

# Lifelong Learning in China

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*Abstract: Lifelong learning in China is explored in terms of China's developing modernization in the areas of agriculture, industry, military, and science and technology. Issues involving labor distribution allocation, skill and training, and potential problems are addressed. The role of adult learning in China is contrasted with Western ideas and traced through time to show how it has changed to accommodate the country's needs in terms of illiteracy and skill development and used to be inexplicably intertwined with the country's political agenda and educational policy.*

*Keywords: Lifelong learning, Xina, labor allocation, skill development, educational theories.*

*Resumen: El artículo explora el aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida en China en relación a la modernización del desarrollo en las áreas de agricultura, industria, industria militar, y ciencia y tecnología. Se tratan temas relacionados con la distribución del factor trabajo, habilidades y formación, y problemas potenciales. El papel del aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida en China se contrasta con ideas de mundo occidental y se analiza a lo largo del tiempo para mostrar cómo ha cambiado para adaptarse a las necesidades del país en términos de analfabetismo y desarrollo de habilidades y cómo, inexplicablemente, se ha entrelazado con la agenda política y educativa del país.*

*Palabras claves: Aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida, China, distribución del trabajo, desarrollo de habilidades, teorías educativas.*

# 1. Introduction

China, the third largest country in terms of geographical area in the world after Russia and Canada, has more people than any other country (approximately 1.3 billion) (China Internet Information Center, 2003). China has relied heavily upon its lifelong learning to promote desired changes in political ideology, socio-economic relations, and human productive capabilities. To outsiders, China's huge population could be seen as a problem: just feeding the people is a heavy burden. However, the Chinese regard their huge population as a vital asset in overall economic development. To this end, many Chinese quote their late chairman Mao by saying, "many hands make light work." This saying has almost become the Chinese people's political motto, encouraging millions of Chinese to work harder in order to contribute to China's four modernizations: agriculture, industry, military, and science and technology. According to Kaplan, Sobin and Andors (1979, p. 126), full utilization of the country's vast workforce has been a consistent aspect of strategies designed to place the country on a firm economic footing. Between 1949 and the mid-1970s, the government was successful in mobilizing the rural workforce in support of national development schemes. Now the government is mobilizing both rural and urban workforces to surpass countries such as Japan, Germany and the United States. As of 2006, China successfully surpassed France and the United Kingdom in terms of its GDP. Now, China has become the world's second largest economy. After 20 to 30 years of continual economic reform, the country's foreign currency reserves reached a record \$1 trillion in March, 2007, as its factories churned out goods for markets around the world, heightening the likelihood of fresh trade tensions with the United States (Goodman, 2005). The Chinese government announced the formation of a new agency to oversee the investment of these foreign currency reserves, representing a potent new force in international finance (Yardley & Barboza, 2007). Although economic policies and institutions have fostered China's economic growth – which has taken place at such a rate that it has shocked the rest of the world – the efficient use of human resources has also played a major role. When speaking of human resources in China, one must turn to the definition of the country's labor force, which is far from clear given its large population.

China's mass labor mobilization campaigns obscure boundaries between those who are in and outside of the workforce. Students attend class, but they also work while going to school. Peasants farm, but can also be employed in rural and urban industries in slack seasons. Women still bear a major responsibility for housework, but millions take part in neighborhood service centers and

small-scale industries. Military personnel engage in production. Thus, it is very difficult to trace with any precision the size or growth of the urban or rural, industrial or agricultural labor sectors. (Kaplan, Sobin & Andors, 1979, p. 126)

In any examination of China's economic accomplishments, the mass labor mobilization to improve the lifelong learning of its human resources is what first springs to mind. On the one hand, China has set a shining example for other developing countries in terms of properly feeding its huge population by mobilizing its mass labor force. On the other hand, China has revealed a plethora of problems by aggressively improving its lifelong learning. In the next sections, we will discuss lifelong learning in relation to labor distribution, skill and training, labor allocation and its associated potential problems.

