

**EDUCATION, WORK, AND CITIZENSHIP OF YOUTH IN CHINA:
STRATEGIES, ACHIEVEMENTS, AND CHALLENGES**

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ABSTRACT

This article examines China's strategies for and constraints on protecting and implementing children's and young people's rights to education, employment and social and political participation. It shows that the 1978 policy of reform and opening to the world brought forth significant domestic economic and social changes and exposed China and its people to the world. All this, in turn, created new demands and concerns for the development of youth education, work and citizenship. The article further shows that in China, these three domains of youth have been influenced by changing domestic and global contexts, and the state has played a vital role in facilitating these changes in three major spheres of youth. China, however, has also been confronted with equity issues arising from new developments in these domains.

KEY WORDS

Youth; Education; Work; Citizenship; China.



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Education, Work, and Citizenship of Youth in China: Strategies, Achievements, and Challenges¹

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INTRODUCTION

Providing youth with an education that improves their life, transitions them to economic productivity, and prepares them to become active, functioning citizens is a longstanding international concern. The People's Republic of China (PRC), founded by the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 1949, is no exception. The article examines China's strategies for and constraints on protecting and implementing children's and young people's rights to education, employment and social and political participation. It argues that since the 1980s, China has played an important role in developing and improving these three domains in response to changing domestic and global contexts. It has also been confronted with equity issues arising from new developments in these domains.

After introducing the background of the PRC, this article discusses the challenges confronting and protection of young people's right to education. Then, it examines China's shift from a centrally planned to a market oriented labour market, its adoption of international labour norms, its strategies for easing youth unemployment and the problems arising from these

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strategies. Thirdly, it investigates the PRC's strategies for engaging children and young people in CPC-organized social and political activities in schools and workplaces, and the tension between their participating in a political space constrained by structural inequalities against non-CPC members and participating in a social space broadened by the emergence of civil society and expansion of cyberspace.

THE GENERAL CONTEXT OF EDUCATION, WORK AND CITIZENSHIP FOR CHINESE YOUTHS

Like many countries, the PRC has no commonly agreed-on age ranges for youth (*qingnian*) and young people (*qingshaonian ren*) (Mo, 2009). One Chinese dictionary defines youth as the 15-30 age cohort, while the age range for China's Top 10 Outstanding Youths competition is 18-39 (Y. K. Hu, Zheng, Chen & Wang, 2011). The CPC, which has ruled China since 1949, admits youngsters (*shaonian*) to the China Young Pioneers (CYP) and youths to the China Communist Youth League (CCYL) between 6 and 14, and between 14 and 28, respectively (China Communist Youth League National Congress, 2008; China Young Pioneers National Congress, 2005). For comparison purposes, this article adopts the United Nations' (2001) definition of youth as the 15-24 age cohort; it is difficult, however, to strictly adhere to this definition when discussing basic education and employment, as both could involve people outside this age range. The terms, youth and young people, are used interchangeably herein.

The PRC has the largest population in the world, some 1.34 billion people in 2010, the majority of whom (91.5%) are ethnic Han, with 55 other ethnicities accounting for the balance (8.5%) (Population Census Office under the State Council & National Bureau of Statistics, 2011a). The age cohorts 0-14 and 15-24 were over 221 million (16.6% of total population) and 227 million (17.1%), respectively; in other words, each cohort was about three-quarters of the US population. Since 1949, the CPC has dominated China's governance from the state to the village level. Diplomatically, China's foreign relations were mainly limited to other socialist states during the Mao period (1949-76), but were extended to include capitalist countries thereafter. This diversification has exposed the PRC more to the international community and to international norms and practices in various domains, including education and work.



In 1978, the PRC introduced a policy of reform and opening to the world, adopting five major strategies to revive its declining socialist economy (Law, 2011). First, it accessed and utilized foreign (particularly Western) capital, knowledge and technology. Second, it changed its economy to socialist market orientation by allowing the coexistence of central planning and market forces and, therefore, of the state and private sectors. Third, it adopted a differential approach to development, letting some areas (such as coastal areas and special economic zones) and people to get rich first. Fourth, the PRC gradually shifted its economic focus from primary to tertiary industries. Primary, secondary, and tertiary industries accounted for 28.2%, 47.9%, and 23.9% of GDP, respectively, in 1978, and for 10.0%, 46.6%, and 43.4% in 2011 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012b). Fifth, China increased the pace of urbanization, with urban populations rising from 21% in 1982, to 26.4% in 1990 and 49.7% in 2010 (Population Census Office under the State Council & National Bureau of Statistics, 2011b).

As a result, the PRC became the world's second largest economy (after the US) in 2010, and its *per capita* GDP rose over 90 fold, from RMB381 in 1978 to RMB35,083 in 2011 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012a). At the same time, however, the income gap between rich and poor has grown, as have such developmental problems as economic disparity between and within regions, inflation, rural to urban domestic migration, pollution, and social unrest and conflict.

EDUCATION

The PRC has the largest education system in the world, including pre-school programmes (for children under 6), nine-year compulsory basic education for all (EFA) (primary and junior secondary education for children 6-14), senior secondary (regular and vocational/technical) education (ages 15-17), and higher education. In 2011-12, it had over 254 million students: about 34 million in 166,800 pre-schools; 99 million in 241,200 primary schools; 51 million in 54,100 junior-secondary schools; 47 million in 27,600 senior-secondary schools; 398,700 in 1,767 special schools; and 23 million in 2,409 higher-education institutes (Ministry of Education, 2012a). Since the 1980s, China has attached higher importance to education and to protecting the rights of children and young people to education through legislation, nine-year compulsory EFA, and



expanded post-EFA education. These efforts, however, could not completely eradicate structural inequalities and social discrimination, as reflected in widening intra- and extra-regional educational disparities, and in children of rural-to-urban domestic migrants being deprived of their educational rights.

