

# The Schooling Structure of China and the U.S.

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## ABSTRACT

There is a clear contrast between China and the United States in the decentralized and centralized management of education. Education in China is uniformly managed by the government with centralized power. The United States has the right to develop its educational systems. Each country's own education management system has a far-reaching and long-lasting impact on its talent training. A series of reforms to the education system is not broken and rebuilt, but updated in the original system, using more effective and faster ways and functions to operate and improve the quality of education. This article aimed to stand in the cultural background of China and the United States. The study should, therefore, be of value to practitioners wishing to introduce and study progressive education methods, paying attention to basic education and practical performance and promoting educational equity.

**Keywords:** *Chinese and the United States Education, Education reform, Education system*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

For decades, education reform has become a serious matter for countries. In 2013, Xi Jinping, president of the CPC Central Committee, attended the 100th celebration meeting of the Western Returned Scholars Association and pointed out "Competition for comprehensive national strength is, in the end, competition for talents." As the primary resource of economic and social development, the characteristics and role of human resources are becoming more and more obvious, and talent competition has become the core of comprehensive national strength competition. Whoever can train and attract more outstanding talents will have an advantage in the competition. Great changes have been taken place in the education reform in various countries, and their respective countries have actively adjusted the principles and policies for training talents according to their own talent needs.

There is a clear contrast between China and the United States in terms of decentralized and centralized management of education. Education in China is uniformly managed by the government with centralized power. Since the founding of New China, the national government has systematized the contemporary education system, and China has made many achievements in the field of education. By 1985, the State Council had held the first National Conference on Education since Economic Reform and open up, issued

the Decision of the CPC Central Committee on the Reform of the Education System, which pointed out that "education must serve socialist construction, and socialist construction must rely on education". At the same time, it proposed to popularize nine-year compulsory education, from now on, China's education would enter the right path [1]. It can be seen that since the founding of new China, China's education has made steady progress. The United States occupies a place in the world's education. Decentralized management of power and unified government jurisdiction are the most obvious differences between American education management and Chinese education management. Schools in the United States are divided into public and private. Each branch of the education management system, such as the federal government, state government, private certification institutions, and local schools, has different responsibilities. American colleges have a large amount of autonomy and independence to decide their educational issues, such as the appointment of professors, recruitment of students, major adjustment, curriculum, financial expenditure [2]. To improve the quality of American education and solve the problems existing in schools, the U.S. Department of Education implemented the race to the top policy in November 2009, which has largely stimulated the reform of American education and made a breakthrough in practice. The country has obtained new practical educational achievements in this reform. Therefore, it can be shown that the differences in educational policies

between China and the United States are related to the country's historical background, social needs, and cultural differences.

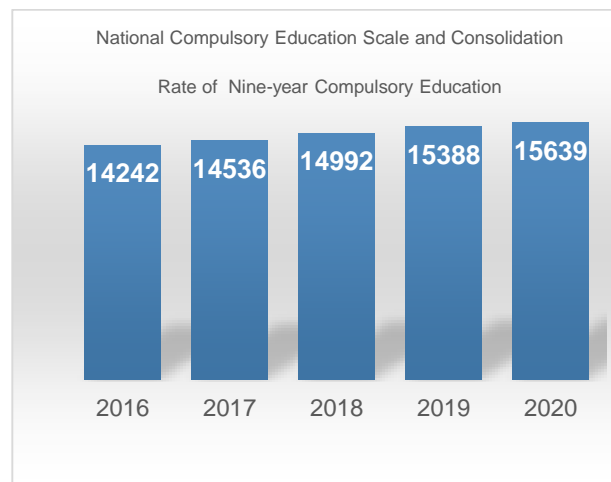
This paper was divided into four main parts. First, we briefly outlined the history of the development of the Chinese education system, which has a long history and disruptive leaps in Chinese education. We describe how Nine-year Compulsory Education has changed and facilitated education in western China. Thirdly, we described the educational framework of the United States and the impact of Obama's "Race to the Top" plan. Finally, we indirectly explained the admissions process of the United States universities, taking the University of California as an example.

**2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHINESE EDUCATION SYSTEM**

The development of China's education management system is inextricably linked to the foundations laid by Confucianism in the ancient Shang and Zhou periods. The education system in China is under the unified management of a powerful centralized government. The concept of centralized powers starts from the perspective of collectivism which believes that a group is the unit of society and the foundation of general value. Society is composed of groups, while individuals are only a part of groups, and they must subordinate to the interests of groups [3].

