings came from the production team or his auntie. Lily said their teachers had a personal collection of storybooks for them.

Although the conditions were far less favorable from today's point of view, few of the respondents felt they had suffered; instead they had enjoyed their times.

Tiane was actually quite positive about the conditions. She said:

We didn't have many reference books. Teachers mainly used textbooks that were considered very important in rural schools. We even took advantage of this less favorable condition that I felt we could much concentrate on studying the knowledge available in the textbooks. The phenomenon of competition among students was actually not that obvious. We put more of our mind in studying by ourselves. (Tiane)

**Question 13.** Was going to school or learning very popular in your village? (In some cases the question was also raised as: Was the atmosphere for learning good? Or what was the position the school enjoyed in the community? Or what was the community people's attitude toward school or learning in general?)

To the researcher's surprise, Weihe was the only one saying that his people in the village attached great importance to school and their children's learning. This was because of the tradition in the area. In other respondents' cases, although sending children to school seemed to be common practice and state's policy was favorable (i.e. primary and secondary education were free before the late nineties), village people didn't see much meaning or hope in doing so. Or they didn't have long-term plan (Guoqing's words). It might be because few children could later move on to senior high or enter university, in which case, they had but one choice: going back to the countryside and farming. Linyong's sister had finished junior high but became a farmer in his hometown. "What do you think a junior high student could do?" asked Linyong. This was not something unusual to Shanshan or Guoqing or Jingyang or Hua. They all witnessed the same thing happened to their friends or families. And Guoqing noticed, "it was only about sometime after the college entrance examination was resumed, some people began to feel that going to school might enable their children, in simple words, to leave countryside or to live a different life. Only since then, did they begin to think that learning was an important thing."

As a matter of fact, on the one hand, children seemed to be given freedom in deciding to go or not to go to school (they could go to school when they wanted to, they could also quit school when they felt like to do so.). On the other hand, if they couldn't enter university and later choose to live a different life, they would inevitably be expected to carry on farming work. In some places, girls were even cared about less in terms of school education.

To some extent, Tiane has offered a very good thought which helped explain the difference between Weihe's situation and other respondents' situations.

In some part of rural China, people have long followed the tradition of education. If everyone in the community has reached the consensus that children should receive education, this helps foster a favorable cultural atmosphere. People admire the educated. So even the family is very poor, they will send children to school. Of course, if parents themselves don't think that way and because they themselves are stupid, they may think the farming is good enough for their children. Some villages in Gansu province, which maybe among the poorest places in China, have had many number one students around the country. I think this is because the whole village had arrived at the consensus. And this tradition definitely will pass down from generations to generations. (Tiane)

**Question 14.** How were teachers being treated in your community?

Teachers' social status could be reflected from many respects, how community people respected teachers might be one of the most outstanding indicators.

Interestingly enough, the researcher has found out, respect toward teachers varied. In Linyong and Weihe's case,

people treated our teachers very well in our village. Sometimes our teachers even came to visit our homes and be our guests. Each time that teachers came to our village, they were warmly received by the villagers. I think teachers have enjoyed quite high social status there. (Linyong)

During important festivals, such as spring festival, the villagers would invite teachers to have meal in their homes. I think teachers then enjoyed more respect and higher social status than today. I guess that is also because the quality of teachers were even better than today. (Weihe)

While in Changping's case,

generally, people in my community were not showing dissatisfaction toward teachers then. They basically respected teachers. (Changping)

And in Jingyang's case, the situation seems to be more brought up to the surface.

As far as I can remember, teachers in our community were not given special positions. People just felt it quite natural that there should be a school in the community and since there was school, then there should be teachers in it. Things should run this way. I don't think we treated teachers as someone special, or someone we should put on the shrine. (Jingyang)

Lily, however, pointed out some of her villagers' attitudes toward teachers.

Because generally they (villagers) were not so well educated and they might not even know for sure what education should do. So they don't have the choice, right. They just send their children to school and leave every responsibility to the school or to the teacher. (Lily)

Or in Shanshan's description, people's respect was reflected in that their children "just listened to what teachers said, did what they told you to do. This is almost a rule.

Weihe, however, pictured the subtle change in the community respect in teachers.

In the rural community like ours, people respect teachers very much, so do the children. Before the Cultural Revolution, teachers in the community enjoyed a quite high prestige. But things changed afterwards. Teachers' status was sort of declining. At the time we used this or that kind of tickets in restricting buying everything. Teachers had nowhere to get these tickets. I remember very clearly. Once a teacher was going to give birth, she wanted to buy some sugar but couldn't find places to buy. I was working in the town at the moment. It was not hard for me at all to get

tickets. Then I just told the commune about this. And I said to that teacher, how much you want, just go and buy it. And these teachers were quite good teachers in the school. From that time on, teacher' status was going downwards. The situation lasts until now, I think. (Weihe)

We could very well draw a lineal chart about people's respect toward teachers, which is going downward. We don't need to be pessimistic about this result, which was not a reason in itself. However, we probably could weigh how much this tendency affected students' perceptions toward teachers and teaching career.

### ***Pressures Confronting Teachers***

Teachers' pressures could have resulted from many causes, such as economical situations, parents' desires, social expectations, political factors and even outside world temptations etc. The researcher was interested in finding out how much the respondents could perceive this pressure and its impact on teachers.

**Question 15.** What major difficulties do you think that your teachers might have encountered in their work and life? Having a life like this, what do you think those teachers might think about it?

In the discussion about this pressure concern, respondents touched on a number of respects of rural teachers' lives. In a sense, the rural teachers were brought up to us and analyzed just as ordinary people around us. So from the students' perspective, they definitely faced difficulties of ordinary people and likely more than that.

Rural teachers' financial embarrassment, either insufficient or delayed pay, seemed to be the number one concern of most of the respondents. In this concern, some causes were offered. Hua had seen this problem as an evolving one.

I feel, maybe one of their major difficulties was that their salaries were too low, especially in the later or more recent years. In early days, people didn't go out to work. And teachers' situation at the time was not that bad. They had a small piece of land and meanwhile, they earned bit of money through teaching. But later, rural extra laborers began to go to city to work. But Minban teachers still earned that bit of money. So comparatively, people have increased their income, but teachers income, just remained the same, which indeed means, became less in an actual sense. (Hua)

Tiane has associated this financial problem with the state's improper policy.

The problem of salary and formal working status might be two correlating problems teachers faced. Urban schoolteachers might not attach too much importance to salary, but this was definitely a problem for rural teachers. The formal working status means that rural teachers should be given welfare just the same as urban teachers and they should be put on the state payroll. Some rural teachers' identity cards indicated that they were still peasants. This is not proper. And this affected all benefits that rural teachers received. (Tiane)

Rural teachers also had difficulties in their ordinary lives, including family and children, which could be side problems caused by their financial embarrassment. Weihe, Jingyang and Tiane had mentioned rural teachers very likely faced the problem of family separation. To take Jingyang's story for example:

That reminded me of one of my teachers in the primary school. She was about 30 years of age at the time. We never knew where her husband was. But everybody knew she had a family. She was alone teaching in that place. The phenomenon of separation among our teachers was actually quite common in the place where I lived. (Jingyang)

Some respondents also mentioned about other concerns. For example, young teachers were having difficulties in finding the right marriage partners and elder rural teachers faced questions about their children's education and lives.

While economic concern could be the most obvious and direct cause for many other problems, some respondents also had noticed the spiritual facet of our rural teachers. Tiane said,

I think even rural teaches should be given opportunities in cities, to work or to live there for a period of time. Don't let them feel that their lives and their dreams will just end up burying in the poor rural earth forever. I think this will help them find a mental balance. Moreover, this will in turn enable rural teachers to open children's heart to knowledge that is usually considered belonging to city children. This can help make teachers feel that they are more valuable than if they never step out of small villages themselves. (Tiane)

Tiane felt this mental balance sometimes even mattered more than economic difficulties. She said,

If I were given a chance to be a teacher, I would definitely expect support from parents, administration people and from the community. If this was impossible, I am sure that I would be very very disappointed. I think poverty might not be the most hatred enemy, teachers actually feel it is even unbearable if local people are very ignorant and self-conceited. If they couldn't communicate with local people, they must feel very disappointed. (Tiane)

The social pressures on teachers in general were also noticed. Quite a few teachers lacked proper training. "Yet people ruthlessly blamed them of being without proper knowledge to teach or respect in dealing with students", said Lily.

All this definitely affected the social status or reputation teachers enjoyed.

As a result, respondents concluded these difficulties made teachers not so motivated.

So whenever they found any other jobs that would offer them higher pay, because they had to support their family too, they would leave. There were quite many cases like this. (Lily)

And,

They would gradually lose their enthusiasm and leave for other businesses or work in cities as well. They did this for themselves and for their children as well. (Hua)

But teachers' attitudes also experienced a gradual change. Instead of leaving for other businesses or better pay as being noticed in recent decade, Guoqing, Jingyang, Weihe and Meilan depicted their teachers as "to regard teaching as a life long career" or "to sacrifice more than to get".

You would just stay because the Party has assigned you here. (Weihe)

I think the situation then was a bit different from today. People still felt to be a teacher was fairly good. Yet of course, they were very poor.

(Guoqing & Meilan)

Before the Cultural Revolution seldom did people talk about income. Everybody earned about thirty of forty Yuan. Today people began to keep an eye on how much teachers earn, and whether this profession is well paid or not. (Jingyang)

The researcher also heard another voice concerning rural teachers' difficulties. Linyong for example, said

Difficulties, I don't see they have many difficulties. The present situation in rural China is many people can't afford to go to school. (Linyong)

And Meilan had also given a kind of reasonable explanation, "as a matter of fact, to quite some Minban teachers, their roots were in the rural place". Weihe kind of agreed in this point. He said,

Some teachers now, they should be local teachers, I mean, they passed the college entrance examination and received an education, then they returned to their hometown. In such cases, they might not feel a big loss. Because they are just suitable for the jobs. (Weihe)

But of course "the life there, surely, was quite hard" (Weihe's words). And Shanshan said,

The difficulties they faced were quite the same as what my family faced... they were actually peasants too. The difference was that they didn't go to farm but teach. So peasants' difficulties were just their difficulties. Their social status might be higher than ordinary peasants, but definitely lower than the head of the production team. (Shanshan)

This somewhat implied that rural teachers were rural people in the first place, so they shouldn't feel their lives more difficult than the rural people, although they enjoyed a higher social status than ordinary farmers.

When being queried further how these factors (salary, further training, social expectations, working environment etc.) influenced or brought pressures to teachers, Meilan and Jingyang's answers could be seen as representative,

If you even couldn't take care of yourself, how could you take care of other people or students? (Meilan)

If the teachers begin with a bad mood, how can they teach with

excellence. (Jingyang)

Some other relevant things were also noted. For example, with respect to respondents' cross-cultural experience, Changping for example, also made this comment: "Their financial income might not be as good. But in the united states, teachers are in the same situation". And Meilan noted that "in Canada, the differences between rural and urban is not that obvious as in China. Here, as long as you have got a job, you will be able to live a fairly good life."

**Question 16.** Did you ever feel that rural teachers sacrificed more than they were given in terms of material life and spiritual life?

As a supplementary resource to question fifteen, this question attempted to bring about students' opinions on what the public usually describes teachers as burning-out candle images.

Although generally, respondents agreed on the point that rural life was hard and teachers were poor, not all of them regarded this as sacrifice. On the other hand how teachers looked at this sacrifice also depended on the original places they came from. At least Tiane, Weihe and Jingyang had pointed out "sacrifice" happened when teachers moved from cities or bigger communities to rural areas, because "they definitely would lose some of the advantages of city life" or "at the cost of a better future" (Tiane's words) or "comparatively speaking, teachers in those places did/do sacrifice more in terms of material as well as spiritual life than their counterparts in urban schools" (Jingyang's words).

