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## Chapter 5<sup>1</sup>

### Transforming Teacher Education for Social Equity in China

Heng Jiang

Overcoming inequality has become one of the most important goals of teacher education and educational reforms in general in China. Since the economic benefits of development have been realized more in urban areas than in rural areas, the Chinese government has spent the last decade introducing social and educational reforms in cities and rural areas in an effort to provide more opportunities for disadvantaged social groups. Supported by the Chinese government, teacher education programs have been engaged in preparing teachers to serve students in low-socioeconomic rural areas. In this chapter, the author examines the initiatives of these teacher education reforms in China, which are implemented throughout the pipeline of teacher education: pre-service teacher education, student teaching, new teacher recruitment, and in-service teacher professional development. Among these reform initiatives, four major approaches (*free teacher education*, *Dinggang internship*, *special teaching positions [Tegang]*, and *national professional development programs for rural teachers [Guopei]*) are introduced in this chapter to delineate how teacher education is transformed, both from top down and from bottom up, to prepare teachers over time and support them in learning to teach for social equity goals. This chapter argues that transformation in teachers' beliefs about social equity (as well as its negative counterpart, inequity) should be central to the discussion of current teacher educational reforms.

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In light of the perspectives on teacher education for social justice, the challenges and possibilities of the mentioned initiatives linked to a social equity agenda are then discussed.

### **Introduction**

A key question in the field of teacher education research in the United States is how to provide high-quality teachers for all students, especially those presently underserved by the educational system, including students from low-SES backgrounds (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). This problem is shared by Chinese teacher educators as the social-economic gap in Chinese society continues to grow. The reconfiguration of modernization and globalization in China tends to intensify inequalities in wealth, power, ideas, and information. The *agricultural* and *nonagricultural* sectors (commonly termed the urban-rural divide) are divided by the socialist residence registration system *hukou*, the most important determinant of differential privileges in China (Wu & Treiman, 2004).

The ten-strata model depicting the hierarchy of social status in contemporary China was developed by Lu and Gao from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) (2002). The CASS ten-strata model categorizes Chinese society by ten levels based on occupation. Their classification criteria reflect Wright's (1985) class theory, that is, the ownership and control of three productive assets: organizational resources, economic resources, and cultural repertoire (defined as skills and knowledge as recognized through certification). Among the three resources, organizational resources are considered to be the determining resources, because the ruling party and the government control the most important and largest number of them in the society. Based on these criteria, Chinese society is subdivided into the ten social strata shown in Figure 1, ranked in descending class order. Rural areas are at the bottom of the ranking. Lu also accounts *hukou*, employment, and urban/rural divide systems as the reasons for constraining the transition

of agricultural workers into higher social strata (Lu, 2002). In 2005, it was reported that the average income of urban residents was six times that of rural residents (Jiang, 2005).

Table 1

*China's Ten Strata According to CASS Studies<sup>i</sup>*

	SOCIAL STRATUM	COMPOSITION (%)
1	Government administrators	2.1
2	Managers	1.6
3	Private business owners	1
4	Specialized technicians/Professionals	4.6
5	Clerks	7.2
6	Self-employed entrepreneurs and businessmen	7.1
7	Business and service industry workers	11.2
8	Industrial workers	17.5
9	Agricultural laborers	42.9
10	Rural and urban unemployed and semi-unemployed	4.8

Researchers both inside and outside China have found that many social classes have been emerging, both in rural areas<sup>ii</sup> (Bian, 1996; Lu, 1989; Lu, 2002) and in urban areas (Bian, 2002; Xie, 2004; Zhang, 2000) since the 1980s,<sup>iii</sup> fueled by the growing differences in income, social status, education level, and lifestyle. In fact, the regional economic inequalities between the cities and the rural areas<sup>iv</sup> have in many ways shaped socioeconomic development and educational stratification in China (Bian, 2002; Yang, Huang, & Li, 2009; Zhang, Huan, & Li, 2007). Researchers have also shown that the “enduring significance of geography” has become an “educational stratifier” in China (Hannum, 2006).