MEASURES TO PROTECT CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S RIGHTS TO EDUCATION

The PRC's national leaders have seen education as an important means to improve the quality of China's labour force and its national strength in an increasingly competitive world. In 1949, nearly 80% of China's population was illiterate, representing a huge barrier to national development and modernization. After its 1978 opening to the world, China sought to turn its huge population into a national asset and stressed the need to gear education towards modernization, the world and the future. In 1995, the PRC emphasized the role of education and science in national prosperity (*kejiao xingguo*). Despite its instrumentalist approach, China has taken serious steps, including legislation and the expansion of education, to protect children's and youths' rights to education.

China used legislation to protect its citizens' right to education and to commit itself to providing education at different levels. It followed the spirit of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* regarding everyone's right to education, including free and compulsory education at elementary and fundamental levels, and various forms of post-compulsory education (United Nations, 1948, Article 26). Specifically, the National People's Congress (NPC, China's highest law-making body), in revising China's Constitution in 1982, stipulated that Chinese citizens have the duty and right to receive an education, whereas the state has the obligation to wipe out illiteracy, run schools of various types, provide compulsory primary education, and develop post-compulsory (secondary, vocational, and post-secondary) education (National People's Congress, 2004, Articles 19 and 46). In 1986, the NPC codified the principle of equal educational opportunity, stipulating that all children over the age of six should receive compulsory EFA, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, race or physical condition (Articles 5 and 9). A decade later, the NPC (1996) passed the Vocational Education Law, recognizing the strategic importance of vocational education to labour, employment and economic and social development in China, ensuring citizens' right to vocational edu-

cation, and requiring the state to develop, reform and support vocational education, including in rural, remote and poverty-stricken areas (Articles 3, 5, and 7); in the Higher Education Law (1998), it stipulated that all citizens enjoy the right to higher education (Article 1). This law requires the state to help ethnic minorities and financially-disadvantaged students receive a higher education, and universities and colleges to admit disabled students who meet admission standards.

To extend the right of children and youths to education, China adopted a differential approach to educational development, expanding different levels of education at different stages. In the mid-1980s, China began pursuing EFA, because this could improve the quality of Chinese workers at the lowest and largest labour market stratum. In addition, China used two popularization strategies: regionalization by setting different goals and timelines for eastern/coastal, middle and western parts of the country; and devolution of major administrative and financial responsibilities to local governments. As a result, China achieved universal primary education in 2010, increasing net enrolment rates from 93% in 1980 to 99.1% (China Education Yearbook Editorial Team, 2011); that same year, it achieved universal junior secondary education, raising gross enrolment rates to 100%, up from 66.7% in 1990. In 2012, the overall EFA retention rate was 92% (Y. Liu, 2013). In other words, China instituted EFA ahead of the United Nations' millennium goal of all children able to complete a full course of primary schooling by 2015 (World Bank, 2002); moreover, it extended EFA to include junior secondary schooling, three years more than the UN called for.

In addition, China moved to equip youths to fill the middle and upper strata of the labour market by expanding post-EFA education – senior secondary and higher education – in the early and late 1990s, respectively. The number of new senior secondary students drastically increased from 4.8 million in 1990 to 8.1 million in 2000 and 15.9 million in 2010; higher education (including degree- and sub-degree programmes) enrolments rose from 0.6 million (7.2% of age cohort) in 1995 to 2.2 million (12.5%) in 2000 and 6.6 million (26.5%) in 2010 (Ministry of Education, 2011). According to Trow's (1970) criteria, Chinese higher education has shifted from an elitist orientation (enrolling below 15% of age cohort) to massification (15-50%). Senior secondary and higher education will further expand due to China's decision to increase gross admission rates to 90% and 40%, respectively, by 2020 (Communist Party of China Central Committee & State Council, 2010).



China's remarkable achievement in EFA, however, does not mean it has no dropout problem. In the 2000s, junior secondary dropout rates rose, particularly in some poor rural areas (Yi et al., 2012). Research shows three main types of dropout students: students with serious learning difficulties; students from extremely poor families, and students left behind in rural areas by parents who migrated to urban areas for work (L. Q. Li, 2013). As such, the central government asked local governments to increase EFA retention rates to 95% of age cohort by 2020, up from 91% in 2009 (Communist Party of China Central Committee & State Council, 2010).

Competition for higher education spaces remains acute, however. According to the UN Development Programme's (2013) Human Development Report, recent higher education enrolment rates in China are lower (25.9% of age cohort) than in the West (e.g., 94.8% in the United States, 58.5% in the United Kingdom) and in Asia and the Pacific (e.g., 75.9% in Australia, 59% in Japan). The same report ranked China 101st in human development among the UN member states.

EQUITY ISSUES CONFRONTING EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Chinese children and youths face issues at various levels, including widening regional education disparities and the marginalization in EFA and post-EFA of non-local children whose parents' household is registered elsewhere in China.

1. *Widening of Educational Disparities in EFA Between and Within Regions*

Since the implementation of EFA in the late 1990s, the focus of children's right to education has shifted from equal access to education to equity in education standards. The widening of intra- and extra-regional educational disparities, in terms of per student expenditures, teacher-student ratio, teacher qualifications and school conditions and facilities, (Project Team of a Case Study on Key Educational Policy in Transitional China, 2005) disadvantages students from poor areas or poor families, and is a matter of national concern.