Yet Jingyang was able to put this issue in context. He said,

It is not an easy task to evaluate what happened two decades ago. Because that was before/in the period of Cultural Revolution and everyone received thirty or forty Yuan for salary. Seldom did anyone complain about low salary or poor life; sacrifice was considered the most valuable virtue. When you look at this phenomenon today, you may not be able to understand those people. According to my observation,

separation of husband and wife or urban teachers being assigned to work in rural poor places might also be considered as a necessary sacrifice at that time. I even think they would be very happy with their choices because they were so used to sacrifice that they might not feel that way. This is because time has changed. (Jingyang)

Quite a few respondents felt that whether or not teaching in the rural area should be considered as sacrifice varied with individuals.

### ***Family Influence***

#### **Question 17.** Did your family teach you how to treat teachers?

Concerning the responses to this question, three people said they didn't remember their parents telling them how to treat teachers, which could be that parents couldn't spare time for children or they didn't think that was necessary at all.

In other respondents' cases, their parents instilled in them the idea to respect teachers either intentionally or unintentionally, either formally or informally. What interested me was how they defined this respect and how this respect was carried out in reality. At least four respondents said their parents told them to respect their teachers unconditionally, because "whatever teachers did, they did it for your good", or "just listen to teachers, do what they ask you to do." In this case, teachers' authority was not to be challenged. Tiane's example was typical. She said, "If teachers don't allow me to join the youth league", "they (her parents) will explain to me that teachers may have their own reasons". Yet in some informal cases like Guoqing's, parents didn't give the point special stress. It was transmitted together with other ideas as well, such as "to care for each other", "to do the homework on time" and "to observe the school discipline" etc.

#### **Question 18.** Families' teaching roles

Messages about families' teaching roles were not elicited by planned questions designed by the researcher, but respondents constantly transmitted

such messages. As a matter of fact, parents or grandparents or other relatives all could play teaching roles, which provided another dimension or mirror in reflecting students' perception about teachers and teaching. It could be interesting to compare how much stress the respondents put on their teachers' influence and on their families' influence.

Obviously, parents or grandparents of the respondents had influenced them intentionally or unintentionally, especially in the key respects of the formation and development of their worldviews, moral judgments and academic interests. These influences were generally positive and being reinforced by the later experiences of the respondents. As a common fact, respondents who told of their parents or grandparents' influences usually had an education-oriented family.

To cite some examples here, Shanshan, Hua, Guoqing, Lily and Tiane very explicitly referred to this family influence. Children in their families were all sent to schools and there always had been one of the elder members in these families insisted on the children's school education.

Lily has mentioned her parents instilled in children what has been considered traditional Chinese thought from the Confucian canon, such as: to give complete respect to supreme authorities (Heaven, Earth, Emperor, Parents and Teachers) and follow their wisdoms; the educated enjoy superior status over people in other professions. This way, the importance of education was stressed greatly.

Shanshan said,

To my deep impression, that my father liked us, my sister as well, to go to school very much. I guess this was because he himself had dreams not realized. Some people asked my father, what's the use of sending daughters to the school. But my father, he sent all six children in my family to school. (Shanshan)

And Hua,

I think my mum was really great in this respect. Although she had no formal education, but she felt it was good and useful for children to receive education. So my mum, although she never said something like “study hard”, never asked me to quit school. Although she might not know what exactly was the use to go to school. All the children in my family went to school. She even criticized us if we didn’t want to go to school. But if any children really couldn’t catch up with others in their study, they might be allowed to quit. (Hua)

And Guoqing,

My grandfather never went to school. He was working for the landlord from very early age, around 12 years old. I guess my grandfather felt leaning was important. My grandfather couldn’t read or write himself, he was the so-called illiterate. He might not know some big words regarding the learning or the ultimate purpose of learning, but he just paid a lot attention to our brothers’ study. He always told us to be good students. And I think to some extent, he was influencing us. He never talked about big words but he always felt that we children shouldn’t repeat his life. (Guoqing)

Weihe has pointed out his family influence in the respect of moral development. He said,

In fact, I think the moral education is not something to be taught nor something you can learn from the textbook. You actually learn many things by yourself from life. This depends largely on the environment and on your parents, sisters and brothers. People around you all give you some kind of influence. My father has attended 8 years of Sishu (private school around the foundation of new China), that’s fairly good education at that time. That’s why we had 5 university graduates out of 6 children in my family. (Weihe)

In Meilan, Tiane, Jingyang and Changping's cases, family might not verbally talk about the importance of school education, but family provided the natural resources for the motives of learning. In these respondents' families, parents were generally well-educated intellectuals. Only Changping's parents did not receive education beyond primary level. Parents themselves served as good examples for the children. Jingyang had given a good explanation for this:

"...there are natural differences between intellectuals (or cadres) and peasants".

But out of eleven respondents, only three people expressed implicitly that school education and teachers' influences were second to family influences. In Guoqing's point of view, "I don't think early education influenced children much. The influence mainly comes from your family. Parents are your best teachers". And Changping said "My interests in academics has little to do with the teachers". And in Meilan's case, "I think my teachers are environment, experiences, broader mass and family, rather than teachers in school".

Linyong seemed to be the only one who didn't mention family influence.

## **Students' Observations, Thinking and Anticipation**

### ***Changes to the School***

**Question 19.** Did you happen to have a chance to return to your community afterwards? Were there any changes to the school and teachers or did you talk about any changes in the schools with your schoolmates afterwards? What were the changes? What do you think of new teachers in your rural schools?

Only Changping said he never returned his rural community nor talked about this with his former schoolmates after graduation from high school. Guoqing, Linyong and Hua returned only before they came to Canada. And other respondents returned once or several times after they went on to university, but not in later years.

Changes that some respondents mentioned were that school buildings were renovated, some of their teachers retired and in whose places new

teachers came. Facilities were also bettered, such as “a basketball court” in Linyong’s case, “a typewriter” in Hua’s case and “sufficient tables and chairs” in most of the respondents’ cases. But the researcher also noted down the respondents’ special observations. Lily said,

They built more and more buildings in my senior high school, but not as many buildings in my junior high and primary school. (Lily)

Tiane’s observation had provided another implication for the recent rural educational issues. She said,

Recently I got a news from my former school girl friend that our rural school building was torn down. This is really a big change. I was also told the reason was that we have less and less students now. Some teachers also jumped to other schools or transferred to other professions. I think this might be a problem for suburban schools. Parents always try best to send their children to city schools and they think teachers in our local school are not as good. (Tiane)

Weihe also mentioned,

Because the number of children are decreasing a lot in recent years in my village due to the “one child policy”, in quite a few villages like ours, they don’t have primary schools anymore. We used to have about forty students in one grade, but since last year (2001), we only have about seven children who have reached school age. The policy (one child policy) has proved to be quite effective. But the problem is since the school closed, the teachers wouldn’t stay anymore. They left for other places. (Weihe)

Although school buildings in some rural places were getting renovated, Meilan commented like this, “they are still too crude compared with city schools”.

Guoqing, Jingyang, Shanshan and Tiane felt, “I don’t think there were many changes to the school or the village in a real sense”.

*What do you think of those new teachers in your rural schools?*

When the researcher wanted to find out how the respondents valued the changes in rural teaching teams, Hua noted,

About teachers, when I was in school, we didn't have teachers from formal teachers' school. Most of them were just junior high graduates. But the situations are getting better. Now they have got some teachers from teachers' school, though only junior teachers' school graduates. (Hua)

Tiane also echoed this change. But to the researcher's surprise, some respondents questioned the quality of these better-educated teacher's school graduates. Weihe actually have mentioned this point in responding to the question about community people's respect toward teachers,

During important festivals, such as spring festival, the villagers would invite teachers to eat in their homes. I think teachers then enjoyed more respect and higher social status than today. I guess that is also because the quality of teachers were even better than today. Personally, I think the primary school teachers today are not as good. (Weihe)

Lily also mentioned her viewpoint on this teacher quality issue when she was queried whether she thought there is a decline in today's rural teachers' quality. She said,

I can not say that this is a general phenomenon. But this phenomenon exists. Because you know that in China today more and more people worship money, teachers are no longer the teachers I remember when I was a child. At that time, teachers were much more devoted. Now they are driven by too many things, like money. (Lily)

And Linyong,

I feel my teachers were very devoted at my time. Today's teachers may not be as good. I just heard something about it. (Linyong)

Concerning the possible reasons for this decline, some respondents offered their perspectives. Linyong, for example, believed,  
 I guess the social morale is not as good now, not as good as that of 1980's. (Linyong)

**Question 20.** Did any of the college or university graduates in your village return later? Did you ever think of returning to your village to teach?

Although quite a few children who originally were brought up in rural areas were willing to help better the situations in their hometown, few college or university graduates went back to their community and chose to teach. This was obviously reflected from responses of the respondents.

The respondents offered a number of reasons for this common phenomenon.

- a. Rural children who have received higher education will end up wasted in rural areas, since passing the intensive college entrance examination is already not easy. (Tiane, Weihe, Linyong, and Guoqing)
- b. Many rural children have thought about moving their parents out of the poor rural areas. (Tiane)
- c. Children didn't choose to be in the education field. Then what is the use of engineers or scientists in rural teaching? (Weihe, Shanshan, Jingyang)
- d. Too many practical questions to confront in the rural life. (Tiane)
- e. The rural-urban gap is too big in China. (Linyong)

Then who will return to the countryside to teach? Some respondents agreed on the point that those graduates from junior teachers' school would usually return to teach, because they probably didn't have many choices. Some respondents also said those who remained to teach in a rural setting were just ordinary teachers. This somewhat implied that in the common sense, once people possessed a certain talent, they definitely would not choose to teach or remain to teach in rural areas. As a matter of fact, Linyong, Lily, Shanshan, Guoqing, Jingyang and Weihe echoed this point. Just to cite Weihe's words as an example,

I think we could put this issue this way. It actually depends on if the person has got any advantages. I mean if he is talented, he won't be assigned to teach in the countryside in the first place. Second, if you are college or university graduates, who would like to teach in rural places, no way... And third, as long as the teacher has some sort of ability or he feels he is able to leave the rural areas for a life, he will definitely leave. Of course, if he thinks he has no ability to leave, he will then have to stay and teach. (Weihe)

The researcher also attempted to figure out what were the personal reasons for the respondents not to choose rural teaching. When queried whether he or she ever thought about returning to their communities to teach, two respondents said yes while the rest directly said no. Tian said,

I once had a fever to become a rural teacher, that was inspired by a Soviet film: A rural woman teacher. But when it comes to reality, there are just too many things to consider, such as your marriage and your children's future education. (Tiane)

And Changping talked about an ideal situation,

In ideal situation, which means in reality I can't make it, I am willing to teach in rural, because this may set good examples for the rural people...but I personally am not good at teaching and my interests may prevent me from realizing such a dream. (Changping)

Lily's words was seen as quite representative,

I don't want to be a rural teacher. I think that's as if you put in an elephant's strength to deal with a little ant. I believe I can make much bigger contribution than simply being a rural teacher. I would rather set up a scholarship or foundation. I will surely do that. And I will set up an award system for our rural teachers as well. (Lily)

No matter that the respondents were willing or not to teach in rural China, the researcher didn't attempt to make any judgments here.

Interestingly the researcher also noted that some respondents had viewed this issue from an international perspective. Linyong mentioned,

The rural-urban gap is not that big over here in Canada, so even go to teach in rural may not be as difficult, not like the situation in China, there is an increasing rural-urban gap. (Linyong)

### ***Students' Retrospective Thinking***

**Question 21.** As an adult now, what do you think now that those rural teachers lacked to be qualified to teach? What aspects do you think that they should improve most?

Generally, The majority of respondents have reached the consensus on the primary importance of basic education, because “a person's interests are usually well fostered at early age; primary education is actually the enlightenment period in one's life (Linyong)”, “they help lay the foundation of basic knowledge about the world (Jingyang)” and “knowledge begins with interest in early period (Meilan)”.

So to the researcher's understanding they believed that the fundamental quality in their teachers should enable them to handle this important task, to lay the foundation of basic knowledge. Yet respondents expressed different opinions related to this concern.

I don't expect our knowledge can go to such a depth, but at least I hope they could cultivate our interests in this world and in knowledge instead of guiding us farther and father away from knowledge. But I don't think quite may primary school teachers realize this. (Meilan)

The rural teachers' team in China is just too disappointing...