The inequalities, manifested in schools, have become one of the major problems in maintaining and enhancing the quality of education. There are drastic disparities in the resources between city schools and rural schools in China, as well as inequalities in teacher salaries, benefits, and social welfare. This inequality is deemed a hurdle for the overall development of

China as a nation. In 2007, the Chinese President, Hu Jintao, delivered the Report of the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China. He raised the issue of “social equity and justice” and strengthened the cause by asserting that “Education is the cornerstone of national rejuvenation, and equal access to education provides an important underpinning for social equity” (Hu, 2007). Thus, it has been a recurring theme around equity issues in recent educational reforms in general in China. In 2010, the Chinese State Council published the National Medium and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development Outline (2010–2020) and pointed out that promoting equity is the fundamental national education policy.<sup>v</sup>

Teacher education is regarded as a vital means to produce a quality teaching workforce for both city and rural areas and for educating all children in order to sustain the desired socioeconomic development (Xu, Jin, & Yan, 2005; Zhu & Han, 2006). With support from the central and local governments, teacher education programs have been engaged in training pre-service teachers for students in low-SES rural areas (Chen & Guo, 2007; Dai & Cheng, 2007). The tendency to view teacher education in this way—that is, as much about preparing teachers for equity as training teachers for economic priorities—has been stimulated by both ethical considerations and by concerns about the increasing social inequalities in the process of modernization and socioeconomic development in China.

I do not seek here to review the very extensive literature that now exists on teacher education reforms in China (in this study, teacher education refers to the overall process, including pre-service and in-service teacher education). My objective is the rather more limited one: to review some of the recent policy documents and research findings on the process of transforming teacher education in supporting modes of integration into social development in rural regions, which aims at both growth and equity in China. The specific focus of this study is

on the institutional restructuring of four main components along the pipeline of teacher education and development in China—pre-service teacher education, internship, new teacher recruitment, and in-service teacher professional development—that targets training teachers for disadvantaged rural areas. Moreover, I look at the wider international research literature on teacher education for social equity and justice, teacher learning about diversity, and teacher professional development in multicultural settings in order to assess the general arguments that are made in regard to the role of institutional change in positive forms of transforming teacher education for equity. In the first section, this chapter examines (a) the different perspectives of teacher education for social diversity, equity, and justice; (b) how these have shaped thinking about teacher education; and (c) what they tell us about the roles of teacher education in social equity in the international context. The second section reviews the policy documents and research findings on the teacher education reforms in China and the ways in which teacher education is being reshaped to contribute to social equity. The third section discusses the challenges and prospects of Chinese teacher education reforms, as well as their relevance to the discourse of transforming teacher education for social equity and justice.

### **Perspectives of Teacher Education for Social Equity and Justice**

“Social equity” and “social justice” have become watchwords in the effort to train teachers to educate all students, including disadvantaged social groups in many countries (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007; Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Kaur, 2012; Xie, 2008). Given its focus on building equitable access to quality teachers for all children in cities and rural areas, the case of transforming teacher education in China is examined within the discourse of teacher education for social equity and justice. However, there is great variation in the interpretation of this discourse. It is customary in academic reviews to distinguish among three schools of thought on

teacher education for social equity, typically referred to as *structuring innovation in teacher education programs, multicultural and diversity issues, and teacher identity and beliefs about working with diverse students* (Cochran-Smith, 2010; Cochran-Smith, Shakman, & Jong, 2009; Kapustka, Howell, Clayton, & Thomas, 2009; Sleeter, 2008). This classification simplifies the picture and far from exhausts the variety of standpoints on social equity issues in teacher education. However, it provides us with a useful starting point to clarify the ambiguity in conceptualizing teacher education for social justice.

Cochran-Smith (2010) included the “equity of learning opportunity” in the larger social agenda for justice. She further utilized the debate regarding social justice in the field of political philosophy to elucidate the concept of teacher education for social justice and argued that there are two intertwined aspects of social justice—“distribution” and “recognition”:

The distributive paradigm of justice, which grows out of liberal democratic theory, focuses on equality of individuals, civic engagement, and a common political commitment to all citizens’ autonomy to pursue their own ideas of the good life (Rawls, 1971).... From this perspective, the remedy for injustice is redistribution of material and other goods, including opportunity, power and access with the goal of establishing a society based on fairness and equality.... In education, the distributive paradigm has often taken the form of compensatory programs, such as Head Start or transitional bilingual education programs, or add-on curricula, such as adding a unit of study on Native Americans to an otherwise Eurocentric American history curriculum or adding a course of multiculturalism to a traditional teacher education curriculum. Despite the deepening socioeconomic inequalities in contemporary society, most political philosophers now agree that focusing solely on equality and distribution of goods is theoretically inadequate to the task of conceptualizing

justice in today's diverse society.... From a recognition perspective, efforts to achieve equality are presumptuous in that they presume to know what is good for everybody. In this sense, efforts for equality can work to deny difference and foster the oppression of social groups. From the perspective of recognition, the argument is that justice is not reducible to distribution, since Honneth (2003) argues, even distributional injustices reflect “the institutional expression of social disrespect—or unjustified relations of recognition. (p. 114; cited in Cochran-Smith, 2010, pp. 450–451)

Cochran-Smith (2010) observed the value of both perspectives for social justice and suggested that teacher educators delve into the “relationship between the notion of distributive justice...and contemporary struggles for the recognition of social groups based on culture, race, gender, religion, nationality, language, sexual orientation, and ability/disability—in short, in relation to the politics of identity and difference” (p. 451). She further cited Fraser (2003, as cited in Cochran-Smith, 2010) to posit the idea of “‘perspectival dualism’ wherein distribution and recognition are regarded as ‘co-fundamental’ and ‘mutually irreducible’ (p. 3) aspects of justice” (p. 451).

In this chapter, I take this unitary approach of social justice to understand recent teacher education reforms in China. On the one hand, the distribution and redistribution of educational resources are fundamental for the agenda of teacher education for social justice. On the other hand, equalizing access to quality teachers and educational resources without raising individual teachers' and teacher educators' awareness of institutional discrimination and recognition of culturally embedded personal beliefs would remain a hollow infrastructural framework.

### **Restructuring Teacher Education in China: Equal Access to Excellent Teachers**

In this section I will utilize the “perspectival dualism” stated above in relation to social justice to examine four major initiatives in recent teacher education reforms in China: *free teacher education* (Mian Fei Shi Fan Sheng Jiao Yu, 免费师范生教育), *Dinggang internship* (Ding Gang Shi Xi, 顶岗实习), *special teaching positions* (Te Gang Jiao Shi, 特岗教师), and *national professional development programs for rural teachers* (Guo Pei Ji Hua, 国培计划). As Table 2 shows, both “distribution” and “recognition” aspects of social justice are taken into consideration for these recorded initiatives, either in the policy documents or in the research literature. It is noted that, currently, much effort has been put into restructuring the institutional arrangements of the teacher education system. Growing interest and concern, both in policy documents and research literature, have been directed at considering the individual participant’s recognition of social diversity and democratic interactions in the classroom.

### **1. Free Teacher Education (Mian Fei Shi Fan Sheng Jiao Yu, 免费师范生教育)**

After 10 years of decentralizing the governance of those teacher education institutions that charged tuition fees, the Chinese Ministry of Education enacted a “Free Teacher Education” policy from 2007 (China, Ministry of Education, 2007). Six key teacher education institutions directly administered by the Ministry of Education<sup>vi</sup> took part in the trial-out phase beginning in Fall 2007, and more teacher education colleges and universities joined later. High school graduates are admitted to a free teacher education program based on their scores on the College Entrance Examination and their own application. The admission standard for such a program is usually 30–40 points higher than the cutoff scores for general higher education institutions (Wang & Wang, 2011). Teacher candidates who are accepted study in a 4-year teacher education program, with waived tuition fees and accommodation costs as well as allowances sponsored by the central government during the period of academic study. Upon graduation, they are assigned

to work in a rural school in their home province for at least 2 years, and they are also required to work as schoolteachers for 10 or more years, whether in a rural or an urban school (Liu, 2012). During their service period (2 years and beyond) in the rural area, they can transfer to another school in the same area or take an administrative position.