This inequity can be interpreted as resulting from three main, inter-related problems. First, low public education expenditures; despite having promised to do so since the early 1990s, China did not raise public educa-

tion expenditure until 2012, and then only to 4% of GDP (about 20% of state expenditures) (Y. Liu, 2013) – on par with lower-middle income countries, but below the world average of 4.6% (World Bank, 2012). Second, uneven distribution of school financial resources, due to local governments' difficulties in generating revenue, particularly taxes, in different areas because of China's differential approach to economic development. Third, fee abuse; to augment low government subsidy rates, many schools asked parents to pay illegal sponsorship fees (based on school reputation) to ensure a school place, admitted students to elite classes with better teachers if their parents were willing to pay more, and charged for tutorial or supplementary lessons after school or during holidays (Law & Pan, 2009). As a result, inter- and intra-school disparities within and between regions widened, as did inequities in standards of education and student participation (Project Team of a Case Study on Key Educational Policy in Transitional China, 2005).

To address these equity issues, China introduced, in 2001, its “two exemptions and one subsidy” (*liangmian yibu*) policy, requiring the central government to buy the textbooks for students from poor families, exempting them from miscellaneous local fees and subsidizing their boarding expenses. In addition, the NPC (2006) revised the Compulsory Education Law, forbidding schools from levying miscellaneous fees or charging for tutorials, and asking central and provincial governments to take additional financial responsibility for EFA to ease financial burdens at the county or local levels. In the late 2000s, these two measures (among others), seemed to slow, slightly, the growth of educational disparities in four provinces (Shandong, Henan, Shaanxi and Gansu) (Zhai & Sun, 2012). Moreover, in the early 2010s, China piloted a nutrition scheme for 30 million students in 481 poor and 699 extremely poor counties, to improve the health of students in rural areas (Y. Liu, 2013). Despite these efforts, intra- and extra-regional disparities between schools remain a serious national concern, and the CPC Central Committee and State Council (2010) have called on central and local governments to reduce them significantly by 2020.

2. *Marginalization of Domestic Migrant Students' Rights to Local Public Education*

In the mid-1990s, the rights of domestic migrant students, whose parents' registered domicile was elsewhere in China, to EFA and post-EFA in host areas began to become a serious social concern, revealing an important gap in China's efforts to ensure people's rights to education. Although the



rights of migrant children and young people to EFA and post-EFA education are protected by national laws, the realization of these rights in host areas is localized, and constrained by national household registration policy and related measures.

Since the beginning of economic reform in the 1980s, the unequal national pace of modernization and urbanization has resulted in surplus rural labour and a wave of economically-driven domestic migration. In 2011, there were 230 million domestic migrants, about one-sixth of China's population (National Health and Family Planning Commission, 2012). Commonly, after settling in host areas, single migrant workers marry and have children, while some married migrant workers bring their children with them. Thus, the population of migrant children aged below 18 rose drastically, from 19.8 million in 2000 to 38 million in 2010 (Hua, 2007; Wu, 2012).

In the 1990s and early 2000s, migrant children were deprived of equal access to EFA in host areas, despite their parents' important economic contributions to those areas. Household registration regulations (National People's Congress Standing Committee, 1958) tie people's rights to political election, public education, and social welfare and public housing to their domicile registration; domestic migrants cannot exercise those rights unless they return to their original domicile. The policy also assigns local governments the administrative and financial responsibility for providing these rights to citizens whose registered domicile is in their jurisdiction.

The policy caused serious education problems for both migrant children and local governments in host areas. Public schools were very reluctant to enrol migrant students due to the lack of subsidy from host and source area governments. To compensate, they often charged migrant students a "school-place rental fee" (*jiedu fei*), while some schools, particularly famous ones, asked migrant parents to pay a sponsorship and/or school selection fee – in Beijing in the early 2000s, the former came to about RMB480 per term, while the latter reached RMB20,000-30,000 (L. Wang, 2008). Most migrant parents could not afford these fees on a monthly household income of between RMB800 and RMB1,500.

Thus, many migrant parents preferred to send their children to illegal, private schools with lower fees. These schools began to flourish in the 1990s, growing, in Beijing, from one school in 1993 to 241 schools in 2006, and providing places for nearly one-third of migrant children (Wen, 2007). However, most migrant-children schools employed unqualified headmasters and

teachers, had serious hygiene and fire safety problems, and had sub-standard facilities (Kwong, 2004; Law & Pan, 2009).

Many migrant parents could not afford tuition fees even in these illegal schools and kept their children home; in 1997, 14% of Beijing's 80,000 migrant children aged 6-15 were not in school (China National Children's Centre, 2003). Moreover, migrant children were further disadvantaged by their family's comparatively limited financial resources (Hua, 2007). Many migrant parents had less time to focus on their children's studies and had difficulty helping with homework because they worked long work and were not well-educated. Moreover, they had no extra money to support extracurricular activities or hire private tutors for examination drills.

In 2003, the State Council introduced an administrative measure requiring host area governments to provide eligible migrant children with equal opportunity to nine-year EFA, later codified in the 2006 revised Basic Education Law (National People's Congress, 2006, Article 12). In response, many local governments gradually abolished illegal private migrant-student schools, transferring many of their pupils to public schools. In 2011-12, 12.6 million migrant children were enrolled in nine-year compulsory public education: 9.3 million in primary and 3.3 million in junior secondary (Ministry of Education, 2012a). China has promised to enroll at least 90% of eligible migrant children in EFA in their host areas (All-China Women's Federation, 2013); however, this means a large portion of migrant children still cannot enjoy EFA in public schools for various reasons.

In the early 2010s, the problem of migrant children education began to extend into public senior secondary and higher education, to which they were not entitled in host areas. To deal with this, in 2012, four ministries jointly issued a circular asking local governments to allow migrant workers to take public examinations for admission to post-compulsory education in host areas (Ministry of Education, National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Public Security, & Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, 2012); in 2013, one municipality (Chongqing) and 11 provinces (of 31 administrative areas) agreed to allow eligible migrant students to sit college entrance examinations, with another 11 provinces expected to follow suit in 2014 and three more in 2015. Some local governments, however, set non-academic eligibility criteria for examinations, such as evidence of their parents' stable occupation and residence, and buying social insurance (a state-run, comprehensive insurance plan covering areas such as health and unemployment).