Teachers should play key roles in shortening rural-urban distance, but I don't think they have done much in this respect. (Jingyang)

Quite interestingly, the researcher also found that people made constant comparisons based on their cross-cultural experiences.

I feel they didn't help a lot in the knowledge outside of classroom, like how to socialize with people. My daughter's teachers often organize tours and parties<sup>34</sup>...our teachers might be limited in their own social knowledge. That's why they couldn't even think of helping us in such things... They might not have expected highly of us... I had hoped they could take us to the nearby big cities like Shanghai and Wuxi for sightseeing. Actually these ideas are not that unrealistic. The problem is that our teachers might not even think of these methods. Teaching is not just like teachers read those sentences in the textbook and students follow doing so. (Changping)

Opposite to the criticisms on their teachers' quality, some respondents also expressed understanding of this quality.

But I guess they basically could meet the requirements set by the state. (Changping; Tiane; Guoqing)

Of course, it is not reasonable to compare the situation in China and that of Canada. Although I still think there should be universal requirements for elementary teachers. (Jingyang)

*What aspects do you think those rural teachers should improve most?*

As responses to this further inquiry, people offered quite some of their thoughts and suggestions. Some expressed concerns about teacher's subject knowledge.

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<sup>34</sup> Changping's daughter received two years of primary education in the United States.

To consider the priorities, the very first thing (they need to improve) should be (their subject) knowledge. (Tiane)

Some others raised their concerns about teaching method.

But I think teachers would be a lot better if they tailor each student according to their capabilities, or if they know how to make teaching even more vivid, like taking us to the museums, or if they know how to enhance students' potentials and thus drive them to put more efforts and enthusiasm into what they are good at. (Changping)

I really expect hem to lead us into a broader field of knowledge... I hope they could cultivate our interests in this world and in knowledge but not make us getting farther and father away from knowledge. (Meilan)

To make teaching more lively and vivid helps give students a genuine experience. Like those key schools<sup>35</sup>, they organize tour and visit, not just sit in the classroom and read and write and listen. (Tiane)

To give us more guidance instead of duck-feeding. In addition, I hope that they could realize the importance of developing and digging our potentials. In western countries, they usually attach more importance to developing potentials, like management skills. Because these skills are more beneficial to a person in the future in terms of career options. (Shanshan)

Changping, however, made a comment on teacher-student relationship by saying,

For example, in Canada, students are treated as equal friends in the elementary school. This actually helps fostering the moral aspects of the students. Chinese teachers ignore this and they are too strict with students. I think this is a common problem for all Chinese teachers. Of

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<sup>35</sup> Key schools refer to schools given privileged conditions in all respects in order to achieve high student academic performance.

course this relates to the question that whether the teachers are devoted to their careers, which I think is the primary thing for teachers. Only if they love their careers and they happen to have this talent to be teachers, they will love to stay with children. (Changping)

Yet of course the respondents have realized that their suggestions could not be built on ideals given the difficult and complicated features of education in China.

The problem concerns the whole educational situation in China.  
(Jingyang)

Educational reform sounds like a big operation. No problems will be easily solved within one or two years. (Meilan)

However, this was not all due to teachers' low qualifications, I think educational system then might have big problem. (Changping)

**Question 22.** Did you feel that you have experienced a transition period when you left the countryside for cities or bigger societies in your psychology and knowledge? What was it and was it long?

The purpose of this question was to see how respondents perceived the rural-urban gap in their personal experiences and if teachers played a role in this transition.

To the interest of the researcher, Linyong was the only one who noted a transition period in his early life when leaving for bigger communities. And this transition was only temporary with a short adaptation period in the new environment. This was also echoed by Guoqing when he was put in a new environment with tough living conditions. Hua said she only felt such a transition when she moved on to the university. Before that most of her fellow classmates were from rural areas.

The majority of the respondents felt that they didn't experience a "sudden transition" (Lily, Shanshan, Guoqing and Jingyang) or a "significant transition"

(Weihe, Tiane, Changping). To this phenomenon, people offered six reasons as their explanations:

- a. People's daily lives are getting more convenient now, like going out with friends and shopping.
- b. In academics, rural students were usually outstanding. They felt even more competent than their urban fellow students.
- c. Geographically, the respondents' communities are close to the county or the city, as in Weihe's case.
- d. The respondents' personalities are outgoing and goal-oriented, such as in Shanshan's case.
- e. The family was not typically rural, or in other words, parents were intellectuals themselves, such as in Jingyang, Tiane and Meilan's cases.
- f. Information was not that difficult to access, such as in Changping's case. He learnt from books, radios, TV and later even the Internet.

But the respondents also admitted that they felt a distance between them and their urban fellow students, in terms of interests and personality.

It maybe possible that children brought up in urban areas have contacts with more things. For example, some children could play musical instruments. (Linyong)

I felt that they (urban students) seemed more able than us in respects of sports and singing or dancing. Some students even could play guitar. (Guoqing)

However, I felt in things such as Mandarin, the very basic thing, and the personality, they seemed to be more open and optimistic while we appeared to be bit stubborn, or introverted. And I felt their interests were in quite diverse fields. I felt we knew nothing, such as they talked about

some popular stars, they knew that much. This difference was only felt when we moved on to university. (Hua)

But I am still quite certain that children from rural places are not as good, must be different from city children in some way. The distance between rural and urban used to be huge, but it has been shortened gradually nowadays. (Jingyang)

Although the teachers' role was not emphasized in most of respondents' experiences, the researcher could track this influence from behind respondents' stories. All respondents expressed strong self-confidence in their academic performance, which at least implied that education provided them the feeling of belonging and self-esteem.

Changping, however, gave a very positive note on his teachers' influence. He said,

Both my rural and urban teachers trained me how to grasp well the basic tools, i.e., knowledge and skills for further exploration by myself. They didn't emphasize the practical or immediate usage of these tools. I gradually felt a lot of fun in the process of learning and also obtained rewards from the inner of myself and from others including from teachers. (Changping)

### ***Students' Current Observations and Anticipations***

**Question 23.** Do you still learn anything about Chinese rural education in your community or rural education in general today after you left the countryside?

It is quite understandable to the researcher that after leaving rural schools for so long, few respondents would still regard rural education as an indispensable part of their lives. Weihe and Lily are the two of all respondents who are working in the education field. They seemed to be still informed about what was going on in education in general and in their village schools. The other

respondents, due to their current jobs and their family moving out of the countryside, might feel rural education somewhat far from their daily lives. But most of the respondents were not totally ignorant of issues concerning rural education. They have noted various aspects of the educational undertakings in China, through direct and indirect means. And their attitudes varied as some appeared more optimistic and others more pessimistic.

The respondents have discovered and commented mainly on five aspects, which included educational policies, public effort such as Hope Project, parents' attitude, teachers and children.

Concerning educational policies, Lily and Guoqing raised the issue of educational finance from two different perspectives.

(Based on the reflections of my past experiences and comparisons of different kinds of education,) I think rural education in China now, first of all, needs more funding, or money. I don't think facilities are the only aspects that need money. We actually need money to bring more resources to the students, like library, or more experimental facilities, and recreation facilities as well. (Lily)

Most of us feel that, first of all, the school fee is increasing too much now, while the economic situation in the countryside doesn't improve much. Rural people sometimes feel they can't afford the fee. (Guoqing)

Guoqing also mentioned that the government advocated strengthening investment in basic education. Shanshan, however, straightforwardly criticized the implementation of some key policies. He said,

I heard some (policies), but do you think we can believe in that? And can you believe that can be implemented, impossible. For example, nine years of compulsory education, you think that can be implemented? Impossible! (Shanshan)

It was not out of the researcher's expectation that the respondents felt disappointed with the actual implementation of some of the educational policies on which the general mass once built their hopes and dreams. This could also be reflected from the respondents' attitudes toward the Project Hope<sup>36</sup>, which was originally an effort of the public to aid dropouts, poor children and girls.

I heard about this (Hope Project) through the media, quite often some corruption involved. As a matter of fact, when I was in Huhehaote, my wife, and I, we once each supported a student. And later the child himself quit school. He was in a county near Qingshuihe, very poor place. We gave 50 yuan for each child each term. And later he quit when he finished junior high. He said his family needed labor and he couldn't do very good in study. (Shanshan)

The Hope Project in China has been implemented for more than a decade. But I just don't see big changes in rural education in China. Almost 20 years since I left rural school, but not much changes at all. You actually can learn about this from the photos taken by Hope Project. (Jingyang)

On the subject of teachers, the respondents also offered their comments, which somewhat implied the public concern about the quality of teachers.

I think there should be more regulations. When I revisited the school in my community, people told me that because teachers now have less burdens than they had before, because more teachers are doing the same amount of work, they sometimes just play cards or Majiang (traditional Chinese game). Regulations for the teachers are thus very necessary. (Lily)

They (teachers) seem to have improved, in terms of their degree or diploma, but not in the quality of students they teach. Because good

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<sup>36</sup> Project Hope: a nationwide project launched by the China Youth Development Foundation aimed at providing financial assistance for school dropouts in poverty stricken areas in China in 1990.

students are usually being selected by the county school... Now rural teachers have degree or diploma, they have that. But I still feel they may not be as good as our teachers. At least I don't think they are as committed as teachers before... Besides, those early junior teacher school graduates were all top students themselves in high school. Today it is not the case. Most of the college (technical school or two to three years school study after high school) graduates can't compare with university candidates (an average of about 26% of high school graduates in Shandong province can pass on to university study), although they may also be quite responsible. (Weihe)

Comparatively, Hua's comment on the quality of rural teachers sounded most positive. She said,

Before I came to Canada, I chatted with my teachers. I felt, based on what I knew about our village school, teachers now, comparatively speaking, are better in their quality than before. As far as I know, in rural schools, more and more graduates who have received formal training, returned to teach in rural areas. That is to say, the educational level of rural people is getting better. (Hua)

Weihe also mentioned about the improved teaching conditions,

Teaching in senior high school now is a big challenge. Teachers' welfare is comparatively better than other professions in rural area. And goods are cheaper there. And they have vacations. (Weihe)

Hua, however, provided another picture of teachers.

This happened in 1990's, just recently, not at my time, that teachers began to look for jobs in cities or other places. (Hua)

This new phenomenon concerning the instability of teaching force was believed quite popular in China today by most of the respondents.

Parents' attitudes toward education and their children's study also varied.

We admit that we sometimes don't spend too much time on children, just let go of them. In other words, people may feel that their children are not good for study. So just let go of children and they can become whatever they want. Not to mention some children themselves don't have strong wish to study. This makes the family think since you are not good for study, it will be a waste of money to let children continue. This is also the case. (Guoqing)

Again Hua offered the opposite side,

And besides, parents in the countryside, many also go out to work. They also felt, through media, TV, communications, they gradually changed their ideas. They began to attach importance to their children's education and support their children to go to school. (Hua)

*But what happened to the receiver of the education—our students in the context of rapid social changes and ideological changes?*

Linyong mentioned with pity that some of his secondary school friends now stayed home farming, because they weren't selected to the county middle school years ago and later without other choices they entered their village middle school, which was said to be too poor in quality. Weihe's comments from another angle somewhat echoed Linyong's words about the quality of village schools.

We have managed to maintain the senior high in our community, so children from the community and neighboring communities could attend. Because of this school, more children will have chances to take the college entrance examination and spend less money. This year, only 10 students passed the entrance examination out of a total of 80 or 90 students. But most of the students were able to move on to three years college study. In Shandong province, the student university attainment rate is about 26% annually. In rural schools, the rate could be much lower because in rural area, not many students can enter senior high, many fail

to move on to senior high. The ratio in No. 1 middle school in the county is not bad though. (Weihe)

Shanshan's comments might have offered a different perspective of thinking,

I only heard people commenting that children from better family conditions wouldn't work very hard, they play almost everyday, my nephew is just like that. (Shanshan)

Based on the respondents' comments, the researcher felt that children are not the only group of people that need to be educated. Without the high awareness on the part of governments of all levels, communities, schools, parents and teachers, even if we provide children chances to receive education, they may not benefit as much as they should. Besides, the fact that some of the children ended up so disappointed with the whole education system and they spread this feeling to people around them and to their children as well should also be taken into account. This is not to say that the whole situation is getting worse, like Hua said, "in general the situation is getting better although there are lots of problems for us to solve". But when people, Meilan for example, made comments like this "the basic education in China today is really in retrogression, a lot backward compared with Confucius times, " we surely have to give educational undertakings a second thought.

