

# Chapter 6

## Changes in Educational Institutions in China: 1978–2020



### Analysis of Education Policies and Legal Texts from a National Perspective

Guorui Fan

This chapter reviews key historical documents and reform events and outlines China's educational reform and development in the macro context of 40 years of social, political, and economic changes. Professor Elizabeth J. Perry (2014) noted the significance of studying contemporary China from the Reform and Opening-up in the field comparative politics and public policy, which marked the beginning of “a new era of developing socialism with Chinese characteristics” (Xi 2017). This chapter focuses on the process of education institutional changes and innovation and identifies the educational reform and opening-up as a predominant narrative, aiming at breaking through the obstacles of existing institutional structures and promoting sustainable development of education. A key challenge to reforming education institution lies in how to solve the Chinese governance dilemma of loosening control in chaos or tightening control in suffocation (“Yifang Jiuluan, Yishou Jiusi” “一放就乱 一收就死”). Solutions are suggested as exploring appropriate tensions among education institutional factors and stimulating the vitality of educational elements and institutions under appropriate tensions.

## 6.1 Research Approach

Factors that influence changes and innovations in educational institutions range from external socio-political and economic factors and inherent factors of contradictions and tasks, to the build-in logics of educational institution. Therefore,

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G. Fan, T. S. Popkewitz (eds.), *Handbook of Education Policy Studies*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8347-2\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8347-2_6)

undertaking a study of the changes and innovations in educational institutions during China's 40 years of reform and opening-up is a complicated project. The following methodological principles are sorted to guide this study:

*Unification of history and logic.* The changes and reshaping of educational institutions that have occurred are the historical results of development in China. Major events in educational reform and the logic of system reconstruction could only be understood within the broader historical contexts and process of reform and opening-up.

*Unification of education institutional analysis and social system analysis.* Education is closely linked to and interacts with political, economic, cultural, and other social forces. Changes in educational institutions are the result of changes in educational policy and reform, which are initiated and managed by the government. Education institution is the sum of diversified schooling institutions nationwide, for which the government bears at least some responsibility in terms of overall control and supervision, and whose components and processes are interrelated (Archer 1979).

The development of and changes in socialist educational institutions with Chinese characteristics are closely related to the politics and institutional reform of the country. In the historical period of the 40 years of Reform and Opening-up, the development strategy centering on economic construction has directly influenced the transformation and development of various social factors. An investigation of the changes that have occurred in educational institutions thus should be contextualized in the interconnected social, political, and social changes. Therefore, this chapter draws upon typical texts representing the contexts from speeches given by Party and state leaders, the relevant policies of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCCPC) and the State Council, as well as relevant national laws and regulations, education laws, regulations, and rules, and policies of the Ministry of Education and local governments.

*The unification of institutional changes and educational development.* The establishment and improvement of educational institutions aim to coordinate relationships between various educational elements and to promote the healthy development of education. The main contradictions and major tasks vary in different stages of educational development and require corresponding educational institutions. Therefore, while examining the changes in educational institutions, it is necessary to maintain the focus on educational development.

*The unification of systematic construction of educational institutions and analysis of major educational reform events.* Education in China is a complex system composed of the schooling operating system, school leadership and management system, educational personnel system, education finance system, and examination and enrollment system. At different stages of educational development, due to differences in main contradictions and major tasks, there are different landmark events in educational reforms. These major educational reform events not only are highly relevant to certain educational institution elements but are also related to the improvement of the entire education system. In this chapter, the interpretation of significant reform events is situated in the whole systemic and institutional changes.

*The unification of “top-level design” (Dingceng Sheji 顶层设计) and the practical processes of educational improvement.* Faced with outstanding contradictions and tasks in education development, central and local governments will seek institutionalized measures to solve educational problems through a series of decisions and actions. In practice, due to society and educational development itself, adjustments to institutionalized top-level design are needed based on actual conditions to innovate and improve institutional design. Therefore, during the research process, the top-level design of educational institutions, implementation, correction, adjustment, and improvement of educational reforms shall be systematically examined.