Table 2

*Transforming Teacher Education for Equity and Justice in China*

<b>Reform Initiatives</b>	<b>“Distribution”:</b> Provide equitable access to excellent teachers for all students	<b>“Recognition”:</b> Build respect and recognition of social diversity on behalf of justice in classroom teaching
Admission and pre-service teacher training for teacher candidates: Free teacher education	Diverse teacher candidates required to teach in rural areas after graduation	Train teacher candidates to be committed to social equity and justice
Student teaching: <i>Dinggang</i> internship	Student teaching in low-income rural schools for one semester	Strategies to support student teachers’ understanding of the local community and learning to teach disadvantaged students, with mentor teachers that model advocacy stance
New teacher recruitment: <i>Tegang</i> teaching positions	More teachers from diverse social and academic backgrounds with financial support from the government	Induction programs that effectively help new teachers become aware of institutional inequalities and establish democracy in classrooms
In-service teacher professional development: <i>Guopei Plan</i> (national professional development programs for rural teachers)	Rural schoolteachers attend professional development workshops, with much time and funded support	Practice-based inquiry and reflection about teaching diverse student groups

They are also given priority as part-time students if they apply, during their service period, for the master’s degree.

Researchers have found that this policy attracts students from low-income families and that many of them do not intend to stay in the rural areas after studying in the privileged teacher education institutions (Fu & Fu, 2012; Liu, 2012). This may lead to a high teacher turnover rate after the 2-year service period in the rural area is completed (Huang, 2009). Thus, researchers have suggested a welfare package to enhance rural teachers' salary, benefits, and social status (Yao & Dong, 2009). Some researchers have criticized the current teacher education curriculum for rural teacher candidates as irrelevant to the rural context, focusing mainly as it does on subject knowledge and "de-ruralizing" the content. They have suggested a new teacher education curriculum with more practical training modules that are embedded in the local rural contexts and that are in tune with the objective of training teachers for rural areas (Su & Zhang, 2010; Yao, Ma, & Li, 2012). In addition, the morality, ethics, and professionalism of a teacher for the rural schools were also deemed important components for developing a teacher education curriculum (Lu, 2010; Su & Zhang, 2010). Although the dimensions of teacher morality, ethics, and professionalism are not specifically referenced to social justice in the reviewed research literature, the aim of including these components in the teacher education program is to instill the commitment of teacher candidates to serve rural areas (Wang, 2011).

The admission of the free teacher education programs based on academic ability, coupled with the priority of subject knowledge and decontextualized teacher education curriculum, may not sufficiently meet the needs of training teachers for the rural areas. As mentioned above, many researchers noted the weaknesses and suggested rethinking the admissions process and teacher education curriculum development, as well as integrating more field experience. Currently, the Ministry of Education and teacher education institutions expect to learn more from a new free-teacher education program initiated by a local teacher-training college, Hunan First

Normal University (HFNU). HFNU started a 6-year training program for rural primary schoolteachers that enrolls junior high school graduates based on their dispositions as well as academic performance. Upon completion of 2 years of study, teacher candidates have to take part in the Specialized College Entrance Examination (SCEE, Pu Tong Gao Xiao Zhao Sheng Dui Kou Sheng Xue Kao Shi, 普通高校招生对口升学考试) for secondary vocational students. Those who fail the Specialized College Entrance Examination for secondary vocational students will be transferred to the 3-year secondary vocational program for primary school teachers. Upon successful completion of the program with subsidized tuition fees, they can obtain an associate's degree in primary education at the end of the fifth year (2 years before the SCEE and 3 years after) and look for jobs on their own. Those who pass will get into the 4-year bachelor's training program. After fully sponsored training in the program consisting of both academic training in contextualized teaching modules and field practice, these graduates can be granted a bachelor's degree at the end of the sixth year and assigned to work in a rural school in the vicinity of their hometowns for at least 8 years (Zhan & Li, 2011).

The example of HFNU represents a possibility for making teacher education more relevant to schools in historically underserved communities. While the dynamics of teacher identity, teacher education curriculum, and field teaching experiences in this program have not been fully explored, the adoption of an admissions process that focuses on academic ability plus dispositions and motivations, as well as a contextualized practice-oriented teacher education curriculum, seems to be able to build on and make a positive impact on candidates' attitudes about teaching in disadvantaged rural schools.