**Question 24.** Do you think there is hope in being a Chinese rural teacher? (In some cases, the question has been raised as "Do you think there will be more people wishing to teach in rural areas?")

This question intended to elicit views of even broader perspectives than did such specific question as: Did any of the college or university graduates in your village return later. In response to this question, the respondents showed maturity to put this question within context. And both positive and negative responses were given. The positive response can mainly be characterized as:

a. The rural conditions are improving, as shown by a smaller urban-rural gap, higher living standards, more educated people in the countryside and most important of all the almost guaranteed teacher salaries. (Lily, Hua)

b. There are advantages to being rural teachers. For example:

I think to be a rural teacher has advantages, i.e. the rural society is not as sophisticated as urban society. In a way, they can enjoy a more peaceful and quieter life, which is good for their personal development if they prefer that. Actually they could also be more concentrated on teaching, unlike in cities, too many distractions. Since in the rural areas, there are not so many social activities or night activities, they can concentrate more on their work. (Lily)

I think it is not bad to teach in a rural high school. Because schools are an educational unit, which means you hold a permanent position. If a couple both teach in the high school, they can live a very good life. For your salary is almost the same as that in the county. But your expenses are not as much. (Weihe)

c. There are people whose personal interests are in teaching and who happened to be originally from a rural community. So to them, returning to teach in rural schools might be a good choice. (Weihe)

While some of the respondents suggested the above positive aspects of rural teaching, others had concerns which somewhat overshadowed these positive aspects.

No teachers like to go to rural to teach. Maybe this is one of the problems that if you are bit higher educated, you wouldn't like to go to teach in a rural school. Even educated local people, I am sure, don't want to stay in their hometown. Who wants to move to rural areas, no one. And those who remain to teach in the countryside are just ordinary teachers... certainly the quality of village schools are not as good as that of the

county or city, and local economics influenced the retaining of teachers.  
(Linyong)

There should be a criteria for this hope or prospect thing. I personally don't think there is any hope to work in a rural setting. Of course, if you think you are very firm communist soldier, you can go. I believe everyone should catch up with current development and social progress. Even if you just think from the point of view of personal enjoyment, you will decide you won't be able to realize your hope or goals in the countryside, which is too unrealistic... We really have no way unless you have means to raise teachers' treatment. What do you think people want most? Chinese especially like to go to extremes. Why I should go to the rural areas to make contribution, while most of you people enjoy your life here, unless you have mental illness... I am from a rural place, and I never think of going back. I believe, especially people from rural places, they definitely don't want to go back. (Shanshan)

From the above opinions, it appeared that people tended to think rural teaching was neither financially rewarding nor spiritually inspiring. And those who remained teaching in a rural setting seemed to fit certain characteristics, for example, they were not talented or unable to find a better position.

Guoqing offered another perspective,

Then do you think I have prospect in learning MBA now? It is not that simple. Sometimes it is not that you who can decide on the kind of life you want. It also depends on many other things. Whether there will be hope or prospect for this profession, it depends on individuals. For some people, they can make their own choices, but for some others, they even can't make their own choices..You yourself are very qualified, experienced, if you want to be a teacher you may want to find a better position. Take one of my past fellow students for example. He went to Beijing himself and there he found a teaching job. But is there anything in the rural areas that could attract people to teach, I don't see that. (Guoqing)

The researcher also noted some self-contradictory remarks in Weihe's earlier remarks as he had previously applauded the benefits of being a rural school teacher, but now comments as follows:

I think we should put this issue this way. It depends on what kind of advantages he has. If he is talented, he won't be assigned to rural teaching. It used to be government assignment. Now if you are college or university graduates, you would like to go to the countryside, no way...As long as the teacher has some ability, and he feels he is able to leave the rural areas for a life, he will definitely leave. If he thinks he has no ability to leave, he will have to stay and teach there. In addition, today the globe is just one village, you have access to all kinds of information. It just depends on whether you have that ability. I will not stay if I have got that ability, absolutely. But the premise is you can find a job elsewhere.  
(Weihe)

Tiane's comments, however, provided insights into macro-social problems in relation to the question of hope for becoming a rural teacher.

When considering this question, I think the political factor may play a bigger role in China. China's social issues, such as rural population's migration to cities, laid-off workers, unemployment, university graduates' difficulties in finding jobs, which altogether caused certain degree of social instability, could be more immediate and need to be solved. Issues as to how to improve the situations of rural teachers, thus might be given even less attention now, and with less policies made in the respect. If we consider from this perspective, I personally feel there is not much hope in being rural teachers. (Tiane)

As a matter of fact, it is not that people purposefully ignore this issue, but we really face some more immediate questions, which don't seem to include this one. I guess the government at the present stage would put more attention on the above issues. (Tiane)

Although everyone knows the educational issues are fundamental and long-term, which is similar to issues such as environmental protection or resources protection, if we invest little by little from today on, we would be able to obtain huge result in a hundred years, but if we destroy bit by bit today, we would expect disastrous consequence years later. (Tiane)

It was indeed observant of Tiane to take such “big issues” into consideration. The shortsightedness of the government certainly resulted in some kind of short-term actions. This might well explain why people have rather mixed feelings toward the question of hope for the possibility of rural teaching being an attractive career choice in the future.

Tiane also made a note on the helpless situations of Chinese people.

In the US, people go to school simply because they want to go to school, because to them, this is just too commonplace, this is just part of their logic. But in China, people have few choices of their own, governmental policies decide most of the things, difficult to meet individual’s personal wishes. Over here (in Canada), people could choose to become a rural teacher totally based on their individual wishes or likes. But Chinese people may have more difficulties in realizing their individual dreams. (Tiane)

On the improved situations in rural areas today, Tiane commented,

The changes in rural areas today are only superficial, with more and better houses, better clothes, seems more and more getting closer to urban life in every aspects. But in the ideological perspective, the countryside remains unchanged. I actually am not that pessimistic about rural education, but on the issue that how much we could change the current situation in rural areas, I admit that I am quite having negative impression. As a matter of fact, rural children go to school, mainly because they want to leave the countryside in the end. (Tiane)

Although the macro situation might take long to change, based on the respondents' comments the researcher felt the micro changes might help in the retaining of teachers, if working together with the positive aspects of rural teaching mentioned previously.

I think if our education policy could pay more attention to the allocation of resources like money to rural education, I believe at least the phenomenon of teacher salary delay or blank note should disappear soon. To pay teachers on time and pay them enough money, that would be the first thing to do. (Lily)

I think we should offer more training to the teachers... I think it is very necessary for them to upgrade themselves. (Lily)

Some rural places are quite rich and attach importance to education... I still remember when I was studying in the university, some of the town teachers went to teach in our village, the school tried to provide them with better working conditions. So it ends up with the economic situation of the village is the decisive factor. If the economic situation of the village is bad, this will definitely influence the retaining of teachers. This is very obvious. (Linyong)

**Question 25.** How do you think that community, parents, schools and society can help teachers in achieving the expectations that have been laid on them?

Instead of simply providing solutions to question fifteen (What major difficulties do you think that your teachers might have encountered in their work and life? Having a life like this, what do you think those teachers might think about it?), the respondents obviously were aware that teacher related issues couldn't be viewed in isolation from even broader and deeper social and

systematic causes, from general to specific, they have provided views on this support issue from different perspectives.

Lily has questioned the current educational system, its purpose and practices, she said:

I think there is a big problem in Chinese education system, for example, we teach to exam, everyone is caring about marks or scores instead of their (students') comprehensive abilities. (Lily)

To this, she suggested:

Although the issue is a big one, why couldn't we begin action now? If the whole country can change or moderate its direction, say, there wouldn't be so many tense or serious examinations any more, and we are going to evaluate the students comprehensively. That would be much better.

Otherwise teachers are forced to burden students with so many assignments to do. Children won't in this way enjoy their childhood. And at the same time, teachers will compete intensely with each other. That's not good. (Lily)

As to what should be considered important for the development in students, her cross-cultural experience has provided an explanation.

When I came here in Canada, I found that the education here is to train people to be self-presenting, which means, people can use their own expressions, no matter right or wrong, to present themselves to the society, those are their own opinions in the first place. In China, the education doesn't pay too much attention in developing personality or individuality. (Lily)

Concerning teacher-student relationship, Lily said:

Chinese parents pay too much attention to or stress teacher authority too much, that's kind of oppressing children's development. You know, teacher—student relationship has problems there. They (students) just passively listen to what their teachers are saying and whenever my teachers are unhappy, the only thing I can do is to cry and I have to think of ways to make him or her happy. I don't think this is healthy. I think the healthy relationship should be more academic and personal and make learning and teaching a more harmonious thing. Rather than students compete heavily with each other and teachers compete heavily with each other. (Lily)

The majority of respondents raised the point that in rural areas in China, primary education is still a weak chain. Tiane especially stressed “teachers teaching children of different age groups should be well prepared themselves”. To achieve this, they suggested more and forms of subsidy should go to rural schools, to be exact, money, physical facilities, and most important of all, qualified teachers. Interestingly, the researcher found that respondents' approaches to achieve the need of qualified teachers varied quite a lot in terms of their perspectives.

Some of the respondents expressed their views in a rather positive tone. And five points were agreed upon how we could make teaching attractive and thus retain as well as train more qualified teachers.

- a. Better working conditions are needed. (Linyong, Guoqing)
- b. Low and delayed pay should be avoided. In order to retain teachers and raise their morale or social status, teachers must be given much higher pay. (Linyong, Guoqing, Meilan, Hua, Changping)

Teachers' salaries were so low that even my parents were not encouraging me to teachers college, especially primary school teachers' salaries, used to be too low. (Linyong)

There are too many things to do. For example, to provide schools with more qualified teachers, to provide teachers with training opportunities, to

pay more attention to school physical facilities as well as to promote teachers' salary and their social status. (Guoqing)

c. More chances of further training should be provided for the in-service teachers. (Guoqing, Linyong, Hua, Changping)

We can create some external opportunities of learning for them. But I think it is a process, a gradual process, with the development of rural economy, the conditions in the school will get better. Then, more and more educated students will return for teaching. But this is a gradual process. (Hua)

And help them (teachers) renew their knowledge. For example, history teacher should constantly refill himself with new knowledge. But if they never have a chance to visit museums themselves, they may not be able to even think of it, and as a result teaching has no way to become vivid. (Changping)

d. More support from public and parents are expected. (Meilan, Tiane, Weihe and Hua)

In the rural community, parents usually will compare this teacher with that teacher. For example, concerning children's study, children will report to their parents something about their school... You will be able to hear about all kinds of comment about teachers. (Weihe)

Such as the promotion of their quality, which can't be achieved overnight. But it is possible to let them know what we expect them to change. In this case, there may be some changes. But still we can't change everything. Because he (teacher) is the one who bears that quality. (Hua)

Although the ways of support suggested by Weihe and Hua sounded more like passing messages to teachers by word of mouth, such ways of support certainly work under certain circumstances, especially in small villages in China.

However, there are also respondents who held a seemingly rather negative, or even cynical attitude, "I feel this issue, too difficult to deal with", for example, said Shanshan. But it appeared to the researcher that these "negative" opinions also directed to quite the same issues as above, such as, financial support and teacher morale.