Four administrative areas (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong and Tianjin) did not show a strong desire to open up their public university education to migrant students. These areas have famous national universities and the largest population of migrant workers and their children; in Shanghai, for example, migrants make up 42% of the local population (10 million). Beijing's migrant student admission criteria are the harshest of the four; beginning in 2014, migrant students will have access to tertiary vocational/technical institutes offering sub-degree programmes, but not to universities degree programs (Beijing Municipal Government, 2012). Underlying these responses is a subtle issue – how to ensure and balance the rights of local and migrant children and youth in highly-mobilized China. Stringent non-academic criteria likely reduce migrant students' admissibility and ability to compete equally with local students, whereas low non-academic criteria likely invite an influx of migrant students into local higher education to the disadvantage of local students.

EMPLOYMENT

Since the 1980s, economic reform in the PRC has changed the nature of the youth labour market from one that is centrally-planning to one that is market oriented, determined by supply and demand. This has led to new employer/employee relationships and problems, and has caused serious youth employment issues in urban and rural areas across the country. To tackle these new challenges, China has legislated employment rights for workers (including youths) in the emerging market economy, expanded post-EFA education to delay youths' entry into the labour market, and allowed rural youth (and adult) workers to look for jobs in urban areas. The implementation of these measures, however, revealed the inadequacy of legislation protecting workers' rights and created new employment problems, such as intensified job competition among post-EFA graduates and structural and social discrimination against youth migrant workers in the labour market and society.

SHIFT IN THE LABOUR MARKET FROM CENTRALLY- PLANNED TO MARKET-ORIENTED

Formerly, the Chinese state overwhelmingly controlled the means of production and allocation of resources, and was almost the country's sole employ-



er. Youth employment was not a major problem because after graduation, students were guaranteed jobs based on state needs and plans; in this way, youth unemployment was hidden. For example, during the Cultural Revolution (1967 – 1976), millions of urban youth were sent to work in the countryside as “a shortcut to solving employment pressure and possible youthful resistance” arising from the closure of schools and universities (Yan & Gao, 1996, p. 281).

When the market economy began to take root in the early 1990s and the state sector of the labour market contracted, youth employment in urban and rural areas became a serious national problem. Many urban state-owned enterprises and factories were downsized or even privatized and numerous state workers laid off, and the state stopped arranging jobs for school or college graduates (except those who had received professional scholarships or who had been specifically recruited by, for example, military universities). On the other hand, the private sector labour market bloomed and numerous private enterprises were established and became new employers. People, including school leavers or college graduates, were allowed to choose and compete for employers, and *vice versa*. This diversified and complicated employment relationships, and generated new relations and conflicts among the state, workers and employers in the labour market.

YOUTH'S EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR RIGHTS

Before the 1980s, the PRC enacted few specific labour rights laws; by the 1990s, however, youth and young adult employment and labour rights had begun to be recognized and protected through legislation. In 1983, the PRC began to be active in the International Labour Organization (ILO) and to increase its efforts to protect labour rights. In the 1990s, China began to change its role from labour market monopoliser to macro-regulator, using law to guide the transition from central planning to a market economy, and to address problems and issues arising during the transition. The NPC Standing Committee (1994) promulgated the Labour Law, covering all employers and employees, including youths, and incorporating important international labour standards.

Firstly, the PRC forbade child labour, adopting the ILO's (1973, 1999) conventions on child labour and minimum age. While the 1986 Compulsory Education Law ensured children's free access to EFA, the 1994 Labour Law



defined 16, the age of most EFA graduates, as the minimum employment age. The PRC also enacted special measures protecting the safety and health of employed minors, aged 16-18 (*wei chengnian gong*), through the Ministry of Labour's (1994) Regulations on Special Protection for Minor Workers; for example, minors have to obtain State Council approval before finding employment. Hazardous occupations such as mining were not allowed to employ minors, and employers are required to provide minor workers with pre-employment vocational training and occupational safety and health education, provide health checks before and after one year of employment, and adjust the amount and/or type of their work, if necessary.

Secondly, the PRC protected youth and adult labour rights by ratifying ILO (1951, 1958, 1981) conventions on pay equity, discrimination, and occupational safety and health. The 1994 Labour Law of China mandates workers' freedom to choose their occupation, equal opportunity for employment and promotion (regardless of ethnicity, gender or religion), pay equity, and occupational safety and health. Together with the 1992 Trade Unions Law (National People's Congress, 2001), it gives workers the freedom to join and organize trade unions. To protect employee health, the Labour Law limits work hours to not more than eight hours a day or 44 hours per week, and limits overtime to not more than one hour a day in normal circumstances, or three hours a day or 36 hours per month in special circumstances. The Labour Law also follows the spirit of the ILO's (1921) Weekly Rest Convention, stipulating that employees are legally entitled to weekly rest days and leave on public holidays, such as first day of a year, spring festivals, and National Day (1 October).

Thirdly, the PRC began to promote contracts to further govern relationships between employers and employees and regulate both parties' practices and behaviours. The 1994 Labour Law follows the spirit of the ILO's (1949) convention on contracts, and requires employer and employee to conclude a labour contract wherein a labour relationship is established. The legal status of contracts in the socialist market economy was reinforced by the enactment of the Labour Contract Law, which stipulates contract contents and process, the contractual rights and obligations of employers and employees, and the conditions and procedure for contract termination, including layoff (National People's Congress Standing Committee, 2007). It also highlights the importance of the law, fairness, equality, consent, integrity and trust in concluding a contract, forbids compulsory overtime, requires employers

to pay employees for overtime, and does not allow employers to dismiss employees who are pregnant or sick during their contract period. The law was later revised to prevent discrimination against “temporary workers”, stipulating equal remuneration for equal work by temporary and regular employees (National People’s Congress Standing Committee, 2012).