## 2. Labor distribution and lifelong learning

Lifelong learning refers to the desired end results or accomplishments of purposeful behavior or activity (Rothwell & Dubois, 1998). A broader definition of lifelong learning offered by Bennett and Bell (2010) includes "preconscious as well as conscious learning resulting from the transformation of experience in all contexts and stages in life and integration into the individual's personal biography" (p. 415). This definition includes the social context of learning as well as the continual changes in self-identity and one's life world that are both the beginning and the outcome of new learning. It addresses the ability of individuals to learn from experience so that they can cope with continual change.

The more skilled and productive individuals are, the more valuable they are to industry and commerce and, by inference, the national economy (Van Der Linde, 2007, p. 45). China's leaders have never stopped finding and formulating optimal or desirable ways of solving lifelong learning problems or seizing lifelong learning improvement opportunities. As soon as the Chinese communist party came to power in 1949, the future course was set as follows:

The culture and education of the People's Republic of China are new democratic, that is, national, scientific, and popular. The main tasks for raising the cultural level of the people are: training of personnel for national construction work; liquidating of feudal, comprador, fascist ideology; and developing of the ideology of serving the people. (Kaplan, Sobin & Andors, 1979, p. 217)

During the Great Leap Forward (1958-1959) and the Great Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), one of Mao's major policies for improving lifelong learning was *uniting theory with practice*: the direct interaction of educational

institutions with productive labor and the establishment of self-supported schools by factories and commune units. Elias and Merriam (2005) express a similar view in their statement “theory without practice leads to empty idealism and action without philosophical reflection leads to a mindless activism” (p. 4).

Prior to the economic reforms implemented in the early 1980s, the West’s so-called “democratic individualism” was viewed as a key threat to improving Chinese people’s performance in the work place. According to democratic individualism, the fundamental role of educating and training people for the sake of improving lifelong learning is the physical, intellectual, emotional and ethical integration of the individual into a ‘complete man’ (Van Der Linde, 2007, p. 42). Before China opened up to the outside world, its leaders decided that the best way of solving lifelong learning problems was to attract foreign investment. To this end, the government set up many special economic development zones along its coastal provinces where China’s workers, engineers and scientists could work side by side with their foreign counterparts. The goal of this historic endeavor was clear: not only could China use foreign capital but its personnel could also learn advanced human management skills. During the 1980s and 1990s, the late leader Deng’s theory became popular. It must be pointed out that his theory was found akin to John Dewey’s pragmatism (1963, 1966). Literally translated into English, Deng’s theory states: “it makes no difference whether you are a black cat or a white cat. As long as you can catch mice, you are a good cat.” Applied to lifelong learning, Deng’s theory does allow China’s personnel to focus on practical skills to get their work done. Further, nothing goes wrong in emphasizing skills development as a charter for education and training to meet present and future industry and economic demands (Van Der Linde, 2007, p. 48). This theory ran contrary to Mao’s policy in that being “red” was more important than being “expert.” During Mao’s time, as long as Chinese people were loyal to the supreme leader, that was all he needed. Because of Mao’s leftist policy, his theory, uniting theory with practice turned Chinese personnel into a class struggle.

Both Mao’s policy and Deng’s theory have contributed to disproportionate urban and rural labor distribution in China. As a result of Mao’s uniting theory with practice, millions of urban youth emigrated to the countryside to improve their performance. Writing in 1979, Kaplan, Sobin and Andors (p. 129) indicated,

Since the population in 1970 was estimated at about 753 million, with 125 million or 16.5% living in urban areas, this would mean that in 1975 the urban population totaled about 135 million. The rural segment therefore comprised 685 million people or 83.5% of the total population. These ratios between

urban and rural population have remained remarkably stable since 1958, when the urban population was about 14.2% of the total. Roughly 44% of the urban population, or 59.5 million people, made up the urban labor force in 1975; a smaller percentage of the rural population—42% or 290.5 million people—made up the rural labor force.