Except in some rich rural areas around Yangtsi Delta, the majority of rural population is living in kind of very rough environment. Under such circumstances, how to improve teachers' situations? ... to afford teacher further training, it is impossible. They don't have this money. Besides, if you send them (teachers) for training, who is going to teach those kids? It stops their study... Of course you may think of ... ask some teachers to take more students, but you have to consider, you don't have money to afford a salary raise... they couldn't even pay the salary on time. It happened just last year. (Shanshan)

Social and policy issues were also touched. When I queried about the teachers' social status, Guoqing said,

Concerning teachers and teaching, how to say, I think everything is being commercialized today. So maybe it is necessary to promote those so-called old traditional ideas. (Guoqing)

Teachers themselves shouldn't be responsible for all the problems. The problems were actually in larger part social ones. For example, teachers earn much less than small restaurant owners. Social injustices in material distribution like this will definitely cause imbalance in people's mind. (Meilan)

Shanshan has made comment on the government policy which, due to its ineffective and slow implementation enforcement in the recent several decades has resulted in a distrust and disappointment in rural people.

The central government has talked about this issue for so many years. Even they couldn't think of effective ways, not to mention you, as an individual have any means to change this. The issue concerns too large area and money is just far from sufficient. (Shanshan)

Jingyang's tone sounded a bit cynical. He expressed his discontent toward the phenomenon that some teachers were just like many other people, chasing after money. But the researcher would rather take this cynical attitude as the true reflection of social reality and public sense of value.

All Chinese people now are facing the common problem, that is, they need money. So all people are busy making money. That is to say, you just need to give them money because they lack it. I have seen so many primary as well as secondary schoolteachers trying to make money in the stock market. There could be even worse situations... I guess in China education is not the first need for us. China needs money first. Some people even don't need education. After he has got money, he will think about making more money regardless of further education or not. Then what is the use of giving him education? ... In some cases, they (teachers) don't lack education. But they just will try all the means to obtain something that they don't have. (Jingyang)

At least twice, he expressed his disbelief on the value of the research.

In one word, a person's wish may not be in congruent with that of the reality. I once chatted with a friend. Both of us agreed that Chinese people have too many ideas or wishes. They have a million more ideas than westerners. But I doubt if these ideas are practical. (Jingyang)

Perhaps I am too pessimistic... but I still think that China today only cares about money, which is the only ideal and spiritual pillar of the whole country now. (Jingyang)

Coincidentally, Meilan made a comment that happened to provide a suggestion to the above issue.

People now are just too selfish; they don't realize education is such important plan that needs effort and commitment for centuries long. In this case I think moral education is also essential and fundamental part of education. (Meilan)

Tiane, however, provided a relatively different point of view, she said,

I think to help teachers arrive at an expected height, not necessarily only my expectations, we should first treat them as ordinary human beings. Teachers in the first place are human beings, so they definitely possess human's weakness. From this point of view, I now feel that their weakness were not improper at all, rather, they are very understandable now. (Tiane)

This comment more or less indicated that some people realized teachers not only have professional needs but also needs as ordinary people.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

#### Conclusions

This exploratory study was undertaken to examine the perceptions of selected former rural students regarding rural teacher and teaching issues in China.

While respondents clearly had a variety of opinions, it was evident that there also existed some major tendencies.

These major findings can be presented in the following six points:

1. The variation of public opinion on the value of teachers and teaching in general over time
2. Co-existence of traditional and non-traditional public values with regard to rural teachers and their teaching
3. The gloomy prospect for rural teaching as a profession
4. Variations in the involvement on the part of parents and communities in their children's education
5. Distrust over educational policies & strategies among rural people
6. Shift in teachers' attitudes toward their teaching profession

#### ***The variation of public opinion on the value of teachers and teaching in general over time***

As the age of the respondents ranges from 67 to 25 at the time of interview (mostly within the year 2003), it has made it possible for the researcher to detect the changing process in the views in one individual and to make comparisons on the views between respondents. It was quite evident throughout the data analysis that the perceptions of the respondents have reflected a tendency for the Chinese public's opinion on the value of teachers and teaching in general to fluctuate. Such fluctuation can be depicted on a three-phase model

– before the Cultural Revolution, during the Cultural Revolution, and after the Cultural Revolution.

### Before the Cultural Revolution

The general image of teachers before the Cultural Revolution that is prior to 1966 was agreed on as having “high quality, high social status and good pay” based on the information provided by the respondents who have experienced schooling before the Cultural Revolution. There also appeared to be a correlation among the three, that is to say, the high quality of teachers greatly promoted their social status, and good pay also made teachers and a teaching career looked upon with respect. But good pay might not be necessarily the primary agent to maintain teachers’ high quality or high social status, because the teachers then were regarded as devoted by nature, or they were very loyal to the work assigned to them.

The connotation of the term “quality” in this period related more to personal traits and the professional aspect of teaching, in particular, it related to the teachers’ moral attributes (role modeling), subject area expertise, their strict discipline on their students and their commitment toward their teaching job. Teachers were undoubtedly awed as having high caliber. Their authority in the field of knowledge was even felt in daily life, especially in rural China then.

It was apparent that in the period before 1966, traditional Chinese culture was still casting a great influence on how people valued teachers and teaching. It was also noted from the respondents’ depiction that teachers were very strict with students. Physical punishment (as mentioned in Weihe’s case under Question 19) was commonly used in the schools, yet students or parents regarded this as something natural and acceptable. If there existed a power relationship between teachers and students, teachers then certainly held the upper hand without question.

**Reference:** Question 1, 14, 15, 16 and Question 19 in Chapter IV

### During the Cultural Revolution

Although in China political movements targeting intellectuals were not rare before the Cultural Revolution, teachers' dignity was more seriously challenged or even overthrown by the students during the Cultural Revolution than at any time since 1949.

Based on the respondents' views, the image of teachers during this period could still be regarded as "high", but with "not equivalent high social status". Pay was uncertain at that time. What was certain was that the term "quality" had shifted its emphasis during this period. Political quality or in other words loyalty to Communism was thought to be most important. In some cases, those teachers who have been identified and categorized as "revisionist" or "capitalist roader" were badly treated. The importance of teachers was shaking. The fact that even Confucian culture was labeled as old culture to be destroyed might be considered a central reflection of teachers' declining social status at that time.

Nevertheless, respondents who have experienced this political movement expressed their gratitude to their childhood teachers. In spite of many difficulties, these teachers played their roles well as teachers, authority figures, and caregivers during the respondents' early years of schooling. They maintained traditional teaching methods and dedicated themselves to their role modeling for their students, although some teachers themselves might be in the process of "reeducation".

The decline of teachers' social status, however, changed the power relationship between teachers and students, although respondents in this study still felt it impossible to communicate with teachers on an equal basis. And rural children to some extent benefited from the influx to the countryside of good teachers who received reeducation in rural communities. These teachers gained respect from the participants in this study not only because of their role in children's lives but also because traditional values, such as filial piety and respect for teachers persisted in the rural families.

**References:** Part two in Chapter II and Question 1, 11, 14, 15, 16, 19, 23 and Question 26 in Chapter IV.

### After the Cultural Revolution

After the Cultural Revolution the social status of teachers could no longer be compared to that of days before the Cultural Revolution. Since the adoption of the open-door policy and social reform in 1978, the market economy in China is booming. Yet the teachers' situation didn't improve. As a matter of fact, the phenomenon of the "brain drain" began to emerge among teaching force, rural teachers in particular, greatly due to the uneven social material distribution and its side effects.

Concerning teacher quality, the disparities among the respondents lay in that younger ones thought teacher quality was getting better and better while others felt teacher quality was actually deteriorating, compared to the quality of teachers before and during the Cultural Revolution. As some respondents said: the tuition rises while the services drop. This conclusion, however, is hard to measure. The researcher figured that the proponents of the former opinions made their judgment mainly based on those measurable elements, such as the degree of education teachers received, the years they were in school training etc. Undoubtedly, respondents' subjective judgment as well as their personal experience was also involved. Meanwhile the proponents of the latter opinions had their ground too. According to the respondents, if we take a look at and compare the percentage of top students engaged in teaching before and after the Cultural Revolution, we would be able to draw a reasonable conclusion as to the declining in teacher quality.

Although in this phase teachers were still regarded as the spiritual sculptor of the students in theory, they were looked on and treated as just ordinary people in reality, according to a number of the respondents. The development of a market economy played a big role here. It has caused dramatic changes in how people generally value teachers and teaching and it has also caused dramatic changes in the attitude of teachers toward teaching. How much teachers could earn and what kind of teaching conditions are provided have become the most important factors that people are concerned about most today. These factors are

now considered to be a true reflection of a person's value and guarantee of professional satisfaction. Because of this, teaching in the countryside is considered as much less worthwhile than it was.

Many of the respondents were dissatisfied with the changes in teachers' personal qualities since the time of the market economy. In particular teachers are now no longer the role models they once were.

**References:** Question 1, 14, 15, 16, 19, 23 and Question 26 in Chapter IV.

### ***Co-existence of traditional and non-traditional values with regard to rural teachers and their teaching***

In rural communities traditional and non-traditional values continue to co-exist according to our respondents, though the dominant values vary from region to region.

The Confucian classics emphasized the importance of the position of teachers in society. A teacher's authority was considered superior to and even nobler than the sovereign. Although such traditional values of teachers have gradually yielded in the ideological field after the Cultural Revolution, this study showed that the communities which cherished traditional values often showed more respect to teachers and paid more attention to children's education in general.

Non-traditional values might not be totally against the importance of teachers, but they diminished authority that teachers had traditionally held.

Both traditional and non-traditional values with respect to rural teachers and their teaching co-existed in the rural communities. On the one hand, people saw rural teaching offering benefits or good points (such as mentioned in data information of Question 24), while on the other hand, talented people, especially the brightest students, intentionally distanced themselves from a rural teaching career, or the rural environment in general.

Clearly our respondents judge that traditional values are giving way to more practical values.

**References:** Question 12, 13, 14, 19 and Question 26 in Chapter IV.

### ***The gloomy prospect for rural teaching as a profession***

The participants in the study fully realized that the difficulties that rural teachers were confronting have made the teaching path not a smooth one.

Teachers faced immense pressure coming from the public as well as from within themselves. Teachers continued to try to handle the responsibility to teach, to role model and to guarantee the quality of students. The role they play is and always was of such importance that they are key persons in shaping the personality and quality of the students and preparing them for life. But how could they spiritually model in a world of hedonism and materialism? As ordinary human beings they now lived a life that no longer matched their formerly sacred status.

From the response to Question 15, we could see that rural teachers, not only had difficulties that confronted all teachers in general, they also had difficulties particularly associated with the rural environment in China.

The attractiveness of rural teaching is seriously decreasing. The general impression given by our respondents on rural teachers in terms of teachers' social status, teachers' morale, teaching force, teacher quality, working conditions, and treatment as well as teachers' professional development and job satisfaction was not promising.

To illustrate the above point, the researcher cited information from the respondents about teaching force, teacher quality, teachers' morale, and teacher's professional development in the following paragraphs.

Who are teaching in the countryside and who are going to teach there in the future? According to the respondents, the rural teaching force was composed mainly of two groups: (1) those who has no means or ability to leave rural areas and (2) those who chose to become teachers in rural areas because they might not have done very well in academic work in schools. This may also indicate that for academically excellent students, a rural environment lacks opportunities for a bright future. Therefore rural teaching will never become a good career option.

Concerning the ready sources of rural teachers, only one respondent in the study mentioned they had a junior teachers school in the town near his village, whose graduates might be distributed to the surrounding villages.

How do our respondents rate the quality of Chinese rural teachers? Rural teachers were generally regarded as not so good as urban teachers in terms of their subject-matter knowledge and professional skills although respondents had expressed their expectations on their teachers to maintain in them good qualities such as mastery of knowledge, the spirit of dedication and a high moral standard. The fact that among rural teaching staff, the percentage of the higher education degree holder was small and the quality of teaching variable however, suggested the perceived low level of quality of rural teaching force. In terms of subject knowledge expertise, the respondents had mentioned such things as that history teacher has never been able to visit museums himself/herself or that Chinese language teacher has to teach music at the same time. The comparatively low quality of rural teachers, according to the respondents was said to limit students in their development of knowledge, socializing ability and vision.