## 6.2 The Historical Context of Educational Changes in China

Educational reform and changes in educational institutions have gone through different stages of development of the past 40 years, including bringing order out of chaos, restoring and rebuilding education, comprehensively initiating educational reforms, exploring institutional changes based on market mechanisms to promote educational development, adjusting education policies from an efficiency-based focus to fairness, promoting comprehensive reforms in the field of education, and accelerating modernization of education governance systems and enhancing governance capabilities.

*Restoration and reconstruction of educational institutions (1978–1984).* After the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CPC, an urgent task faced by the education sector in China was to restore and rebuild educational institutions that were destroyed by the “Cultural Revolution” and improve education. By negating the “two Estimates” of the “Minutes of the National Conference on Education” in 1971, the shackles that plagued teachers and intellectuals were removed, so did the obstacles that hindered education, science, and technology development. A policy of “respecting knowledge and talents” advocated by Deng Xiaoping (1977) led the general public turn to respect and value education. By drawing lessons from the educational experience of the 1960s, provisional regulations for higher education institutions and primary and secondary schools<sup>1</sup> were revised, and educational order was restored and rebuilt. The educational policy of

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<sup>1</sup>In 1961, the CCCPC issued the *Provisional Regulations for Higher Education Institutions Directly Affiliated to the Ministry of Education (Draft)*; in 1963, *Provisional Regulations for Full-time Secondary Schools (Draft)* and *Provisional Regulations for Full-time Primary Schools (Draft)* were issued. These three regulations have played an important role in standardizing education, improving educational quality, and promoting educational development. From September to October 1978, the Ministry of Education revised and issued the *Provisional Regulations for Full-time Secondary Schools (Draft for Trial Implementation)*, *Provisional Regulations for Full-time Primary Schools (Draft for Trial Implementation)*, and *Provisional Regulations for Higher Education Institutions (Draft for Trial Implementation)*, which rectify and restore working systems in institutions of higher learning and secondary and primary schools.

the “Three Orientations”<sup>2</sup> and the training objective of the New Generation with “Four Qualifications”<sup>3</sup> were proposed, which have directed the later educational reform and development. The restoration of the unified college entrance examination and admission system became a symbolic beginning of the restoration and reconstruction of the educational system, and for the new order and modernization of education in China. In the context that the state urgently needs specialized personnel while education resources are insufficient, Deng Xiaoping proposed “there are two ways to develop education, on the one hand, we need popularization, on the other hand, we need improvement. We need to run key primary schools, key middle schools and key universities” (1977: 40–41). Thus, the establishment of the key school system has played an important historical role in “raising more talents in a quicker manner” (Duochu Rencai, Kuaichu Rencai 多出人才 快出人才) and meeting the country’s need for educated and talented personnel.

*Development of educational institutional reform: Streamlining administration and decentralization of institutions (1985–1991).* In the early 1980s, the CCCPC issued a series of decisions concerning economic restructuring, on science and technology reform, and on educational reform (hereinafter referred to as the “Decisions” (CCCPC 1985)). Three important documents on these areas constitute the general framework for social reform and development during this period, thus greatly promoting the modernization process of Chinese society. In the field of education, the Decisions aims to arouse the enthusiasm of the government at all levels, the general staff, and the community at large and to promote the development of education. As for the ethical value of educational reform, the Decisions puts forward the conclusion that education must serve the socialist construction, and the socialist construction depends on education, which responds to the development strategy of “mak[ing] economic development our central task” since the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CPC.