Today, China's population remains predominantly rural, despite a strong trend toward urbanization. Over 60% were classified as rural by the 2000 census, compared with 83.5% two decades ago (Brooks & Tao, 2003). As a result of new strategies for lifelong learning, changes in the size of the labor force largely reflect the degree to which women and young people become part of it. Because of Deng's pragmatism, changing attitudes toward female social roles also affect the size of the workforce. Now, participating in economic activities outside of the home or family seems to be the norm throughout China. These new additions to the workforce are accompanied with new traits and skills. While Bell and Bennett (2010) are predominately describing a Western population in their depiction of the net generation born between 1981 and 1984, some of these traits are global. They include familiarity with technology, optimism, ability to multitask, "lack of critical thinking, and naivety about intellectual property and information authenticity of internet resources" (417). All of these will impact life-long learning throughout their careers.

### 3. Skill and training and lifelong learning

Writing in 2003-2004, Wang and Bott (p. 37) indicated,

Mass illiteracy was one of the main problems facing the new government of China in 1949. Illiteracy was a serious obstacle to technical progress, both in industry and on the farm. The adult education curriculum prior to the post-Mao period in China was geared to eradicate illiteracy, and a massive assault on illiteracy became the first priority. Spare time education programs were set up for workers in cities while some literacy classes were held in the villages during those early years. Since 1984, 11 Chinese units have won prizes from UNESCO for their work in eliminating illiteracy. As a result of these efforts, by the end of the last century, China's illiteracy rate among young and middle-aged people had dropped to less than 5%.

Prior to the 1980s, the number of highly skilled workers within the industrial sector is estimated to comprise about 15% of the workforce. Most industrial workers can be assumed to have been unskilled or semiskilled if wage-grade rankings are taken as equivalent to skill criteria (Kaplan, Sobin, & Andors,

1979, p. 129). According to Paltiel (1992), the Chinese pioneered the system of education and training to boost lifelong learning as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. Prior to the 10th century AD, the Chinese philosopher Confucius, who lived in the 5th century BC, postulated that no nation goes bankrupt for educating its people. Those who do well in education and training are assigned public service positions in China. To some extent, this is still the case in China. Within the industrial sector, large numbers of workers went through work-study schools at the secondary level or attended part-time courses in their factories in the 1960s and 1970s. As shown by Kaplan, Sobin and Andors (1979, pp. 129-130),

As of June 1976, there were some 251,000 workers enrolled in high-level technical training courses in “July 21” workers colleges (named after the college at the Shanghai Machine Tools Plant cited by Mao on July 21, 1968); 900,000 workers and students in technical secondary schools; and 44.6 million students in middle schools, most of which emphasize practical production skills. In the 1970s—as an outgrowth of reforms brought about through the Cultural Revolution—many young workers just out of school have been entering the labor force with basic skills and some work experience, as well as with basic mathematical and reading abilities.

While in 1949 over 90% of the general population—and 80% of the industrial force—were illiterate, this changed in the 1960s and 1970s when China’s leaders emphasized the importance of education and training initiated by the Chinese as early as the 10th century AD. Although a lot of time and energy were wasted in the political power struggle, young workers and students did master some rudimentary production skills. Indeed, the labor force in China has been transformed. In the post-Mao era, to get entry level jobs in the industrial sector, workers must have a college degree and upward mobility is most possible for those workers who hold graduate degrees. It is no exaggeration to say that the more education and training workers receive, the better they will perform on the job. Work is a process between humans and nature, a process in which humans, through their own activities, initiate, regulate, and control the material reactions between themselves and nature (Marx, 1890/1929). More importantly, it is lifelong learning that produces surplus value (Wang, 2006). Without surplus value, humans could not have progressed from the Stone Age to modern civilization.

As shown above, China’s leaders viewed the West’s so-called “democratic individualism” as a key threat to improving lifelong learning. On the other hand, China has never stopped modeling itself on foreign lifelong learning models. Parker (2010a) notes that many of the theories reveal themselves in models with

geometric shapes. Kolb's circular learning cycle and Illeris' triangular depiction of the dimensions of learning are examples. Just as Confucius suggested selecting members of the ruling class on the merit of individual lifelong learning, Mao rejected formal training as the basis of his new hierarchy. Instead, he insisted on individual cultivation of moral worth as a means of inculcating revolutionary solidarity in a collective setting (Wang, 2005, p. 35). Because the Soviets were interested in indoctrinating Chinese youth with revolutionary spirit in China, Mao sent Chinese youth to Russia to improve lifelong learning. Later, the Marxist-Leninist Training Academy was established on Chinese territory. In the post-Mao era, China's trainers began to borrow buzzwords like "system theory" and "decision-making theory" from the West. Because of China's willingness to learn from the West, more and more multinational corporations have gained a foothold to help improve lifelong learning in China (Wang, 2005, p. 31). Likewise, going abroad to receive a foreign education to improve lifelong learning is viewed as "realizing one's self-actualization." (Wang, 2004-2005, p. 30) In the post-Mao era, lifelong learning does not seem to be closely connected with politics in China. As summarized by Wang,