## **2. Dinggang Internship (Ding Gang Shi Xi, 顶岗实习)**

Student teaching, as an essential part of teacher preparation, is often intentionally planned to address the learning needs of teacher candidates in working with disadvantaged students. In the past decade,<sup>vii</sup> an indigenous form of student teaching, Dinggang internship, was designed and implemented in China to train student teachers in a rural setting. These internships were recently encouraged by the local and central governments. “Ding” means “replace,” and “gang” means “position.” The format is different from traditional pre-service teachers’ 7-week-internship in China, and similar internships have been introduced in other regions in China in the past few years.

The idea is to get these pre-service teachers immersed in a low-SES rural setting. Using the example of the Dinggang project begun by Hebei Normal University (HNU) in 2006, juniors are assigned their student teaching in less developed areas in Hebei Province for at least 3 months. A “Dinggang” project brings interns to schools in low-income areas where they “replace” a few schoolteachers and engage fully in all teacher-related functions of the school, with the assistance of mentors both in the local school and from HNU (Liu & Li, 2007). These interns live in the school dormitories,<sup>viii</sup> observe mentor teachers’ teaching, prepare lessons together, teach classes every day, learn to work as class advisors (ban zhu ren, 班主任),<sup>ix</sup> and get involved in local community activities (she hui shi jian, “social practices,” 社会实践, such as surveying local socioeconomic settings, taking part in “life enhancement” projects, and so forth) (Dai & Cheng, 2007; Li, Liu, & Li, 2007). Those “replaced” schoolteachers for whom the HNU interns substitute get the opportunity to take part in the in-service professional development program jointly sponsored by HNU and local educational bureaus.

Because of its assumed and observed effectiveness in training pre-service teachers for low-income rural areas, this model of internship has been implemented by many teacher education

programs across the country in the past few years (Chen & Guo, 2007; Li, 2007; Ran & Bao, 2006). In 2007, the Chinese Ministry of Education recommended the Dinggang internship to teacher-training institutions nationwide because of the government's recent interest in solving social inequality through education (Li et al., 2007).

In spite of this project's success in providing opportunities for teacher candidates to practice teaching in a challenging environment, there remains the problem of how to scaffold student teaching without reinforcing deficit perspectives about pupils in rural areas. Many teacher education students at Hebei Normal University (HNU) are from cities that are relatively well-off areas. When these teacher candidates encounter pupils in low-income areas, the differences in socioeconomic status can translate into cultural gaps. These cultural gaps can present as differences in ways of speaking, perceptions of the teachers' and students' roles, ways of understanding what to learn and how to learn, different approaches to classroom interaction, and so forth (Barry & Lechner, 1995; Dolby, 2000; Garmon, 2004; McAllister & Irvine, 2002). In the face of unsettled and unfamiliar surroundings, student teachers need strong support from teacher education programs and mentoring teachers in the placement schools to understand the institutional inequality of the local community and to acquire effective teaching skills and positive attitudes toward working with students in rural schools (Chen & Guo, 2007; Li, 2007; Liu & Li, 2007; Liu et al., 2010). In her ethnographic study on Dinggang internships in Hebei province, Jiang (2012) found that, in spite of the intense training sessions at the teacher-education institution aimed at preparing student teachers academically, pedagogically, and psychologically for their Dinggang internships, student teachers resorted to their prior beliefs, personal experiences, and advice from significant others to seek solutions when encountering difficulties teaching in a rural school. Simply putting them in a rural setting does not guarantee

an internalized mission of teaching for social equity and social justice. The observed student teachers, in Jiang's study, actively appropriated different "cultural resources" to make sense of their learn-to-teach experiences and to try to understand their rural students. Among these cultural resources, the "direct interaction with rural students and explicit discussion with professional peers and experienced mentors" (Jiang, 2012, p. 37) is the most influential factor in pushing student teachers to reflect upon their perceptions of teaching and their pupils. This finding agrees with other studies claiming that it is vital to integrate student teachers into the local setting as well as involve them in reflective practices in their internship with substantive support from school principals and schoolteachers (Liu et al., 2010; Zheng & Chen, 2012).

In short, there exists a professional knowledge base for working with disadvantaged students and teaching for social equity in the placement school. The arrangement of Dinggang internships seems to build an effective mentorship system and school-university partnership into a well-conceived teacher education program. In this way, teacher candidates may be able to reflect upon their own perceptions about teaching underserved students in practice, with the models that advocate social equity and justice in the classrooms.