The essence of educational institutional reform is defined as streamlining administration and decentralizing to expand school autonomy. On various levels and aspects, such institutional reform manifests. On the central and local relationship, while strengthening the macro management from the central government, in primary education, the responsibility of basic education development is decentralized to local government. To promote the development of compulsory education, the Decisions first proposed the “two growths” principle of the educational input system, namely “the growth of education allocations of central and local governments should be higher than that of recurrent financial income, and the average education cost per student should gradually increase.” On the school leadership, the Decisions stipulated that “school[s] gradually implement [a] principal accountability system (Xiaozhang Fuzezhi 校长负责制),” thus clarifying the relationship of rights of

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<sup>2</sup>The “three orientations,” referred to orienting “education towards modernization, globalization, and future construction” (Deng 1983: 35).

<sup>3</sup>The “New Generation” with “Four Qualifications,” referred to a “new generation with lofty ideals, moral integrity, good education and a strong sense of discipline who are determined to contribute to their people, country and mankind” (Deng 1980).

responsibility among school leaders, party secretaries, university councils, and staff congress, which established the basic structure of China's modern school system.

*Exploration of educational institution reform: Introduction of the market mechanism (1992–2002).* “Establishing a socialist market economy system” for economic institutional reform was put forward at the 14th CPC National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 1992 (Jiang 1992). Since then, Chinese society has embarked on a new development path of establishing a socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics. The focus of educational institution reforms in this period lies in the following factors: first, establishing an education management system compatible with the socialist market economy system. The *Outline for Education Reform and Development in China* in 1993 emphasized the need for “new education institutions compatible with socialist market economy institutions, political institutions, science and technology institutions reforms” (CCCPC, The State Council 1993). The management institution of “decentralized operation and decentralized management (Fenji Banxue Fenji Guanli 分级办学 分级管理)” on the one hand facilitated localized implementation and fed incentives in the lowest governmental units, but on the other hand caused the dependence of compulsory education on township-level finance and literally increased the financial burden of education in the underdeveloped areas, due to the excessive “localization” of the system (Chen 1996). After the new financial allocation system was implemented in 1994, the township-level financial capacity became increasingly weakened. Therefore, the regional economic disparity resulted in the regional and urban–rural gaps in developing compulsory education.

Second, education funds were raised in multiple channels. In 1992, the 14th CPC National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed that “governments at all levels shall increase education investment and meanwhile encourage different walks of life to raise funds for running schools and private schools, and change the situation where the state has a virtual monopoly on higher education” (Jiang 1992). *The Outline for Education Reform and Development in China* stipulated to gradually establish a multi-channel fund-raising system in which education is mainly funded by public fiscal allocation, supplemented with tax for education, tuition and miscellaneous fees from non-compulsory education students, school-affiliated industrial revenue, social donations, and education funds. This new kind of multiple funding system is literally created to cover the shortage of governmental funding, which inevitably produced the later notorious phenomena of “arbitrary school fees (Luan Shoufei 乱收费)”.

Third, privatization of public schools. The term of public school transformations was used in Chinese rather than privatization. In 1994, the document *Implementation Opinions on Outline for Education Reform and Development in China* by the State Council encouraged enterprises and public institutions to run schools in accordance with national laws and policies. Various forms of “minban” schools (literally private schools) as “civilian run and public subsidized (minban gongzhu 民办公助)” or “public run and civilian subsidized (Gongban Minzhu 公办民助)” were allowed to experiment and practice (The State Council 1994). Since 1993, pilots for different forms of public primary and secondary school transformations were carried out. A

group of transformed schools was set up under the market mechanisms, which has experimented in raising education funds through multiple channels, improving school conditions, promoting rapid development of basic education, expanding quality educational resources, and meeting the diverse educational needs. Apparently, the focus of education in China has shifted from serving the interests of proletarian politics to serving needs of economic construction, which is influenced by human capital theory (Schultz 1997). However, compared with the practice of some developed countries of fostering competitive talents through standardized education to achieve economic ends in the globalization process (e.g., see Singapore Ministry of Education 2012), the practice of privatizing education and making it a commercial industry (CCCPC 1992; Zhang 1993) deprives education of its meaning and value in human development (Bulmahn 2000).