Western ideas, customs and culture are much in favor, and anyone who still clings to the "four olds" (e.g., old ideas, customs, culture, habits) is considered old-fashioned. Individual aspirations for lifelong education have been stimulated by a quasi-market economy since the beginning of the early 1980s. Freed from the limitations of Mao's political agenda, motives for improving lifelong learning have become more and more closely tied to individual, practical purposes, such as jobs, incomes, and materialistic success in life. (p. 30)

#### 4. Labor allocation and potential problems

China has a history of boosting lifelong learning by using sayings or quotes from influential people such as Confucius, Marx and Mao. Confucian thought has inspired generations of Chinese. To encourage Chinese youth to learn, twenty-five centuries ago Confucius had this to say, "Those who are born wise are the highest type of men; those who become wise through learning come next; those who are dull-witted and yet strive to learn come after that. Those who are dull-witted and yet make no effort to learn are the lowest type of men" (Chai & Chai, 1965, pp. 44-45 as cited in Wang & King, 2007, p. 253). Today, politicians and educators still use this saying to encourage young men and women in China to work hard to achieve their goals in work and in life. As soon as the Chinese

Communist party came to power in 1949, Karl Marx became the foremost leader in China. His ideas and concepts have been widely studied in the country. Even to this day, students are required to memorize and be examined on his thought in order to be admitted to a university or a college. *From each according to his ability, to each according to his need* (or *needs*) is a slogan popularized by Karl Marx in his 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program*. The phrase summarizes the idea that, under a Communist system, every person shall produce to the best of their ability in accordance with their talent, and each person shall receive the fruits of this production in accordance with their need, irrespective of what they have produced. In the Marxist view, such an arrangement will be made possible by the abundance of goods and services that a developed communist society will produce; the idea is that there will be enough to satisfy everyone's needs. While such an ideal could be realized in a pure communist country, China's leaders determined that it could not be achieved in a semi-Communist and semi-capitalist country such as China. The Marxist slogan was changed into *From each according to his ability, to each according to his work*. Without any exaggeration, this slogan to some extent boosted lifelong learning throughout China especially in post-Mao China. Those who worked harder and more intelligently in the early 1980s and 1990s gradually became richer and richer. Those who refused to make an effort to learn new skills became poorer and poorer. Today the gap between the haves and the have-nots is getting wider in both cities and the country. Writing in 2006, Gittings (p. 260) indicated that the fifty richest millionaires in China were worth more than Y 100 million each, and the ten wealthiest among them Y 375 million and upwards, according to the Forbes Survey in 2002. On the contrary, some of the counties in the province of Shanxi are among the poorest in China and many people still live in caves (Clissold, 2005, p. 28). From another perspective, Marxist's slogan (Chinese version) confirmed the Protestant ethic of work in that it was man's obligation to God to extract the maximum amount of wealth from his work (Petty & Brewer, 2005, p. 97). Since lifelong learning is synonymous with hard and intelligent work, lifelong learning, like work, should carry with it seven viewpoints that can be served as a theoretical framework in any social setting: (1) lifelong learning is continuous and leads to additional performance; (2) lifelong learning is productive and produces goods and services; (3) lifelong learning requires physical and mental exertion; (4) lifelong learning has socio-psychological aspects; (5) lifelong learning is performed on a regular or scheduled basis; (6) lifelong learning requires a degree of constraint; and (7) lifelong learning is performed for a personal purpose (intrinsic or extrinsic).