Despite these legal efforts, the PRC has been criticized as having poor record of protecting labour rights (Q. Yang, 2006). According to the ILO (2013), the PRC ratified 25 (of nearly 190) ILO conventions, with 22 in force, as of early 2013. Trade unions are required to uphold the CPC’s leadership and its policies (National People’s Congress, 2001, Article 4). Chinese workers have no right to strike or to collective bargaining, and may only join or organize trade unions that fall within the monopoly of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (Julie, 2010). Finally, penal forced labour still exists; for example, in 2009, about 190,000 inmates were interred in 320 labor camps (Yu, 2013).

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROBLEMS

Youth employment is a thorny international issue, with the global youth unemployment rate rising from 11.9% in 2007 to 13% in 2009 (United Nations, 2010). It has also long been a pressing issue in the PRC; in the late 1970s and early 1980s, 20 million people in urban areas were unemployed (H. S. Li, 2008). Officially, unemployment among youths aged 16-24 dropped from 6.3% in 2000, to 3.7% in 2010 (Population Census Office under the State Council & National Bureau of Statistics, 2001, 2011a), falling below global averages. Some studies, however, suggest China’s actual youth unemployment rate could be higher – 35.3% of the urban 16-24 age cohort in 1997, and 9% of the 15-29 national age cohort in 2005 (S. L. Zhang, 2010). In addition to revitalizing local economies to create jobs, and allowing self-employment and private businesses, China used, in the 1990s, two main strategies to ease youth employment: expanding post-EFA education and allowing the large-scale domestic migration of youth labour, particularly those with junior or senior secondary education qualifications. These solutions, however, gave rise to new problems.

1. *Keen Competition of Post-EFA Graduates for Jobs in the High-end Labour Market*

The first strategy was to delay the entry of young people into the labour market by educating them for as long as possible; to that end, and also to



enhance Chinese workers' ability to compete globally, in the 1990s China expanded senior secondary and higher education. In 2011, this kept 15.9 million junior secondary graduates and 6.6 million senior secondary graduates in school for from three to seven additional years. The strategy, however, could only delay, not resolve, youth employment problems.

In the early 2000s, employment problems faced by highly qualified youths began to emerge in urban areas. The expansion of post-EFA education had intensified employment competition among graduates, as there were fewer new jobs created in the high-end labour market than there were post-EFA graduates. In the 1990s, there were 7.5 million degree- and sub-degree graduates, equalling about 10% of the 76 million new jobs created in the same period; in the 2000s, although the number of new jobs nearly doubled, to 130 million, the number of graduates more than quadrupled, increasing labour market competition (R. W. Hu, Zhang & Zhu, 2013). Graduates from the Humanities (including Arts, History, Philosophy, Law and Education) are less likely to get jobs, as China's economic reform and urbanization has created a greater demand for Business Administration, Engineering and Science graduates. Moreover, due in part to lower unit training costs, the number of Humanities graduates increased five-fold from 2002 to 2010, compared to a three-fold increase among non-Humanities graduates; the labour market could not accommodate the glut (C. M. Zhang, 2013).

Second, post-EFA graduates often take jobs that do not reflect their aspirations. Many plan to work in first-tier cities like Beijing or Shanghai, but have to choose between taking white-collar employment elsewhere or blue-collar work in the big cities. Between 1990 and 2010, the number of workers with senior secondary or college qualifications in white-collar occupations grew from 11 million to 52 million, while those in blue-collar occupations rose from just over 1 million to 23.5 million (R. W. Hu et al., 2013).

Third, graduation does not guarantee employment; statistics say 21.8% of graduates in 2010 were unemployed, up from 20.4% of graduates in 2001 (National Bureau of Statistics & Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, 2011). In 2002, 44% of unemployed graduates had college qualifications and 26% had senior secondary qualifications (S. L. Zhang, 2010); these unemployed graduates are not covered by social security (S. L. Zhang, 2010), and many are a financial burden on their family.

The 1990s expansion of EFA education helped the PRC increase the quantity and quality of workers for the high-end labour market, and temporarily

ease youth employment problems. This stopgap strategy, however, cannot resolve long-term employment problems facing youths when they finally enter the labour market. Indeed, educational expansion has led to new youth unemployment problems and reflects the failure of manpower planning in China to link educational expansion to labour market needs. In developed or developing countries, lack of opportunities for employment and social mobility can foster youth dissatisfaction and social unrest (World Economic Forum, 2012). To avoid this, Chinese authorities need to be increasingly sensitive to changing labour market needs, review its policy and planning in education and manpower, and adjust the supply of post-EFA graduates and create jobs for them.

2. *Large-scale Domestic Migration of Labour Force in the Low-end Labour Market*

China's second strategy to ease employment problems, since the 1980s, has involved allowing surplus labour, particularly in rural areas, to move to urban or more developed areas between and within provinces, despite the household registration policy. This has led to an unprecedented, large-scale domestic migration of workers and significantly increased youths' geographical mobility and employment opportunities in the national low-end labour market, particularly for those with primary or secondary education qualifications. However, they still face unequal treatment and discrimination in the labour market and society.