Teachers' morale was often affected by factors such as low salary and poor benefits, job dissatisfaction and less mental preparation for certain kinds of rural community life. The unsatisfactory working conditions and treatment of rural teachers cast negative influences on the morale of teachers. But it was not until after the adoption of the open-door policy and the development of a market economy that the phenomenon of "brain drain" in rural teaching team became serious. Teachers who left for other businesses or engaged in more than one jobs were often forced to do so due to the poor treatment and thus living difficulties. And these teachers could be more able or talented than most of those who stayed in teaching in rural areas. Such changes in the rural teaching force definitely affected the morale of teachers as a whole, and likely had an effect on students' learning motives as well.

Acquiring appropriate professional development and continuing education was not an easy prospect for rural teachers. The respondents have mentioned these factors to be considered: lack of funding; shortage of teacher trainers;

teacher training programs that might not suit the needs of rural teachers; distance from learning institutes. All these factors inevitably made the upgrade of the quality of rural teachers even difficult. This could also be one of the reasons for the departure of some talented and ambitious teachers.

It isn't difficult to imagine that leaving the countryside might have more advantages than disadvantages. Rural students such as the respondents in this study definitely have seen this point and they have left not only for the city but also to another country. If this is the situation with rural China in general, the rural schools will not only lose teachers, but also will attract less and less qualified people to come to teach. This is a gloomy prospect for rural teaching as a profession. Chronically low-performing rural schools have been confronting such critical issues, which strongly influenced rural school improvement efforts and accountability systems. The urgency of action to remove the trend has been underestimated.

**References:** Chapter IV.

### ***Variations in the involvement on the part of families and communities in their children's education***

The family, as the smallest but central social unit in Chinese society, usually plays a fundamental role in the enlightenment of children. And very naturally teachers are considered the substitute of parents, or school education as the extension of family education. Families and communities represent other dimensions of the education of children.

Interesting enough the information provided by the respondents in this study has indicated that the attitude of family and community is of major importance in influencing the future careers of school children.

In this study, parents of most of the respondents were actively involved in the education of their children regardless of family income or background. These parents were not all intellectuals, but the common characteristics manifested in these parents producing intellectually successful children could be summarized as: valuing knowledge, instilling in their children virtues of self-discipline and

diligence, showing respect to teachers and showing high expectations for their children. In short they show the influence of Chinese traditional values. There were also parents who were described as “ignorant and stupid” by some respondents. Such parents didn’t feel much hope or need to send their children to school. Behind the logic of these parents, there existed all kinds of reasons, some social, some economic, and some ideological. But whatever the parents’ opinions, they pass on to their children values that internally guide them in their life long career choices, according to our respondents.

A community is a collective of families. Usually the general atmosphere in the community constitutes the social dynamics in a rural area. We see in the study that the attitude of families toward their children’s education was often in congruence with the general atmosphere in the community. Some communities, though in a poor rural area, had managed to create learning opportunities for every child, while in contrast, some other relatively rich communities did not.

It seemed obvious to our respondents that the cultivation of a positive and supportive atmosphere in the community helps enhance children’s school education and, also helps enhance public respect for teachers. But this of course depends on a combination of many factors.

**References:** Question 13, 14, 17, 18, 23, 24 and Question 26 in Chapter IV.

### ***Looming distrust over educational policies & strategies among rural people***

The situation of rural education in China today has reflected the extent to which the government has attempted to change the situation in the countryside by taking actions. In this study some respondents expressed their disappointment in and doubt concerning the government’s educational policies and strategies on which the people had once built their hopes and dreams.

To the respondents, their dissatisfaction not only lay in the policies and the strategies themselves, but also in the enforcement and implementation of policies and the strategies. Among their reasons for the concern were: first, the possibility that policies and strategies were improper or unfair; second, the

implementation of policies and strategies took too long to take effect and were not clear-cut and convincing; third, there was usually corruption of government officials; and fourth, the government was involved in many short-term social issues rather than long-term ones such as educational issues, and teacher problems in particular.

For example, some respondents mentioned the nine-year compulsory education that has been stipulated as a policy in 1986 by the central government. Yet in a number of rural areas, in the hometown of some respondents, even now the policy was still just a policy. Not many changes have taken place. As another example, the government has advocated greater investment in basic education, yet schools in rural areas only get the small share of the funding compared to county schools, urban schools and key schools. As well, in some rural schools, there still exist local Minban teachers whose farmer identity caused them many problems.

While one after another educational policy has been made in favor of developing rural education and enhancing the treatment of teachers, obstacles constantly emerged in the actual implementation of the educational policies and have led to more problems.

It was not part of this study to reveal the problems inherent in educational policies or to tackle the emerging problems that arose with the implementation of such policies. But the researcher has noticed that the distrust over educational policies and strategies among the respondents, or rural public in general, had undoubtedly affected rural talent. To wait for the miracle, or to leave the countryside and create a life for oneself are the present alternatives. The choice was not difficult for our respondents to make.

**References:** Question 15, 20, 23, 24, 25 and Question 26 in Chapter IV.

### ***Shift in teachers' attitudes toward their teaching profession***

Teachers' attitudes toward their own profession, as characterized by the respondents have undergone changes similar to the changes in the public opinions of the value of teachers and teaching.

Rural teachers were generally depicted as having relatively low quality, poor knowledge of subject matter, a low commitment to teaching and self-improvement and even an uncivilized teaching manner. But the respondents indicated that in the days before and during the early days of the Cultural Revolution, this was not the case. Teachers then still functioned as the spiritual model for society while receiving no little more than a verbal praise or a grateful smile from people. They held different values and beliefs about themselves from teachers today. It was remembered that teachers were more likely to devote themselves to their work and to regard what has been assigned to them as a life long career.

Now they choose to leave teaching if opportunities arise. Although respondents also suggested reasons and expressed understanding, the implication was that such changes in teachers' attitudes were not appreciated.

Another phenomenon mentioned by the respondents was that when teachers carried out their teachers' roles because they had to, they didn't promote the teaching profession among their most able students purposefully. In many cases, they even encouraged students to work hard in order to leave the countryside. This was not a negative indicator of teacher traits. Rather, it suggested that only when teachers felt that they could keep their body and soul together by matching a good living as teachers, would they work at the center of the education process and serve as the role model of good conduct for the whole society.

**References:** Question 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 17, 23, 24 and 26 in Chapter IV.

In conclusion, the study of former rural students' perceptions revealed an interactive dynamic – changes in teachers in terms of their personal attainments, quality and moral standard went abreast with changes in broader context such as social, political, cultural changes as well as changes in traditional values. The changes in teachers and the changes in the broader context in turn led to fluctuations in public valuation of teachers and teaching, including students' perception of their teachers. If such an interactive dynamic of changes in

teachers, changes in broader context, and fluctuation in public valuation is to be simplified and interpreted as three correlating chains, they are causes and effects for each other, that is to say, none of them should be regarded as sheer cause or effect of the other. This was demonstrated in the three-phase model mentioned above related to the fluctuation in public regard for teachers. Thus if we are to initiate any successful changes, the three correlated chains must be taken into consideration. For example, we must simultaneously improve teachers' attitude, promote valuable traditional values and increase the public regard for teachers.

Rural teachers, as an integral component of the teaching force in general were also valued within such a contextual frame. While this exploratory study cannot attribute respondents' attitudes and beliefs solely to the impact of their early rural schooling because of the existence of such a complicated net of influences, the impact from early rural schooling undoubtedly has a place in the personal experiences of the respondents. There is a common tendency among the respondents in this study. Rural teaching was not attractive to them, or in their opinion, not attractive to rural talents in general compared to other professions beyond the rural areas and indeed even less attractive than some of the occupation requiring less skills. This tendency apparently reflected their perceived rural reality as well as their values and attitudes with regard to rural teachers and rural teaching. If this image of the rural teaching profession continues to be stereotyped and rooted in people's values, rural teaching will inevitably confront a gloomy prospect.

The efforts to change such stereotypes and attitudes are needed urgently and should be carried out along with initiatives relating to the social, cultural, economical and moral fields. This may well go beyond the scope of this study. However, further study is required into these questions to determine whether all factors, social, cultural, economic or moral are of equal importance and what initiatives should be given priority.

## **Discussion**

The interviews carried out with 11 participants touched upon some of the

main issues that most schools in rural China have been confronting. With regard to what to consider and how to improve the status of rural teachers as well as rural teaching, the respondents proffered a variety of suggestions, some of them overlapping, some conflicting. The discussions in this part have included some distinct yet quite interrelated issues that might be of paramount concern, in hopes that they will inform policy decisions by administrative and school personnel.

### ***On improving status of rural teachers***

A positive image of rural teachers should be reinforced and promoted among rural teachers, rural students and the rural public in general to gradually overcome the negative influences brought about by the improper qualifications, financial embarrassment, eroding dignity and other factors. This of course cannot be achieved by merely relying on the school or on the public. Rather, legitimate guarantees, such as government policies are necessary.

Taking solid and feasible steps to upgrade overall quality of rural teachers will definitely reduce the gap perceived by the respondents between rural teachers and urban teachers. More sound opportunities for continuing education and further training should be provided for rural teachers to promote their drive and expertise. Given the most important problems of funding and teacher shortage, immediate measures should be also put in place.

The treatments of rural teachers should be accorded more importance by the government. Although treatment, such as income might not be the primary agent that affected the retaining of rural teachers, all respondents perceived a gap in treatment of rural teachers and their urban counterparts. And it is not a sensitive and effective measure for the school to simply rely on people's sheer sense of responsibility for sustenance and improvement. Besides, consideration should also be given to the family life of our rural teachers.

The working conditions should be also given sufficient attention because they affect teachers and their teaching. Research indicates that, given adequate working conditions, teachers make the difference in student achievement

(DeYoung, 1991: 79). Quality teaching requires not only knowledge and skills on the part of teachers, but also proper assistance of equipment and technology.

### ***On community involvement***

Rural schools and rural communities exist in a unique symbiotic relationship (Chalker, 1999: 231). Schools survive better if they can gain community recognition. This is also true as to the fact that the degree to which rural teachers enjoy their working and living in a rural area also depend on how much rural people have realized what the education could do for them.

But community is not always there to back school with sufficient support when its economy was too backward, as some respondents in this study had mentioned. The situation could be even worse when most people in the community hold the view that education could do little to bring change in their lives. School in such case is all left alone and ignored. Thus the voices of the few who realize the importance of education becomes even more important, though perhaps too weak to shake persisting community views. The majority just follows and only becomes helpful when some are daring and effective.

It is thus critically important to build fertile ground in the community for the fostering of a positive environment for the learning and teaching by educating people and probably letting them see the benefit first.

### ***On the role of rural schools***

Instead of becoming copies of city schools, the role of rural schools certainly should differ from that of city schools. This could be summarized in the following three points.

First, rural schools should carry out their basic responsibility of serving the rural society. So they should not only provide rural children education that is required by the regular curriculum, but they also should teach students sufficient knowledge and skills to meet rural life needs, in order to overcome the predicament brought about by the "elitist educational system" (world bank, 1984). This belief actually has already been recognized by Chinese educators such as

Tao Xingzhi. Tao pointed out the critical issue that rural education was going the wrong way, in terms of its objective, content and methods because it was ill adapted to the rural development needs and actually led young people away from the land. In practice, China has carried out experiments and reform in the field of rural education in recent years in order to promote the development of rural education at various levels as well as the adjustment of its internal educational structure. For example, China has proposed the strategy of "Combining Agriculture, Science Research, and Education together" (UNESCO, 2000). This is an innovation in management policy and ideology. The essence of this proposal is: [a]gricultural, technical, and educational departments at all levels should make use of their own advantages in administration and resources, correlating with each other, providing mutual aid, sharing resources, and supplementing each other in functioning, to realize the strategic target of developing rural education (UNESCO, 2000). In such a way, rural young people will be empowered to attack the actual problems in rural life.

Second, rural schools should fulfill and exert their social roles in the process of modernization as well. They are not closed systems, that is to say, they should serve to bridge the gap between the perception of rural people and urban people. In so doing, they can hope to promote a wider understanding by the public, and draw attention to the social clique that holds power and influence.