The Chinese education system was influenced by historical education history in China. In the early days of the Zhou Dynasty, a very strict system of rites and music came into being. Since the Han Dynasty, the Confucianism of Confucius and Mencius has become the orthodox ideas of China's feudality. The idea of teaching learners without division of classes has driven forward the reform of the contemporary education system in China substantially [4]. On April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1986, the Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China was promulgated in China. It is a policy that not only reflects the rapid development of education cause in China but also embodies China's determination in giving priority to education. Compulsory education is a fundamental education policy implemented in China uniformly, which all school-age children and parents have to face it. The unified management of the education of school-age children by the central government has greatly facilitated the popularization of nine-year compulsory education. By 2011, all provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities) in China had passed the acceptance of the 'popularization of nine-year compulsory education. That is to say, it took 25 years to fully popularize nine-year compulsory education in China since the promulgation of the Compulsory Education

Law of the People's Republic of China in 1986. According to the Statistical Bulletin of National Education Development in 2018, the retention rate of nine-year compulsory education in China reached 94.2%, and the popularization of basic education benefited hundreds of millions of students, with the cultural quality of the whole nation leaping to a new level [5]. The promulgation of nine years of compulsory education in China led to a great leap forward in the spread of education across the country. The exemption of all kinds of school fees at the compulsory education stage solved the problem at its root for more families in financial difficulties.



**Figure 1.** National Compulsory Education Scale and Consolidation Rate of Nine-year Compulsory Education

According to Figure 1, with the promulgation and implementation of compulsory education in China, the national compulsory education scale and consolidation rate of nine-year compulsory education has continued to rise year by year, reaching 156.39 million in 2020.

**3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION IN WESTERN CHINA**

The nine-year compulsory education policy was enacted to breathe new life into the already scarce educational resources of the western region. The Chinese government's management of the development of compulsory education is characterized by the balanced development of compulsory education among different regions in China, among different schools in the same region, and different groups in the same school. Therefore, it can be seen that this measure can vastly enhance the cultural quality of the nation and eliminate illiteracy in a real sense. From the perspective of the educational development in different regions, the popularization of compulsory education by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China has helped the backward education in western China to a

great extent. The western area of China is vast, but the local population density is small [6]. For a long time, due to the influences of climate, geology, inconvenient transportation, and behindhand economy, the development level of higher education in the western region is relatively backward [7].

The intensive popularization of compulsory education in China has largely overcome the factor of unbalanced education development, which is helpful to the development of basic subjects in western China to some extent. Taking the development of western China as an example, before the uniform popularization of compulsory education law by the government, there were high as 95% of people who have not received an education, with an enrollment rate of 2% only [8]. With years of education development, the implementation of compulsory education has been comprehensively promoted, and a perfect education system has been built. In 2000, the Ministry of Education successively issued the Ten Measures to Support Education Development in the Western Region and the Rules for Implementing Certain Policies on Education in the Western Region; the Action Plan for Revitalizing Education for the 21st Century, the Action Plan for Revitalizing Education from 2003 to 2007, the National Education Development Plan for the 10th Five-Year Plan and the Outline of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan for the Development of Education in the Western Region, all of which give important priority to supporting the development of education in the western region. In 2004, the Ministry of Education and the Western Office of the State Council jointly issued the "Plan for the Development of Education in the Western Region from 2004 to 2010", which further put forward the strategic objectives and major initiatives to achieve a new leap in education in the western region. In 2004, the Ministry of Education and the Western Office of the State Council jointly released the 2004-2010 Education Development Plan for the Western Region, which further proposed strategic goals and major initiatives to achieve a new leap in education in the western region [9]. It can be found that if a country centralizes the management of education in the country or even has targeted long-term solutions for the regions with weak education access, the percentage of illiteracy in the country will be significantly reduced and the overall quality of students will be improved. China is a country with a large population, and the introduction of the Nine-year Compulsory Education Policy is a fundamental means to cut educational inequity, accelerate the modernization process, and narrow the gap with developed countries, which is of great strategic importance and is beneficial for China without any disadvantages. By focusing on education in remote areas and vigorously popularising and promoting education, China's overall education penetration will slowly rise dramatically, and improving

the quality of national education will start at the grassroots level.

#### **4. THE EDUCATION REFORM IN THE UNITED STATES**

Each state in the United States have their autonomy to regulate education and a series of educational reforms have been introduced to better stimulate the quality of education. The various states in the United States have the right to enforce their education regulations without violating the policies of the government. Compared with the Confucian educational ideologies in China, the educational concept in the United States is more inclined to be a diversified and integrated one. The federal constitution is the fundamental law of the United States. The states shall abide by the federal constitution and state constitution when formulating laws applicable to education. Education is a state responsibility and not a national one. After the American Revolutionary War, each state controlled the right to education in its region. The United States Congress passed the education policy "No Child Left Behind Act" of 2001, the act emphasized every child has the same rights to education. The United States government invested \$5.4 billion and promulgated a national competition called Race To The Top in 2009 [10].

The purpose was to promote education reforms in each state, upgrading national basic education and achieving the transition from fair educational opportunity to fair educational results. One of the most important long-term effects of "Race To The Top" will thus likely be continuing the trend toward greater centralization of education responsibility and policymaking at the state level [11]. The United States government has established uniform education reform provisions, The number of schools that need to be reformed varies greatly from state to state. Obama urged every state to adopt more rigorous education standards, especially in reading and math, and to expand and reformulate federal student aid programs. Obama also made a point of telling students that no matter how innovative schools are or how effective teachers are at teaching, the United States cannot succeed if students themselves are not held accountable for their education. And being responsible for themselves means attending class on time, paying attention in class, seeking extra tutoring when necessary, and staying away from boredom. He also stressed that no student should consider dropping out of school, which is no longer an option, not only for themselves but for the United States [12].