The domestic migration population is marked by three major features. First, its growth is rapid and substantial, expanding from 70 million in 1993, to 144 million in 2000 and 230 million in 2011 (National Health and Family Planning Commission, 2012). Youths account for a significant portion of the migrant population; about 30% were aged 15-24 in 2000, and 45% aged below 30 in 2010 (Gao, Cui & Chen, 2011). Second, geographically, about 80% domestic migration in 2011 flowed from rural to urban areas within and between provinces, and from western and middle regions (Anhui, Henan, and Hunan) to coastal regions (Guangdong, Zhejiang, Shanghai, Beijing, Jiangsu, and Fujian). Third, migrant workers often move from the primary sector (e.g., agriculture and fisheries) to secondary and tertiary sectors (e.g., unskilled workers, technical workers, and the service industry) (Song, 2010).

Between the 1980s and 2000s, there were major changes in the young migrant worker population, creating what some scholars (e.g., C. G. Wang, 2001) refer to as two generations. The first generation included those who



became migrant workers from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s. A majority of these had received primary education at best, no vocational training, and were separated from their parents, who stayed in their rural areas. The second generation became migrant workers after the mid-1990s and were better educated, because EFA had been a fact in China since 1986. For example, in 2012, 18.3% of the 6.2 million migrant workers in Chongqing Municipality had primary education, compared to 56.3% with junior secondary and 25.4% with senior secondary (Z. Q. Liu, 2013). Although their households were registered in rural areas, a significant portion of second-generation migrant workers were born, raised and lived in urban areas. Compared to their parents, they have more ability and opportunity for development, but are less hardworking and persevering (Zhu, 2010).

Despite their contribution to the economy of host areas and China as a whole, migrant workers face unequal treatment and discrimination that prevents them from integration into local communities. In the labour market, many migrant workers take jobs locals are reluctant to do, and receive lower pay than their local counterparts for the same type and amount of work. Many migrant workers often are forced to work long hours and have less job security. In 2011, the average migrant worked 54.6 hours per week (above the legal limit of 44 hours) and over 30% did not have an employment contract as required by law (National Health and Family Planning Commission, 2012). Migrant workers' employment rights are further reduced by their weak bargaining power, the fact that the supply of migrant labour exceeds market demands, weak enactment and enforcement of laws protect migrant employees, low awareness among migrant workers of their legal rights, insufficient legal aid, and a lack of NGOs to help workers fight for their rights (Song, 2010).

Many youth and adult migrant workers face social discrimination as well as employment barriers, and are largely marginalized in Chinese society (Murphy & Fong, 2006). First, because of the household registration policy, migrant workers (and their children) are not entitled to the same rights and benefits as local citizens. Second, migrant workers are often discriminated against for their accents, life styles and habits, which differ from local people's. Third, migrant workers often do not have a strong sense of belonging to their host areas; in 2011, 35% of migrant workers had not attended any social activities and fewer than 10% participated in elections or local competitions (National Health and Family Planning Commission, 2012). Psychologically, many migrant workers, particularly younger ones, are not happy because of poor work-

ing and living conditions, declining real income, and a dichotomy between their expected and actual career achievements (Knight & Gunatilaka, 2010). To many migrant workers, their host areas are mainly places for earning a living, rather than pursuing social commitment and integration.

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

In addition to education and the labour market, China's policy of reform and opening to the world brought significant changes to Chinese youths' political and social participation. Before the 1980s, youth social and political participation was often politically-driven, as when Mao Zedong turned over 10 million high school and college students into militant Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution (1966 – 1976) (Clark, 2012). After the 1970s, China continued to recruit and engage children and youths in CPC activities in schools and workplaces nationwide. The space for youth political participation is still constrained by structural inequalities that favour those with CPC membership, but the potential for youth social participation has been broadened by the emergence of civil society and the dramatic expansion of cyberspace.

ENGAGEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CPC'S POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

To consolidate its leadership, the Chinese state has long engaged children and youth in social and political activities arranged by the CYP and CCYL, which penetrate campuses and workplaces, targeting different groups for similar political purposes – to reinforce their members' affiliation and identification with the CPC.

The CYP focuses on student work in primary and junior secondary schools. According to its constitution, the CYP is led by the CCYL; it is the “school” in which children aged 6-14 (i.e., grade 1-9 students) learn about communism and are prepared to become “builders of socialist undertakings” (China Young Pioneers National Congress, 2005). In their swearing-in ceremony, CYP members are required to pledge their love and support for the CPC. They are entitled to wearing the CYP's red league scarf; almost all students wear this scarf. In CYP formal activities on campus, student members are required to sing their anthem *We are the Successors of Communism* and be “al-



ways ready” to strive for communist undertakings when asked. The CYP also organizes social activities in which children participate in local community services, donate books and stationery, or offer environmental protection. To strengthen the CYP’s work on campus, in September, 2012, the Ministry of Education (2012b) made CYP activities state-mandated, compulsory activities in grades 1-8, requiring schools to arrange class time for CYP lessons.

Unlike the CYP, the CCYL targets young people in senior secondary schools, universities and the workplace. According to its constitution, the CCYL is the CPC’s “assistant and reserve force” and its “advanced youth group organization”. It recruits members between the ages of 14 and 28. From 2002 to 2012, CCYL membership increased by about 30%, from 69.9 million to 89.9 million (L. H. Li, 2013); in 2012, the CCYL had a larger membership than the CPC (85.1 million). The CCYL is very penetrative in society; in 2008, CCYL members accounted for 26% (78.6 million) of the youth population (Y. J. Li, 2009). More than half (51%) were senior secondary or higher education students, 27% were farmers and primary industry workers, 7% were secondary industry workers, and 15% were tertiary workers or from other industries. Similar to their CYP counterparts, CCYL members need to pledge love and support for the CPC. Their major duties include: studying CPC-prescribed political theories, such as Marxism-Leninism and the theories of China’s national leaders; helping disseminate and implement the CPC’s party line and various policies; implementing CCYL decisions and policies; receiving national defence education; and helping other young people and reflecting their views and requests to the CPC.