Regardless of what indoctrination China's leaders employ to boost lifelong learning, underemployment and unemployment have been problems in China, especially during the first decade of the Communist government. On labor allocation, Kaplan, Sobin and Andors (1979, p. 130) reported,

Unemployment was particularly serious in the mid-1950s and immediately following the Great Leap Forward. During the First Five-Year Plan (1953-57), the unemployed were usually the less skilled, order workers, and some youths with a primary level of education. Rural-to-urban migration exacerbated this problem, so that by 1956-57 it was estimated that anywhere from 9.6 to 18.3 million people were underemployed or unemployed—roughly from one-fifth to one-third of the urban labor force. State expenditures for unemployment relief in 1956 totaled Y 186.5 million.

During the Great Leap Forward, large masses of the unemployed were mobilized for work, including millions of women who left home to join the labor force for the first time. The problem of unemployment in China during this period was compounded when the Soviet Union decided to precipitously withdraw its industrial aid to China. Failures in agriculture brought more labor into rural industry. The so-called backyard furnace in China was a direct product of the Great Leap Forward. Labor allocation during this period caused lifelong learning problems in China. As an incentive to boost lifelong learning, Mao started a concerted effort to begin to shift portions of the urban population back to the countryside. This was done in China in order to achieve Mao's integration of theory with practice. Regarding education and training, the following was reported,

Students and faculty were sent to farms and factories; curricula were formulated based on immediate agricultural and industrial needs; schools, factories, and farms shared management; classroom-centered schooling was replaced by work-study programs; workers and farmers were dispatched to take up teaching and school-management positions; and full-time and institutional facilities were increasingly replaced by part-time and non-institutional programs. (Cheng & Manning, 2003, p. 359)

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, labor was allocated by local governmental authorities who worked closely with industrial enterprises and other units in the area to ensure balance between available manpower and jobs (Kaplan, Sobin & Andors, 1979, p. 130). At the time, China was still considered a command economy by Western standards. In the rural areas, communes and counties played the most important role in allocating labor for industry. According to Kaplan, Sobin and Andors (1979), these administrative levels work in close

coordination with the brigades and teams, the units that manage the distribution of agricultural labor. Despite China's concerted efforts, unemployment has not been eliminated in all regions or economic sectors in China. In the last twenty years, China has made strides towards a more market-oriented labor market. To this end, the urban private sector has become more important and state-owned enterprises have downsized. Millions of urban workers have been laid off. As rural employment has slowed, migrants have begun to seek jobs in the more dynamic coastal provinces (Brooks & Tao, 2003, p. 3). Both urban and rural employment situations have produced a new problem—surplus labor in the 21st century in China. According to the National Bureau of Statistics in 2002, urban unemployment rate was about 4-5% of the labor force. Since over 60% was classified as rural in the census in the year 2000, the unemployment rate is certainly much higher than is shown by official data. Because many of the low skill level jobs are filled by rural surplus labor, it is hard for the urban unemployed to find jobs. Since China is turning from a command economy to a market economy, nowadays governmental authorities no longer allocate labor. Twenty years ago in China, a college degree was a passport to a guaranteed job. Nowadays, college students with just a bachelor's degree find it hard to find quality jobs in China. Wang (2005, p. 36) noted this labor market situation in China by saying, "Numerous Chinese graduates of MBA programs at the institutions of American higher learning have difficulty finding appropriate positions in China. Some MBA graduates have taken jobs teaching English as a foreign language for Chinese universities."

## 5. Reflections

Unlike the West, lifelong learning has been inextricably intertwined with China's leaders' political agenda and educational policy. Social, political, and economic conditions shape individual lifelong learning in China (Wang, 2004-2005, p. 17). Between 1949 and 1976 when politics took precedence over educational policies, young people in China were forced to devote their time and energy, even their entire youth, to advancing authoritarian political goals. During this time, young people were not judged on their academic achievement or their occupational expertise but by how "red" they were (i.e., whether they were loyal to the supreme leader, Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Communist Party) (Wang, 2004-2005). China has a history of creating personality cults. From its emperors to its contemporary leaders, all these people wanted the Chinese to follow their "teachings" to the letter. Those who deviated from their "theories" or