Third, to tackle the issues of teacher shortages and retention of teachers, schools could never simply rely on people's sheer sense of responsibilities for sustenance and improvement though this is an important part of the solution. The flow of teachers between schools or from schools to other businesses is a very common phenomenon today, which may be due to various reasons i.e. treatment, job satisfaction, chances for further education and family concerns etc. Teachers before might have possessed the spirit of sacrifice more than teachers today, yet this should not be the ground for school failure or an excuse for the public to snub schools. The reality the schools now face requires them to deal with teacher issues with approaches different from those applied before, for example, to show people benefits of engaging in the teaching career before asking for their

commitment and sacrifice. Schools should also seek to create chances for themselves by forming either short-term or long-term ties with various institutions outside their locality which run teacher training programs, providing rural teachers opportunities for further education to help solve the problem of teacher shortages.

And of course to fulfill its roles, rural school must have a visible commitment to excellence in all areas because, *[q]uality attracts quality* (DeYoung, 1991: 155) if it expects to keep good people and attract qualified applicants.

### ***On the resources for a rural teaching force***

Rural teacher education undoubtedly is the most effective and direct support for rural schools. It has been widely recognized that developing rural teacher education and training sufficient qualified rural teachers are of great significance. While the UNESCO report (UNESCO, December 2000) on rural education in developing countries pointed out, “based on objective analysis, the overall picture of teacher education in developing countries is not a bright one. Owing to the lack of teachers’ education, which is to train teachers directly for rural primary and secondary schools, some teachers’ contingents in developing countries lack a steady and sufficient reserve force, thus seriously affect the popularization of rural education”. Measures that have been suggested by Tao Xingzhi, a people educator in China about 80 years ago, should be still of great value to us today in the practice of carrying out rural teacher education<sup>37</sup>. His answers to the question of what kind of rural teachers we need and how we can train teachers to meet the needs of the countryside remain relevant today.

Rural teacher resources certainly are not just restricted to graduates from rural teacher schools. As a matter of fact, the sources of rural teachers are very extensive and the ways to become a teacher are various (UNESCO, 2000), considering the historical development of rural education throughout the countries in the world. For example, interviewees in this study have identified

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<sup>37</sup> Outstanding 20<sup>th</sup> Century Educational Thinkers and Their Rural Theories in Chapter II

both government-assigned teachers as well as local-assigned teachers with or without formal education and education of different levels. The strategy of making full use of human resources in rural areas is still feasible and practical in coping with present teacher shortage problem in China. Besides, the China case study in a UNESCO report pointed out that it is “an important methodology to mobilize and attract more staff in organizations or institutes as well as social volunteers to support rural education by means of joining its teaching faculty (including literacy faculty and professional faculty)”.

Teacher resources, just like other resources, also will be best attained when wider network of links and partnerships with educational and non-educational bodies are established. China is actually undertaking very valuable experiments in this respect. For example, since the implementation of two projects in 2000 – “Schools in the eastern region support corresponding schools in poor rural areas in the western region” and “Schools in big and medium sized cities support corresponding schools in poor rural areas in the province”—more than 10 thousand teachers have participated and helped in promoting rural education in poor rural areas (National Education and Research Network, 2002). And this kind of supporting strategy certainly can be very well extended between counties and counties, administrative bodies and communities, vocational schools and communities as well as universities and communities.

All the above-mentioned suggestions require powerful and flexible leadership both on the part of community and school. But how can we achieve this leadership in the end poses another important question here.

### **Questions that require further study**

Certainly there is still a lot more to explore. Since rural teacher issues can never be studied in isolation from other factors and elements that together weave a contextual net for the study, the researcher of this study suggests these questions for further study.

*Should the community develop its economy first or education first, which*

*should be the more fundamental base for the other, the former or the latter?* The problematic relationship of education and economics has undoubtedly generated controversial thoughts among participants of this study. And this question needs no simplified answer as to whether the former determines the latter or vice versa. Rather, concerted effort on the part of both educators and economists is needed in taking into consideration the different stages and levels of social development.

*How much responsibility should rural children take for the future of their community?* This is a question that interviewees in this study have constantly suggested. City children might take it for granted that rural students have greater responsibility to help their hometown to prosper, while rural children have their own opinions on this issue too<sup>38</sup>. After all, to teach in the countryside will be a valuable experience for the city born students. They not only can live a life of rural children that may give them a real sense of what rural life is like aside from being picturesque and food sufficient for their own use, but also can they learn from rural students and villagers many useful skills such as gardening or farming skills.

To answer this question, we may have to first consider another even basic question: *What is the purpose of rural education? Is it to train students and set up a system to meet the demand of rural development? Or is it to prepare them for the demands of development of the larger society?*

This question may lead to more discussions and reflections on not only this question itself but also systematic and policy obstacles in the process of rural development. But the researcher believes it is still very necessary for the rural students to build and foster an understanding of rural identity through education. In that case, no matter whether they are able to receive higher education or not, they will take a more positive attitude toward reducing the rural-urban gap.

*What kind of social dynamics is actually needed in bringing innovation and change to rural schools in China?* The uniformitarian educational system in China has long been criticized and yet still remains almost unchanged today. Under such circumstances, students, urban or rural alike, have made passing the

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<sup>38</sup> Refer to Question 24.

college entrance examinations their only goal. Undoubtedly, to eliminate this “one-path to success” phenomenon, the system itself needs reform. Then “how” and “what” will pose more questions that need to be studied.

Topics concerning sufficient educational funding, the introduction of educational technology, structural changes and so on all need to be taken into consideration by researchers. And the conclusion can also be extended beyond education since China’s situation is largely a managerial and political one, which requires even greater and complex insight and effort on the part of society, government, schools, educators and community.

### **Summary**

The former rural students involved in this study have indeed touched upon many important issues with regard to rural teachers and their teaching within a contemporary Chinese context. How they valued their rural teachers and rural teaching has provided insight into the problem of teacher quality and teacher shortage that has been confronting schools in rural China, particularly schools in the remote, mountainous poor areas.

It is evident that the respondents perceived a large gap between some rural teachers and their urban counterparts in terms of professional quality. The respondents have also suggested that the value of education in the public eye has been declining over the past thirty years. Although the respondents expressed understanding of the changes in teaching force, they don’t seem to appreciate the changes in the sense that these changes diverge from what traditional values define the role model function of teachers.

It was also recognized by the respondents that rural teacher issues can only be effectively solved if more effective measures are to be taken to bring positive changes in the reform of current educational system, the implementation of rural based educational policies, the involvement of certain social sections and the construction of a supportive teaching-learning environment in the rural schools.

### **Impact of this study on the researcher**

Having listened to my interviewees' voices about their rural teachers, I now have a chance to ponder upon my own experiences. As a former rural student myself, under the impact of listening to my interviewees, I found it increasingly easy to visualize my school and my teachers. They are still vivid and close.

In late 1970's, I entered primary school. My school was located in the suburb of the city of Xian. The school was arranged in a U shape, with classrooms surrounding a playground. On one side of the classroom windows, we could see vegetable fields and farmers bending over their land working. Usually we could even smell the human waste that was used as the fertilizer at the time. In spite of all this, that was once the wonderland for us, better than any kind of recreational facilities we could imagine.

My teachers were not many. For five years in the primary school, our math teacher, Chinese teacher, and those teaches who taught us music, drawing, natural science never changed. Some teachers were very strict with us, while some others were not. My math teacher was a thin and tall woman who sometimes would resort to physical punishment in order to discipline us. My drawing teacher was the only man and perhaps the only teacher from the local area in my primary school. As a little child at the time, I didn't feel much difference between teachers in terms of their knowledge and their social identity. Instead, I even feel we were closer with our drawing teacher. His home was in a small village that was on our way to the river. Very often he would invite us in and gave us some dried fruit made by the family itself.

It was only after I moved on to the secondary school that I began to notice that some teachers were good and some were not, because my frustration with some subjects accumulated and I became anxious when I thought about the college entrance examination. The pressure came from both teachers and parents. We were given heavier and heavier assignments as the examination day approached. One thing that I really felt relaxed was learning English. For I pulled off full marks in all English tests until I was in senior high school. And I

always won the first prize in any kind of English speech contest. This might explain why I always had a good relationship with my English teacher, although the tests were no more just multiple-choice tests of correct vocabulary and phrases. And she was one of the teachers who gave me most of the praises.

The time slipped by without my being conscious of it. I never ever doubted the quality of my teachers until I had a chance to compare my teachers with those teaching in a key school in the city. That was during a summer vacation. My parents, as many other parents might do before the college entrance examination, sent me for two months to study in a key school in the city. It was said students in that school would get into universities with one hundred percent certainty. We began to feel a bit jealous of children who could study in those key schools. We accepted the fact that they stood greater chances to go to the best universities, because their teachers were sufficiently knowledgeable that they could figure out what was going to be on the examination. They also offered many supplementary readings to their students that included extra problem solving work.

I am sure my teachers were also confronted many difficulties in both their lives and professional careers. I still remember that some of the young teachers talked to my mum about their personal lives. It was not easy for them to find someone suitable for marriage. So some of our good teachers left for schools in bigger communities.

In retrospect, the influence from my early rural school days can be traced in many aspects of my life. Even when I chatted with my friends I might sometimes remark: "eh, I can understand why you think that way, because you were brought up in the city." As far as the research is concerned, I felt that my interviewees have from time to time pulled me back to my rural school days. Although there were variations in detail, I think that what this research did was to confirm my own suspicions about the opinions of students and the population at large about the experiences, qualities, standards and difficulties facing rural teachers in China. For by and large, these opinions were much the same as my own.

Taking advantage of this research, I learned a lot about the various experiences and their sense of the lives and roles of teachers of those going to school in the countryside that was outside of my own personal experience. For example, my school was in a rural area in the North West of China. But I also learned about the different experiences in many other parts of China including central areas and coastal areas as well. My reading in the international literature as well as in the Chinese literature about research concerning schools in rural areas also filled in my understanding of rural schooling from a world perspective as well as from the vantage point of China, an understanding that had been, until that time, only intuitive.

## APPENDIX A

### MINBAN TEACHERS

The introduction and explanation of the historical background and profound influence of *Minban teachers* on Chinese rural education is very necessary and important for this study, since it is almost impossible to discuss Chinese rural teachers without mentioning this chronically unique and typically Chinese culturally defined teachers group.

The term *Minban teachers* is mainly used in the recent three decades as opposed to *Gongban* teachers who are hired and paid by the government and enjoy certain state employee welfares.

Although the term *Minban* teachers can hardly be found in Chinese government reports' vocabulary since after year 2001<sup>1</sup> as a result of a series of government's efforts, *Minban* teachers currently continue to play a role in rural education in China. When we used the title "*Minban*" before a teacher's title, it usually carried a rather mixed meaning, either embarrassing or degrading, with a few of the qualities commonly associated with a teacher.

The phenomenon of "*Minban* teachers" in the schools in the vast rural China appeared in late 1970's<sup>2</sup>. It came into being by necessity and was closely connected with and reflected the period before it – the drastically damaging political movement, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). The distinguishable characteristics accompanying *Minban* teachers made them differ from *Gongban* teachers in the following dimensions: background, teaching qualifications, professional status and treatment. And such differences also brought accompanying issues and problems.

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<sup>1</sup> Although nothing about *Minban* teachers were mentioned in *Year 2001 Chinese National Education Development Statistics Report*, this doesn't mean that *Minban* teachers were then totally eliminated.

<sup>2</sup> Before 1970's, there were also *Minban* teachers. But those *Minban* teachers usually referred to teachers working in private schools sponsored by individuals or non-state organizations. There were six kinds of payments to *Minban* teachers then. 1). 15 yuan – 30 yuan monthly cash payment. 2). Free meals plus 6 – 20 yuan monthly salary. 3). 15 – 20 kilo grain plus 5 – 15 yuan monthly salary. 4). Grain alone, 100 – 200 kilo grain annually. 5). Work points plus a monthly cash bonus. 6). Work points alone. These different payments represented the equivalent of 15 – 30 yuan monthly salary in the 1950s and 1960s. (Han, 2000)

*Minban* teachers was once again brought under notice in late 1970's when the whole country hasn't yet healed itself from the disruption of the ten-year Cultural Revolution and experienced a severe shortage of qualified teachers. During the political upheaval, young people fervently participated in the revolutionary actions and kept away from knowledge as those were labeled as "poisonous weeds". One of the popular slogans at that time was "the more knowledge one has, the more probable he/she will be regarded as anti-revolutionary". Teachers' authority was so much challenged that almost all good and experienced teachers were overthrown and made exiled in remote places to learn from peasant brothers.