"No Child Left Behind Act" explicitly requires school districts and schools in various States to formulate relevant programs aimed at improving the quality of teachers and promote the implementation of relevant measures promptly. At the same time, the law

also defines the minimum growth rate of high-quality teachers and the proportion of teachers receiving training in each state. If the school district and school fail to achieve the development goal of high-quality teachers for two consecutive years, an improvement plan will be issued. Moreover, teacher training will be carried out under the guidance and supervision of the state government, to improve the quality of teachers and achieve the goal of high-quality teachers. The educational policy published by Obama's government is implemented by governments in each state, which is a state responsibility, not a national responsibility. More obviously, it shows the local decentralized management. Such management is highly flexible, but to some degree, it will cause differences in education development between states. This policy has brought vitality to the educational development of all States. In this process, North Carolina made remarkable achievements. The financial allocation of the "Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge" program has injected a booster into North Carolina. It has improved the grading quality evaluation and improvement system (including early childhood learning standards, early children's cultural knowledge, and ability, early childhood curriculum evaluation guidance, and the optimization of early childhood education working environment), strengthened the early childhood education evaluation system and improved their learning standards throughout the state, effectively collected and used early childhood education data to meet the requirements of federal education reform and development and promote the comprehensive reform of preschool education in the whole state [13].

The promulgation of politics and law promoted the large-scale rectification from top to bottom of local education in various States in America. The new 'accountability system' includes that the students must make progress on average scores every year by taking the school as the unit; The results of the achievement test must be reported to the public; If student marks of a school fail to meet the specified requirements, it will face the consequences of reorganization or closure. The bill also requires each state to submit an 'accountability plan' to the Federal Ministry of Education [14]. Due to the promotion of politics and law, all States in the United States have begun to rank schools publicly and stipulated those who fail to meet the standards to rectify, gradually changing from emphasizing fairness to paying attention to the quality of school education. This practice also makes the leading figures in American education constantly reflect on the current educational situation and put forth new ideas.

## **5. THE METHOD OF THE UNITED STATES COLLEGE ADMISSION**

Admissions to the United States universities assess a

wide range of factors such as knowledge base, personality traits, future potential, and even takes into account family and social factors. College admission in the United States also focuses on students' achievements and performance in high school. The difference between the United States and China is that there is no college entrance examination uniformly managed by the government, and there is no statutory national unified examination in the United States. Although colleges, universities, and relevant education departments do not provide entrance examinations, they have relative authority and can obtain the educational academic skills examination recognized by American Universities [14]. At present, the scores of entrance exams recognized by the University of California include SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) and ACT (American College Testing). Both SAT and ACT are standardized tests for academic ability [15]. The school screens out candidates who can complete college courses through the ranking of students' scores of SAT and ACT. Education is a complicated, trivial, and extremely detailed field. The education received in junior-senior high schools and university education affect each other. The education in senior high school can affect the performance and situation of students' learning in the period of the university in the future. Curriculum designs of university, college management, and the original intention of education play a leading role in high school education at the same time. Although high school education in the United States is inextricably linked to college education, some problems cannot be ignored. There are no set course materials in the United States, and the curriculum design, as well as the content of the courses, are not uniform. Even in the same school, teachers use different materials from one another, and in addition, there are significant differences between public and private schools. This has largely led to an uneven reception of knowledge and a relatively unsound basic education for the United States students. Although the single-track school system in the United States guarantees universal access to education, the disadvantage of uneven educational opportunities is obvious when it comes to the selection of talents in colleges and universities, and the social hierarchy gradually widens - the good ones get better and better, and the poor ones get worse and worse. Obama's education reform has made American education further improved and innovated. While giving every child equal opportunity, attention is paid to the quality of school education, and the States actively make positive adjustments to improve the overall education level.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The Chinese government implements compulsory education under the unified management of the central government and sets the horizontal line of basic education in the whole country through strict control.

China pushes the local education reform to ensure that school-age children have equal access to education and cultivate abundant human resources for the future of our country. The various states in the United States have the right to enforce their education regulations without violating the policies of the government. Compared with the Confucian educational concept in China, an educational concept in the United States is more inclined to be a diversified and integrated one. The federal constitution is the fundamental law of the United States. The states shall abide by the federal constitution and state constitution when formulating laws applicable to education. The compulsory education under centralized management by the Chinese government promotes the unification of national basic education standards very well. Therefore, compulsory education is a foundation of national education. But in terms of local development, we need to learn from American education principles and propose the competitiveness of educational undertakings to stimulate a positive educational reformation. Rather than that, we should focus more on cultivating independent thinking skills and creativity. We take the best of American education and teach our students how to behave while learning. What we learn in school is knowledge, what we need in life is wisdom.

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