“policies” should be punished one way or another and many Chinese took pride in admiring the wisdom of their supreme leaders. For example, between 1949 and 1976 when Mao wanted to create a classless communist China, everyone’s performance was geared towards realizing this political goal. During this long period, all forms of education and formal training were sacrificed to pursue political goals under the leadership of Mao. To support its political agenda, China borrowed Marxist theories to guide lifelong learning. As mentioned above, the Marxist grand theory “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” was changed to “From each according to his ability, to each according to his work” to fit Chinese society. Like Mao, Marx became a personal cult that all Chinese youths including Chinese communist leaders worshipped throughout China between 1949 and 1976. In the post-Mao era when national policy was geared towards economic reforms and the open door policy, to some extent, the influence of Marxism and Maoism on lifelong learning lessened. Mao’s successor inspired millions of Chinese to work harder and more intelligently in order to become rich. While hundreds of Chinese became rich overnight, some ethical standards were lost in the process of pursuing wealth in China. Marx condemned exploitation in the English factories but Chinese rich people used the very same form of exploitation to accumulate wealth. Millions of Chinese workers now sweat in factories in order to make ends meet (\$1 to \$10 per day). Slave labor is rampant under the guise of realizing the four modernizations (i.e., agriculture, industry, military, and science and technology). Where is the money earned at the expense of maximum lifelong learning? It is at the disposal of a few top level leaders and their offspring. In difficult times, China’s leaders are good at using propaganda and nationalism to boost lifelong learning.

On the contrary, Westerners may not believe in China’s way of exerting external control and threats to boost lifelong learning. To Westerners, lifelong learning is related to human nature and behavior. They believe in theory X assumptions about human nature and theory Y assumptions about human nature. According to this dichotomy, some people inherently dislike work and will avoid it if they can while others consider the expenditure of physical and mental effort as natural as play or rest (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2005, p. 257). Further, Westerners believe that lifelong learning is bound by teaching/learning theories such as the theory of adult learning, the theory of multiple intelligences, the theory of emotional intelligence and the theory of transformative learning. Educational leaders such as Rogers (1951, 1961, 1969) and Knowles (1970, 1973, 1975, 1984, 1986, 1998, 2005) firmly believe that humans will exercise self-direction and self-control in order to perform at the optimal level.

In other words, human beings have a natural potentiality for improving their own performance. Punishment should not be the only means for bringing about lifelong learning toward individual or collective objectives. The essence of adult learning theory is about releasing the energy of others (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2005). Therefore, lifelong learning is closely related to self-initiated learning, which involves the whole person—feelings as well as intellect—and is pervasive and lasting. Gardner's (theory of multiple intelligences 1983, 1991, 1993) looks at the brain and how people learn to improve their lifelong learning. Based on this theory, lifelong learning can be considered as an internal and biologically driven need to know for survival (Anderson, 2005, p. 3). Westerners believe that even if one's IQ is higher than that of the average person, one cannot perform at the optimal level if one's emotional intelligence is low. According to Goleman (2005), out-of-control emotions make a smart person stupid. The theory of transformative learning is useful in understanding lifelong learning simply because it argues that learning is needed throughout our lifetime to help us respond to changes in the nature of work, navigate passages from one stage of development to another, and accommodate new personal and professional situations (Mezirow, 1978, 1990, 1991, 1997, 2000; Cranton, 1994; Lamdin & Fugate, 1997; King, 2005; Wang & King, 2006, 2007). Such popular Western theories of teaching and learning in relation to human nature and human behavior may have been studied in academic circles in China. However, they have not been widely applied to improve lifelong learning in China. To some extent, lifelong learning in China is still tied to political agendas, national education policies, propaganda and nationalism, to say the least.

While many of the Western theories mentioned above form the basis for lifelong learning in Western countries, what drives adult learning practice is the fulfillment of societal needs. Examples can be found in the workers' education movement in Great Britain, the needs instigated by the industrial revolution, agricultural extension programs, Americanization programs to educate the influx of immigrants in the early 1900s and the entire field of vocational education (Parker, 2010b). This interchange of theory and practice has influenced lifelong learning and moved it forward through the centuries.