### **3. Special Teaching Positions (Tegang Jiao Shi, 特岗教师)**

Since the 2000s, teachers have been required to obtain teaching certificates through teaching tests (usually developed by the education bureaus in the provinces) or by going through formal pre-service teacher training.<sup>x</sup> In spite of growing numbers of new teachers, there is an estimated shortage of 110,000–160,000 teachers for rural areas in the underdeveloped mid-west region (Su, 2012). In 2006, the Chinese central government developed a teacher recruitment policy, "special teaching positions in the rural schools at the compulsory education period"

(Nong Cun Yi Wu Jiao Yu Jie Duan Jiao Shi Te Shu Gang Wei, abbreviated as Tegang), to encourage more young people to teach in rural areas (China, Ministry of Education, 2006).

Tegang policy aims at recruiting university graduates under the age of 30 to try teaching in low-income rural areas for at least 3 years. They may not have former teaching experience or a teacher-training background, but once they pass a written test and take a short-term training session, they are eligible to be Tegang teachers. They are fully paid by the central and local governments and can become teachers after the 3-year probation period. In 2009, more rural schools benefited from the Tegang project, which was expanded to a larger scale. Since then, about 120,000 new teachers have been recruited in 8,000 rural schools in 22 provinces (Zhang, 2012). In 2011, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao highly commended the Tegang project during a conference about rural schoolteachers and asked for more effort to support the implementation and improvement of this project.

Researchers recently explored and discussed the strengths and limitations of Tegang policy after they collected data from surveying Tegang teachers and their colleagues. Tegang policy helped traditionally understaffed rural schools to hire young university graduates, who are supposedly knowledgeable and quick to adapt to new environments (Fan & Wu, 2011; Zheng, Du, Zhou, & Wang, 2012). However, many of these Tegang teachers felt underprepared to work in rural settings. Researchers found that with limited professional training experience, many Tegang teachers are not equipped with sufficient pedagogical knowledge and teaching skills. In addition, although many Tegang teachers are from rural areas, for those from cities, counties, or a better-off town, they are not accustomed to the cultural and social contexts in remote rural areas that are different from where they are from (Fan & Wu, 2011; Zhang, 2012). Researchers

suggested more professional training programs for Tegang teachers to ease them into their teaching positions (Yang & Yang, 2010; Zheng et al., 2012).

Indeed, recruiting more university graduates with diverse subject skills and social backgrounds to voluntarily teach in rural schools could diversify and enlarge the teaching force for the regions in need. In this sense, the Tegang project would enable more young people with a commitment to serving disadvantaged students to join the educational push for social equity. However, as Athanases and Martin (2006) have pointed out, it is not only the immersion in the teaching field that matters for novice teachers learning to work with diverse learners, but also the extent to which they learn to relate to people who differ from themselves and the approaches they use to connect what they have learned with actual classroom teaching. When done well, in thoughtfully designed induction and professional development programs, this policy not only solves the problem of a shortage of teachers in rural areas but also establishes equitable access for all students to high-quality teachers who possess a keen interest in working with them and the ability to recognize their individual needs.

#### **4. National Professional Development Programs for Teachers (Guo Pei Ji Hua, 国培计划)**

Ongoing professional development plays an important role in sustaining rural schoolteachers' careers and improving their classroom teaching. In June 2010, the Ministry of Education (2010) announced the National Professional Development Programs for Teachers policy (abbreviated as the Guopei project) and began to implement in-service teacher development programs to foster exemplary teaching practices as well as train a cadre of teachers in rural areas of the mid-west region. According to Tao Xu, the director of the Teacher Education Division in the Chinese Ministry of Education, in 2010 the Chinese government spent ¥550

million (at that time, approximately \$82 million) to initiate the National Professional Development Programs for Teachers and worked with local higher education institutions to provide professional training opportunities for 1.15 million teachers, among whom 95.6% were rural schoolteachers. On top of the financial package from the central government, the local governments co-sponsored ¥1 billion to launch this endeavor. Based on their teaching performance, teachers are selected to attend intense, short-term workshops ranging from 2 weeks to 1 month, or take part in a long-distance training program through the Internet or the broadcasting media. This policy aims at providing professional training opportunities for 5.50 million teachers in rural schools in the mid-west region within 5 years. More teachers—not just cadre teachers—will have access to this type of professional development opportunity in the coming years (Xu, 2012).

