

Apprenticeships in China: Experiences, Lessons and Challenges

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Introduction: Why Apprenticeship?

-- In sense of education reform, 2014 is Year of TVET in China as most intensive reforms have occurred and will continue to occur in the field of TVET.

--In that process, what is noteworthy is an initiative to build “*modern apprenticeship*”.

--What apprenticeship means to education system in China: According to 2013 Statistics, at upper secondary level, out of 16 million students admitted into upper secondary schools, 7.5 entered vocational education schools; out of 14.8 million graduates from upper secondary schools, 6.7 million from vocational education schools. (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2014)

I. History in Retrospect

1.1 Origin of Apprenticeship: Confucius

Citation by Confucius shared by a German colleague:

“诵诗三百，授之以政，不达，使于四方，不能专对，虽多，亦奚以为？”

--孔子

“*Memorizing knowledge only, no matter how much you learn, wont’ educate a capable person, who could perform the tasks adequately*”.
–
Confucius

1.2 Apprenticeship had been the major approach to training handcraft workers for thousands of years. It was featured by:

--言传身教（hands-on learning）

--心传（teaching/learning by mind）

--现场传授(on-site teaching)

--师徒关系(family-like relationship) (Bi & Wang, 2012)

1.3 Nowadays apprenticeship still exists in large amount in traditional trades such as local opera (represented by Peking Opera), martial arts, traditional Chinese medicine.

II. How Apprenticeship Worked in China?

2.1 After foundation of the People's Republic of China, from 1950s-1960s and partly 1980s, apprenticeship had been a main approach to train skilled workers in planned economy.

2.2 A typical model of apprenticeship from 1950s to 1960s:

--**Admission:** factories submit needs-based plan to government; after approval by the government, screening candidates/students by examination, usually students of 105% of the planned number of workers were selected.

--**Years of Schooling:** 2 years for upper secondary graduates; 3 years for lower secondary graduates

--**Curriculum:** Based on national curriculum framework with modification

--**Organization of Learning and Training:**

- ✧ Two-cycles in one semester: the first theory-based learning, the second work-based learning.
- ✧ Semester 1: factory on-campus or factory; Semester 2: work-based learning.
- ✧ Two-year schooling: in the fourth semester students were fully engaged in work-based learning; Three-year schooling: in the sixth semester students were fully engaged in work-based learning.

--**Mentor Apprentice Ratio:** 1:1-2

--**Dual oversight:** responsibility of oversight on campus stays with schools; responsibility of oversight in factory stays with schools. Evaluation of performance is the same. (Xu & Long, 2013)

2.3 Statistics shows that over 7 million technical workers were trained by apprenticeship that accounted for 95% of technical workers over 10 years by the end of 1959. (Bi & Wang, 2012)

2.4 At the end of 1980s, such a system was transformed to more school-based, theory-based training system, as a result of a policy that mandated "(sufficient) training before work" and that schools should play a main role in vocational training. That implies an end to the formal system of apprenticeship essentially. (Zhao, 2013)

2.5 It is reported that graduates of vocational education are neither better than graduates from theory-based education in terms of knowledge acquisition, nor better than graduates from Technician Institutes (技师学院) and Senior Technical Schools (高级技工学校) in terms of skills acquisition. (Lai, 2013)

III. Apprenticeship in practice vis-via various training

3.1 Experimentations of various trainings versus apprenticeship

3.2 Examples on practical level:

--Tailored-made training, schools train students on the basis of order placed by the businesses.

--Combination of work and learning: factory in school, school in factory

--School-run enterprises (Zhao, Sun & Yang, 2013)

3.3 Examples on policy level:

Training Subsidy: Earmarked allocation from central government. Regular issuance with varied cycles depending on the majors of the trainees.

IV. Challenges and Issues

4.1 Lack of legislation corresponding to apprenticeship; Issue of student identity; labor contract.

According to the *Labour Law* issued in 1995, students' work in the period of registered study should not be regarded as employment that involves formal labor relationship; Labor contract is not allowed in those cases. That implies that student could hardly get benefits and protection when engaging in work-based learning as in apprenticeship by law.

4.2 Lack of incentives on the side of industry/business

--From the perspective of cost-benefit, high cost and low benefits.

--They think the students from vocational schools could not perform desired tasks because their low practical skills.

--They would rather high graduates from secondary schools directly who are supposed to received sufficient training.

4.3 Lack of linkages between industry and education sectors

V. Closing Remarks

Last but not least, building or rebuilding apprenticeship warrants an overall reform of vocation education institutions ranging from organization of teaching and learning, changing the way to hire teachers, restructuring of curriculum, changing the approaches to assessment and evaluation, all different from current mainstream practice. To that end, we wish to learn lessons and experiences of other countries.

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