Because of its political mission and special status in the CPC, the CCYL has been a cradle and training school for Chinese leaders and a strong political counterbalance to other CPC factions. Before assuming their provincial or state posts, many Chinese leaders and officials occupied important CCYL leadership posts, including Hu Yaobang (CPC General Secretary, 1982 – 1987), Hu Jintao (CPC General Secretary, 2002 – 2013; President of China, 2003 – 2013), and three of the five new cabinet members appointed to the State Council in March, 2013: Premier Li Keqiang, Vice-Premiers Liu Yandong and Wang Yang.

STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES CONFRONTING YOUTHS’ POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The PRC is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, but has not ratified it yet. On paper, Chinese youths are constitution-



ally entitled to freedom of religion, speech, publication, assembly, association, procession and demonstration (National People's Congress, 2004). Regardless of race, gender, religion or socioeconomic status, citizens aged 18 or above also have the constitutional right to vote and stand for election. Similar to their adult counterparts, Chinese youths, however, confront structural inequalities when participating in the existing political system, which favours individuals with CPC membership; party membership is important political capital among Chinese youths.

On the one hand, Chinese youths cannot form their own political parties without state approval. At its founding in 1949, the PRC officially recognized nine political parties: the CPC and eight others; since then, no new political parties have been allowed to form and, if they seek political affiliation, Chinese youths must join one of the recognized political parties. Moreover, political discussion, publication or gatherings deemed a challenge to the CPC's leadership is often suppressed, and political activists involved could be prosecuted and jailed for subverting state power and the socialist system. This limits the scope of Chinese youths' political activities to those acceptable to the CPC.

On the other hand, the differential treatment afforded the CPC and other political parties draws Chinese youths to the former. Firstly, the CPC is the largest political party in the PRC (and the world). Despite the global decline of socialism in the late 1980s and 1990s, CPC membership increased from about 28 million in 1973 to over 85.1 million (over 6% of China's population) in 2012 (Zhou, 2013), 25.6% of whom were aged 35 or younger. The CPC overwhelmingly outnumbers all non-CPC political parties, which had a total of fewer than 700,000 members in 2007 (State Council, 2007). Secondly, in the Chinese political structure, the CPC is positioned as the core of the leadership and the ruling party, while the others are "participating parties" (*canzheng dang*) that may "participate in and deliberate on state affairs" but still fall under the CPC's leadership (State Council, 2007).

Thirdly, CPC membership can be an important asset for young people pursuing a political career. Chinese citizens aged 18 or older may vote in direct elections of people's congresses at the village, township or district level; representatives to higher people's congresses are chosen through indirect election. The results of these elections are seldom a surprise; CPC members dominate people's congresses at all levels, and only CPC members (*i.e.*, about 6% of population) can hold top leadership positions, such as president, premier,



and chairperson of the NPC. Successful candidates for these three posts are first internally elected within the CPC, mainly through indirect elections at various levels, before being nominated to, and “endorsed” and appointed by, the NPC. In other words, existing Chinese political institutions and practices deprive members of other political parties and members without political affiliation any opportunity to become state leaders.

EXPANSION OF YOUTHS’ SOCIAL PARTICIPATION IN CIVIL SOCIETY AND CYBERSPACE

Despite structural constraints on political participation, the public space for Chinese youths with or without CPC membership to discuss and participate in social and public affairs has grown in the PRC since the 1980s. This can be partly attributed to the impact of social changes, the emergence of civil society and the rapid expansion of cyberspace.

Firstly, Chinese youths are increasingly aware of their rights and freedoms. Compared to their parents, most Chinese youths are more educated due to the success of EFA and post-EFA education, and live in a more affluent and pluralist society. Because they grew up amidst economic and social changes arising from the 1978 policy of reform and opening to the world, many young people are more pragmatic and less idealistic; have a stronger sense of competition and awareness of their personal rights and freedoms; lead a more diversified lifestyle in terms of friends, job choices, and consumption behaviours; and tend to choose their personal development and social participation based on personal preferences (H. S. Li, 2008; X. Yang, 2012). This description is certainly not a full picture of Chinese youths, and one can expect a lot of variations between individual youths. It does, however, offer a rough overview of Chinese youths.

Secondly, the emergence of civil society as an autonomous sphere for public discourse and participation (McCormick, 1996) has provided new space in which Chinese youths may pursue their ideals, rights and freedoms. After China’s attitude towards civil society gradually changed from suppression to tolerance in the 1980s (Law, 2011), the number of officially recognized NGOs rose from 154,000, in 2000, to 462,000, in 2011 (Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2001, 2012), in areas ranging from social services to environmental protection. In 2007, 34% of people who served and participated in NGOs were younger than 35 (Su, 2011). A survey shows that, through such participation, youths en-



hance their social awareness and participation, develop social resources and networks, and facilitate the growth of civil society (Su, 2011).

Moreover, youths can be a major source of volunteer services for local communities and international events (such as the 2008 Beijing Olympics and 2010 Shanghai World Exposition). They can also be a strong civic force striving for rights through demonstration. Although criticized for their lack of interest in politics (e.g., discussing political topics), many young people may suddenly gather together and participate in large-scale social demonstrations (He & Huang, 2011). It is not uncommon for Chinese youths to participate in protests against local government that attempt land grabs, or approve the construction of petrochemical plants that might cause local environment pollution.