However, one-shot teacher training programs do little to get at the assumptions about diversity and equity underlying teaching or to change teachers' teaching beliefs (Dang, 2011; Zhao, 2011). Researchers and education practitioners have suggested a school-based professional learning model for rural schoolteachers (Ai, 2011; Cai, 2011). As Sleeter (2008) pointed out:

The venue appears to be less important than the extent to which it supportively stretches teachers beyond their existing beliefs and understandings, is facilitated by someone with a deep commitment to and knowledge about equity in teaching, and maintains a clear and consistent focus on helping teachers meet the intellectual needs of their students. (p. 1951)

Thus, the key is to provide opportunities for teachers to reflect upon their beliefs about their students and their own teaching in the training programs.

Currently, quite a few studies provide information on how Chinese teachers learn to teach, but only a few researchers have empirically examined teachers' beliefs about different learners

(Chen, 2007; Correa, Perry, Sims, Miller, & Fang, 2008; Semmel & Gao, 1992). However, these studies focus mainly on the learners' differences in terms of ability, interests, and prior subject/content knowledge. Very little research has been done on pre-service teachers' beliefs about social differences and how their beliefs influence their learn-to-teach experiences. For instance, the online training modules developed by Beijing University for rural schoolteachers employed videotaped problem-based cases from rural schools to engage participants in developing their own lesson units and polishing teaching skills through discussion and activities (Cai, 2011).

Cai's study, which was similar to many other studies treating Chinese teachers' professional development, approached teachers' beliefs about diverse learners through a cognitive perspective, that is, helping teachers to understand how their students learn. Although the recognition of inequality and discrimination within sociocultural contexts is not specifically discussed, the program documented a pattern of improvement in integrating practices in rural schools and knowledge of local students in teacher professional development rather than theoretical-oriented training focusing mainly on subject knowledge and teaching skills in general (Fu, 2012).

### **Revisiting the Dual Perspectives of “Redistribution” and “Recognition”: Transforming Teacher Education for Social Equity and Justice in China**

Perhaps the most striking aspect of all the initiatives discussed above in the process of transforming teacher education for social equity is the imbalance among what is intended at the level of policymaking, what is implemented in the teacher education program and schools, and the beliefs that the pre- and in-service teachers have adopted and exercised in their rural classrooms. The strategy of putting more economic and human resources into the educational

equity agenda in order to automatically rectify social inequality seems inadequate in terms of having the intended impact on teachers learning or willing to work with low-SES students in rural areas. In spite of the documented teacher education reforms sponsored by the government, teacher candidates and teachers are not necessarily willing to actively engage with underserved rural communities. For instance, less than 5% of the teacher candidates enrolled in the free teacher education program are willing to teach in a rural school upon graduation (Yao & Dong, 2009). Dinggang interns struggle with learning to tailor teaching to their rural students, and many of them do not intend to stay in a rural school after completion of the teaching practicum (Jiang, 2012). Attrition and turnover rates remain a problem for retaining Tegang teachers (Fan & Wu, 2011).

Earlier research on Chinese educational reform for social equity tended to portray it as an uncontroversial, neutral process of professional enculturation requiring more financial support. As Tan (1994) wrote, equity in education means providing resources and equal access to high-quality education. More recently, however, educational researchers have stressed the dynamic nature of the process. Gao (2011) argued that teachers, who are at the center of teacher education for social equity, have the agency to interpret what it means for themselves to teach for social equity, and need scaffolding to learn to teach disadvantaged students. Xie (2008) took a similarly complex view, arguing that individuals have their own interpretation of social justice and suggesting a historical and participatory approach to understanding Chinese education for social equity. Both Gao (2011) and Xie (2008) not only pointed out the differences in what is intended and what is implemented in the teacher education reforms, but also implied the importance of involving participants—teachers and students—in reflecting upon the educational agenda for social justice. Their ideas, to some extent, echo what Cochran-Smith (2008) termed as three key,

closely connected ideas in the theory of justice: (1) Equity of learning opportunity; (2) Respect for social groups and for the ways of knowing marginalized groups; and (3) Acknowledging and dealing with tensions from competing ideas about the nature of justice.