As a result of this movement, when the country wanted to resume its normal educational system in the late 1970's, it turned out that the number of available teachers were far from enough. This problem was even obvious and emergent in broad rural areas in China, even though the number of schools was actually cut down compared to Cultural Revolutionary period in rural areas in China. Yet schools and children needed teachers badly.

In order to implement the central government's policy of universalizing basic education and reducing illiterates to none, rural governments had to find alternative ways to solve the problem on hand. So teachers might be found within the village. Some of them were peasants. Some others were former primary or secondary graduates who at earlier time dropped school or failed in the previous promotion examinations. The source of *Minban* teachers might also be people from cities or suburban areas who couldn't find a proper job at the time.

In year 1978, the number of *Minban* teachers topped 4,645,000 which accounted for up to 55.3% of all teachers in the country.<sup>3</sup> In year 2000, the number of *Minban* teachers reduced to 302,100 which was only about 4.7% of total number of primary and junior high school teachers in the country.<sup>4</sup>

"*Minban* teachers were not qualified teachers." This logic was so widely accepted in Chinese society before the implementation of the teacher certifying

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<sup>3</sup> China Education and Research Network, 2002, <http://www.edu.cn/20020716/3061661.shtml>

<sup>4</sup> *Year 2000 Chinese National Education Development Statistics Report*, State Education Commission of the People's Republic of China, 2000

system. As opposed to *Gongban* teachers who are supposed to be hired through certain screening tests or an observation period, *Minban* teachers usually were pushed onto the stage without going through any kind of formal selection procedures. While *Gongban* teachers were mostly graduates of teacher training schools, junior training schools or teacher colleges or normal universities, seldom did any of the *Minban* teachers had received the same kind of pre-service training. Some *Minban* teachers were actually not necessarily worse than some of their *Gongban* colleagues in their teaching practices, but the fact that *Minban* teachers were mostly not very well educated made themselves perceived as inferior than their *Gongban* colleagues in their teaching qualifications.

Concerning identity and treatment, because *Minban* teachers were formerly peasants, local or suburban unemployed, their identity remained as peasant or their former status. Although doing exactly the same job as their *Gongban* colleagues and even teaching in public schools as well, *Minban* teachers received thoroughly different treatment. As they were hired under special circumstances and were only let to teach in the case of teacher shortage, they were not regarded as formal government employees as their *Gongban* counterparts. Thus they couldn't enjoy the salary or welfare benefits of government employees. Their salaries were from two resources: half was from educational taxes charged on villagers by the government and half was from government's cash supplements. In 1980's, the average salary for *Minban* teachers was around 200 yuan per month which is equivalent to around 25 USD, the amount was much lower than *Gongban* teacher's salary, not to mention that many *Minban* teachers' salaries were delayed in many cases. Some, especially male teachers, couldn't support a family with such a meager income. *Minban* teachers had no other welfare benefits as well, such as pension, medical insurance, housing allowance etc. which are stipulated by the country's law for the welfare of country employees.

A comparison between post Cultural Revolution and pre-Cultural Revolution period gave us an even ironic picture as to how conditions for *Minban* teachers were worsening with the upward growth of the country's economy.

*Minban* teachers were said to earn only between 15-30 yuan a month in the 1950's and 1960's. But in the 1950's and 1960's, the rent for a three-room house, big enough for a classroom, was less than three yuan a month. In 1990's, a lot of *Minban* teachers could not even sustain a normal livelihood with an average salary of 200-500 yuan.

Substitute teachers are seen as another kind of teaching group in rural areas that parallel *Minban* teachers in many respects. In recent years, senior high school and higher level of post-secondary institutes all began to expand their recruitments of students. This, on the one hand, provides more opportunities to children and parents with aspiration for further study, while on the other hand makes it a common phenomenon in that in quite some rural schools inappropriate teacher placements have seriously affected teaching quality. Due to teacher shortage, junior high school teachers were transferred to teach in senior high. This inevitably caused an equally serious teacher shortage in junior high and primary schools. To deal with this problem, primary teachers were promoted to teach in junior high, while a number of junior high students were made teachers in primary schools, but their teaching jobs were only temporary. In 2001, in NingYeng county, Shandong province, substitute teachers were reaching up to 50% of the teaching population.<sup>5</sup> Most of them were said to be not having proper quality for their teaching job. Only 42.9% of teachers could to some extent meet their workload requirements. Some 4.4% of teachers could hardly handle their job.

As a natural consequence, *Minban* teachers as a whole were seen as the most unstable factor in the teaching force. They didn't have proper qualifications. Their low quality hindered the improvement of the qualities of rural schools in China. Their salaries were meager. And they didn't have much motivation in teaching that in turn was seen as just a temporary job and they were seeking any chance for a change. Many teachers couldn't concentrate on teaching in school. They tutored students at home and engaged in other pursuits as well.

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<sup>5</sup> *Teachers' quality in rural schools needs to be improved badly*. National Education and Research Network, 2001, <http://www.edu.cn/20010823/208269.shtml>

Although in 1999, all *Minban* teachers were said to have transferred to *Gongban* teachers' status, one can't deny the fact that in most of the rural schools, those former *Minban* teachers had played the major teacher role.<sup>7</sup> According to the government objective, junior high school teachers with educational certification should be no less than 80% of all those teaching. In fact, many rural schools could not even make 50% qualified teachers. The central committee of the Chinese government and the State Council issued the document of *National Educational Reform and Development Outlines* in 1993, in which objectives for certified qualification of teachers were set. According to this plan by the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century, most of primary as well as secondary school teachers should be able to meet the required certification criteria by means of teacher procurement and in-service training. But in many rural schools, there was a great gap between reality and the government's objectives.

From mid 1980s on, the governments at all levels have implemented the "guan (to take a serious attitude in recruiting new teachers with certifying qualification), zhuan (to transfer *Minban* to *Gongban* teacher's status), zhao (to get hired), ci (to be laid off), tui (to let go)" policy to solve problems concerning *Minban* teachers. In June 1994, the Chinese central government and State Council made it a goal to be accomplished at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century to basically settle all problems relating to *Minban* teachers. Since the mid 1980s, approximately 2,120,000 *Minban* teachers were transferred to *Gongban* teacher status after passing the certifying examinations. About 710,000 *Minban* teachers went for formal training in junior teachers college. There were also 660,000 *Minban* teachers who were asked to leave their position due to their failure in the certifying examinations. And during these two decades, more than 200,000 *Minban* teachers retired. The Chinese government report said most of the provinces have had their *Minban* teachers problem settled.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Chinese Civilian's Blue Paper: The Fastest Ten Years for Educational Development*, 2002  
<http://www.edu.cn/20020716/3061661.shtml>

## **APPENDIX B**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE**

#### GENERAL SELECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Were you in rural school for your primary or secondary education or both primary and secondary education?
2. Do you remember something about your early schooling regarding your teachers in particular?
3. What will be the general comments you want to give your rural schooling and your rural teachers in your early schooling?

#### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

##### Social Contextual Information

1. Did your early rural schooling coincide with any social movement or implementation of specific government policies?
2. What do you think your early rural schooling was influenced in some ways by the social context?

##### Community Background

3. Can you tell me anything about the place where the rural school was located, in terms of geographic and demographic characteristics?
4. What kind of economy did your community was relied on at the time of your schooling?
5. How far was the community from the nearest town centers or city centers? Was there any kind of transportation services available between the community you live and the nearest town centers or city centers

##### Family

6. Did your family live in the community where you have received your early

rural school education?

7. How many family members were there in your family?
8. Please tell me about the highest educational levels you and your family members have achieved.
9. Did your family teach you how to treat teachers?

#### Rural Schools

10. What do you remember about your rural school then in terms of school building, teachers and facilities?
11. Did you happen to have a chance to return to your community afterwards? Did you notice any changes about the school and teachers yourself or did you talk about any changes in the schools with your schoolmates afterwards? What are the changes?
12. What was the position the school enjoyed in the community?

#### Rural Teachers

##### *In general*

13. What would you like to comment on your rural teachers during your early schooling in general?
14. What expectations did you/your parents/people in your community have on your teachers then?
15. Do you remember any teachers have done anything to help you in study and life?
16. Did you have a model teacher in your early rural schooling? If yes, who was it and why was he/she?

##### *Composition*

17. Did you notice how the teacher team was composed then, to be specific, the ratio of young to old teachers, women to men teachers, and local to outside teachers? Do you think that influenced you or other students in

any way?

18. What was the ratio between *Gongban* teachers (mainly referred to state hired teachers) and *Minban* teachers (mainly referred to community hired teachers)? What were the differences between the two in your opinions?
19. Did you notice any difference between teachers from cities and local teachers? If yes, what are they?

#### *Qualifications*

20. How many of your teachers have received certified teacher education? Do you think that matter much in teachers' teaching?
21. As an adult now, what do you think now that those rural teachers lacked in them to be a qualified teacher? What aspects do you think that they should improve most?
22. Did you ever wonder about why teachers' qualities were like the way they were at the time? What are the possible reasons?

#### *Personal*

23. Did any of your teachers' positive and negative characteristics impressed you? If yes, can you give specific examples?

#### *Teaching*

24. Did your teachers ever encourage you to study hard? Did they tell you why you should study hard?
25. Did your teachers pay attention to anything other than just your academic marks, for example moral qualities and interests? If yes, what were the ways your teachers tried?
26. Did your teachers take you to visit places like museums, book stores or any scenery spots or any other places?
27. Do you think any of your current academic interests has anything to do with your teachers in your early schooling?
28. Do you think your language ability today has anything to do with your teachers in your early schooling?

*Pressures*

29. What difficulties do you think that your teachers might have encountered in their work and life?
30. Do you think salary, working environment, facilities, people in the school and in the community and students' quality matter much to those teachers? Why?
31. Did you ever feel that rural teachers sacrificed more than they were given in terms of material life and spiritual life?

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:

32. Did you feel that you have experienced a transition period when you left country for cities or bigger societies in your psych and knowledge? What was it and was it long?
33. If you had a chance to return to your early schooling, what expectations would you have on your teachers and what you would expect to learn from them?
34. How do you think that community/parents/schools/society can help teachers in achieving the expectations that have been laid on them?
35. If you were given the choice now, would you like to go teaching in your hometown or rural areas in general?
36. What do you know about rural education in China today, based on your personal experience or what you have overheard?
37. In your opinion, is Chinese rural teacher an attractive profession in the future?

**APPENDIX C**  
**ETHICS APPROVAL**




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### CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS REVIEW

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This is to certify that the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary has examined the following research proposal and found the proposed research involving human subjects to be in accordance with University of Calgary Guidelines and the Tri-Council Policy Statement on *Ethical Conduct in Research Using Human Subjects*". This form and accompanying letter constitute the Certification of Institutional Ethics Review.

**Applicant(s):** Wenbei Zhu

**Department/Faculty:** Graduate Division of Educational Research

**Project Title:** An Ethnographic Study of Chinese Rural Teachers: Understanding Their Work and Life Through Students' Eyes

**Sponsor (if applicable):**

**Restrictions:**

**This Certification is subject to the following conditions:**

1. Approval is granted only for the project and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modifications to the authorized protocol must be submitted to the Chair, Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board for approval.
3. A progress report must be submitted 12 months from the date of this Certification, and should provide the expected completion date for the project.
4. Written notification must be sent to the Board when the project is complete or terminated.

  
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**Dr. Heather Coleman, Acting Chair**  
**Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board**

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date:**

**Distribution:** (1) Applicant, (2) Supervisor (if applicable), (3) Chair, Department/Faculty Research Ethics Committee, (4) Sponsor, (5) Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (6) Research Services

09/00

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