## 6. Conclusion

It has been demonstrated in this article that lifelong learning has been promoted in China by methods such as politics, the influence of a few outstanding leaders, education policies, propaganda and nationalism rather than theories of teaching

and learning as preferred by its Western counterparts. The article points out that perspectives of lifelong learning in China have changed as the political, social and economic conditions have evolved. It was valid to pursue political goals prior to 1976 as a means of improving lifelong learning. In the post-Mao era, pursuing materialistic goals as a means of improving lifelong learning seems to fall squarely in line with the seven views of lifelong learning given China's political, social and economic conditions. The article also shows that labor distribution, skill and training, and labor allocation create new problems for overall lifelong learning in China. It must be pointed out that China believes in using punishment to coerce young people into leaving poor learning behavior behind and embracing more positive and appropriate learning behavior in order to improve lifelong learning. At the heart of this thinking is that leaders/teachers are in control of all means of improving lifelong learning. This mode of thinking is okay in authoritarian countries such as China although it is questionable whether it will work in democratic countries. In fact it seems to be in conflict with Knowles' assumptions (2005) about adult learners articulated in his six core andragogical principles: "the learner's need to know, self-directed learning, prior experience of the learner, readiness to learn, orientation to learning and problem solving, and motivation to learn" (p. 183).

As problems such as underemployment, unemployment and surplus labor continue to erode the so-called "socialist system", China must look for alternative ways to improve its lifelong learning so that changes can be made to political ideology, socio-economic relations, and human productive capabilities (Wang & Colletta, 1991). To this end, China has adopted a more flexible labor market strategy. That is, urban job-seekers are allowed to find work in the state, collective, or newly-recognized private sectors, and enterprises are granted more autonomy in hiring decisions. The authorities continue to formulate a labor plan, but instead of unilaterally allocating workers to enterprises, labor bureaus have begun to introduce workers to hiring units.

To improve the training and education of the largely unskilled workers, China must introduce Western teaching/learning theories to training academies throughout China and tie training and education directly to the seven viewpoints of lifelong learning instead of to politics, nationalism, or political agenda. "Politics takes command" should be a thing of the past. Surplus labor can be a bad thing or a good thing. If positively used, it can be turned into a productive labor force in China. The number one priority should be to provide training and retraining to the surplus labor in the country. Since they have already been exploited according to Marxist theory, training and retraining should be free.

This study of lifelong learning and training issues in China has presented readers with a totally different picture. Nobody needs to learn the lifelong learning theories and concepts practiced in China by heart as a course of study. This article provides an opportunity for our readers to use their critical thinking skills to critique, analyze and compare issues related to lifelong learning and training in China with those in the United States, Europe, South America, and India in order to develop the best strategies to improve lifelong learning in a particular organization in a particular country. It is by examining the acts and practices of others that we improve our own. If we adopt this as a motto, lifelong learning can be improved in any organization.

## 7. Appendix

*The Great Leap Forward (1958-1959).* In 1958, the Chinese Communist party and government leadership offset up the rural people's communes which, on the scale of Marxist development, moved China's revolution well beyond the stage achieved by the Soviet Union (which had earlier tried and failed with a similar approach). At the same time, the Great Leap Forward movement was set in motion as vast segments of the population enthusiastically engaged in self-initiated efforts to expand production (Kaplan, Sobin, & Andors, 1979, p. 221).

*The Great Cultural Revolution (1966–1976).* The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, a movement that was to dominate China's political, cultural and educational climate for more than a decade, began as a literary debate. Wu Han, a writer and vice-mayor of Beijing, had prepared a series of literary compositions focusing on the unjust dismissal from office of Hai Rui, a Ming Dynasty official who had fallen from favor because of his outspoken criticisms of the emperor. It became apparent that Wu's historical compositions were in fact intended as a veiled attack on Mao's dismissal of Peng De-huai in 1959 and on the policies of the Great Leap as well. The movement and its debates quickly spread throughout the country. Schools and universities were the initial focal points of the struggle. Within months, virtually the entire school system in China had shut down. To show support for Mao's policies, everyone in China was supposed to hold aloft the great banner of Mao Tse-tung's thought and put proletarian politics in command (Kaplan, Sobin, & Andors, 1979, p. 223). Mao died in 1976 and the post-Mao era started in China.

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