Equity of learning opportunity represents the “distribution” and “redistribution” of educational resources. However, it cannot be separated from the effort to cultivate the “recognition” and reflexivity the teacher needs to promote meaningful learning for all students. These two interdependent aspects can only be useful to practitioners, researchers, and policymakers when they are considered together to further inform the conceptual framework of teacher education for social justice, teaching practices that foster justice, and the follow-up design of the teacher preparation program that generates these teaching practices (Cochran-Smith, 2008; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).

Accordingly, my argument here is that pre- and in-service teachers need to empower themselves in well-designed teacher education and professional development programs, reflect upon their beliefs and assumptions about social inequalities, and polish their teaching skills to promote students’ learning. This is an ongoing process for teachers: learning how to actively reflect upon the assumptions and institutional practices that reinforce inequality, and acquiring teaching skills to work with disadvantaged students in China. Rather than talk of teacher *education* for social equity as a linear process, we should perhaps talk of teacher *learning* for social equity.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Data are based on Lu, X. (Ed.). (2002). *Dang dai zhong guo she hui jie ceng yan jiu bao gao*.

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(Research report on social stratification in contemporary China). Beijing: Social Sciences Academy Publishing House.

<sup>ii</sup> According to Lu (2002), there are at least eight social classes in Chinese rural areas based on data in 1999: rural cadres and political elites, 7%; private entrepreneurs, 1%; managers of township and village enterprises, 1.5%; household business owners, petty bourgeoisie, 6–7%; professionals, 2.5%; migrant peasant workers in cities, 16–18%; wage labor in local private sector, 16–17%; and peasants who work and live on income from agricultural products, 48–50%.

<sup>iii</sup> According to Bian (2002), there were working class administrative and managerial cadres, capitalist entrepreneurs, intellectuals (which is an ambiguous class, in Bian's words), and middle class in Chinese urban areas in the 1990s.

<sup>iv</sup> According to National Bureau of Statistics of China, in 2008 the per capita disposable income of the rural population was about ¥4,761 (about \$696.26 in February 2009), growing 8.0% since 2007. The per-capita disposable income of urban residents was about ¥15,781 (about \$2,307.87 in February 2009), growing 8.4% since 2007. There were about 40.07 million rural residents under the poverty line (¥1,196, about \$174.91, in February 2009) (source: [http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjgb/ndtjgb/qgndtjgb/t20090226\\_402540710.htm](http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjgb/ndtjgb/qgndtjgb/t20090226_402540710.htm)).

<sup>v</sup> Retrieved May 15, 2012, from [http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2010-07/29/content\\_1667143.htm](http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2010-07/29/content_1667143.htm)

<sup>vi</sup> There are six teacher education universities directly administered by the Ministry of Education in China: Beijing Normal University, East China Normal University, Northeast Normal University, Central China Normal University, Shanxi Normal University, and Southwest University. These are regarded as teacher education institutions with high-quality teacher training programs that usually take the lead in implementing educational reforms and experiments.

<sup>vii</sup> For instance, Xinzhou Normal College in Shanxi Province began to implement *Dinggang* internships in 1997. (For more information, see <http://www.moe.edu.cn/edoas/website18/level3.jsp?tablename=2387&infolid=34397>, accessed May 21, 2012.)

<sup>viii</sup> The dormitories were usually built by the placement schools for the interns. The schoolteachers and students live near the school. The supervising teachers from Hebei Normal University do not live with interns.

<sup>ix</sup> *Ban zhu ren* is the lead teacher for each class and is responsible for classroom discipline, meeting with parents, and working with subject matter teachers to solve any problems in the classroom. A *ban zhu ren* usually also teaches in one subject area.

<sup>x</sup> Chinese teachers receive their pre-service training in normal schools, 2- or 3-year teacher colleges, 4-year teacher colleges, or normal universities. Normal schools training preschool and elementary school teachers have been restructured as secondary schools or upgraded to 5-year junior teacher colleges that enroll graduates of junior high schools. The 2- or 3-year teacher

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colleges have been upgraded to 4-year teacher colleges, and 4-year teacher colleges have been upgraded to normal universities (Zhu & Han, 2006, p. 68).

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