Thirdly, the public space for Chinese youths' social discussion and participation has been broadened by the rapid expansion of cyberspace and of information and communication technologies (ICT). Since the first email was sent, in 1987, Internet and mobile-phone use in China has grown quickly. According to the China Internet Network Information Center (2013), the number of Chinese netizens increased from 111 million (8.5% of China's 2005 population) to 564 million (42.1%) in 2012, while the number of Internet-connected mobile phone users rose from 50 million (24% of netizens) in 2007 to 420 million (74.5%) in 2012. In 2012, nearly 50% of netizens were children or youths (24% aged 10-19 and 30.4% aged 20-29) and 25.1% were students. Netizen's top ten Internet usages were: instant messaging (83%); information search (80%); internet music (77%); blogs (66%); internet videos (66%); internet games (60%); microblogs (55%); social networking (49%); email (45%); and, internet shopping (43%). The PRC also had 309 million microblog accounts; 55% of microbloggers post using the Web, while 66% use internet-connected mobile phones (China Internet Network Information Center, 2013). Many Chinese youths use microblogs to express and communicate their views on important national and local issues, and to mobilize actions reflecting their concerns or dissatisfaction.

Fourthly, cyberspace can be an alternative platform in which many Chinese youths can practise direct election. Although they cannot directly choose their national leaders, youths can directly vote, with the help of ICT, for their favourite songs and popular music idols, as when the Chinese public selected Li Yuchun as the winner of the 2005 nationwide singing contest, Super Girls, modelled after American Idol. On the night of the finale, some eight million



SMS (short message service) votes were casted, with Li winning by more than 3.5 million votes (Jakes, 2005). In the same year, Li was named one of Asia's heroes in a special issue of *Times (Asia) Magazine*. Her success in the competition was attributed partly to her fans' continuous efforts to promote her singles and albums on the Internet, and casting 'spoiler votes' on webpages for different music charts (L. Yang, 2009). The contest was commended by Li (2008) for adopting important principles of democratic election: equal opportunity for participation and the adoption of an open, fair and just voting procedure. To some extent, election in a non-political arena serves as a good teaching example of democratic election for the Chinese polity.

CONCLUSION

With reference to the PRC, the article has demonstrated that youth education, work and citizenship can be influenced by changing domestic and global contexts, and that the state can play a vital role in facilitating these changes in three major spheres of youth. In the PRC, the 1978 policy of reform and opening to the world brought forth significant domestic economic and social changes and exposed China and its people to the world. All this, in turn, created new demands and concerns for the development of youth education, work and citizenship.

The PRC's need to reform its declining economy and increase its international competitiveness, as shown earlier, required more and better Chinese manpower; this, therefore, helped increase Chinese youths' access to EFA and post-EFA education. The economic reforms also forced the PRC to change its labour market from centrally planned to market oriented, and to create an opening for youths and employers to choose each other. Common to China's efforts to address youth education and employment needs was its use of law to protect youth rights by codifying important principles or norms promoted by the international community, despite the fact that more could and should be incorporated. To reify these rights, China expanded its education by stages (the EFA in late 1980s and post-EFA education in the 1990s) and introduced measures to regulate the new relationships and problems arising from the new market-oriented labour market.

In the PRC, youth education and employment are confronted by various challenges, including large-scale domestic migration, a challenge expected



to persist for decades, as China's migrant population is expected to reach 350 million in 2050 (National Health and Family Planning Commission, 2012). Such migration is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it has helped China ease youth and young adult employment problems nationwide, turning them into a strong labour force and boosting the economy of host areas and China as a whole. It is also an essential means by which Chinese people enhance their employment opportunities and improve their quality of living. Young people are the foundation of China's future economy and an essential source of migrant labour.

On the other hand, the large-scale migration reveals deep-seated problems concerning the localization of important national rights to education and other social welfares in an increasingly mobilized Chinese society. In places outside their registered domicile in China, migrant workers and their children are often treated, structurally and socially, as second-class citizens, and are not entitled to receive the same social welfares, mainly provided and supported by host governments, as their local counterparts. To mitigate this kind of structural discrimination, China needs to step up its efforts to ensure equal rights for all its citizens wherever they are in China. To this end, China could reconsider, for example, delinking entitlements from household registration and making related structural and financial rearrangements between the central and local governments to facilitate the delinking, such as opening public secondary and higher education in host areas to migrant students, and fostering social integration and mutual understanding between migrants and locals.

Compared to education and work, China has adopted far fewer international norms and practices to enhance youths' political and social participation. With a view to consolidating and sustaining CPC leadership, China has emphasised political work on campus and in the workplace, and reserved top national leadership posts to CPC members. In contrast, regardless of their political affiliation, the space Chinese youth have for direct social involvement and participation in local and national communities and affairs has been enhanced by the state's toleration of the expansion of both civil society and cyberspace. As such, Chinese youths and others are caught in a growing dilemma between limited political participation and increasing expansion of social participation.

A question that might worry China is, when will the widening discrepancy between political and social participation become a national political tide



demanding giving the Chinese polity equal opportunity for participation and competition in political elections? It is very difficult to separate completely political and social spaces. Although it remains to be seen whether the popularization of ICT will increase Chinese netizens' political participation to such an extent that it could "ignite a prairie fire of revolutionary, democratic change", it has already helped create "new spaces for individual self-expression and interest-group mobilization" (Leibold, 2011, p. 1036). Exposure to and participation in cyberspace could help Chinese youths acquire more knowledge about the concepts of equality, freedom, democracy and human rights (H. S. Li, 2008). Despite China's strong cyber-censorship, the popularization of ICT has helped turn Chinese netizens, including millions of youths, into a new powerful civic force by providing them with a broader and more convenient platform for expressing and discussing views on government policies and current national and local issues and affairs, and an efficient tool for calling for social action and protests. As increasing numbers of Chinese youths and adults participate in civil society and cyberspace, how to make the Chinese political system fairer, more open, and more just in the competition for political power, regardless of political affiliation, is an important challenge for China in the 21st century.

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