*Continuity of educational institutional reform: From efficiency to equity (2003–2009).* China's rapid economic development has enabled remarkable progress in economic and social development, but also resulted in inequalities in such development. Since the proposition of "Scientific Outlook on Development" in 2003, people-oriented, comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable development has gradually become China's new model of economic development (Hu 2004). Accordingly, the focus of educational reform has changed from the pursuit of educational quantity, scale, and speed to educational equity.

First, the arbitrary collection of school fees was stopped. Raising education funds through multiple channels based on the market mechanism leads to the increasingly serious phenomenon of arbitrary educational charges. Since 1996, the Ministry of Education has begun to "improve regulations and systems of school fee management" (National Education Commission 1996). After that, the Education Fee Publicity System (Jiaoyu Shoufei Gongshe Zhi教育收费公示制)'s (National Planning Commission 2002) "One Fee System (Yifei Zhi 一费制)" in compulsory educational institutions (Ministry of Education 2004) and the "Three Limits Policy (Sanxian Zhengce 三限政策)"<sup>4</sup> in senior high school selection fees were approved, which strengthened the control of arbitrary school fees (State Council 2001).

Second, transformed schools were regulated. In order to solve the problem of privatizing schools, high school fees, and public education resource losses yet to regulate by the developing legal system in the 1990s, China began to adjust its reform policies for running public schools and regulated the school activities in 2005. Approval of newly reformed schools and their fee standards were terminated, and the "advance and withdrawal" strategy to conduct a comprehensive investigation

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<sup>4</sup>The so-called Three Limits policy means that public high schools organized by the government can recruit a certain number of students through the choice of schools under the premise of completing this year's enrollment plan, but the scores (no student with a score under admission line can be admitted), the number of persons (not exceeding the central government-mandated number and local government prescribed proportion), and the amount of money (tuition standards for students through the choice of schools issued after the proposition by Education Administrative departments and approval of provincial government) must be strictly limited (General Office of State Council 2001).

and cleaning of the existing transformed schools were adopted (Ministry of Education 2005; National Development and Reform Commission 2005). The “advance” strategy refers to completely privatize the transformed schools, independent of their previous dependent public schools. The “withdrawal” strategy indicates de-transform the transformed schools and restore schools as public property.

Third, the balanced development of compulsory education was actively promoted. Since the proposition of “actively promoting balanced development of compulsory education” by the Ministry of Education in 2002 (Ministry of Education 2002), “balanced development (Junheng Fazhan 均衡发展)” has become a “strategic task of compulsory education” (Working Group Office of the National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan 2010) to implement the “balanced development of nine-year compulsory education” (Hu 2012) and “coordinate [the] integration of urban and rural compulsory education” (State Council 2016), as well as to gradually establish a guarantee mechanism for rural compulsory education finance, improve public financial institutions of cost-sharing by central and local governments according to projects and proportions that ensure the balanced development of compulsory education, and to implement the “Three Increases”<sup>5</sup> of educational funds and “Two Exempt and One Subsidy”<sup>6</sup> policy.

*Deepening of educational institution reform: From management to governance (2010 to present).* “After long-term efforts, socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era” (Xi 2017). The main contradiction in Chinese society has shifted from “the contradiction between [the] ever-growing material and cultural needs of the people and the backward social production” (CCCPC 1981) at the beginning of the reform and opening-up period to “the contradiction between [the] unbalanced and inadequate development and the people’s ever-growing needs for a better life” (Xi 2017). In the field of education, the primary contradiction is the imbalance between the demand for quality education and the pace of education’s development. Chinese education has entered the new stage of “deepening comprehensive education reform” (Hu 2012) and the modernization of educational governance and governance capacity. The task of educational institution reform in this new era is to further separate the management, operation, and evaluation of schools, while expanding the involvement of provincial governments in educational coordination and increasing school autonomy to oversee and improve their internal governance structures (CCCPC 2013). The goals of deepening reforms of educational institutional mechanisms by the Chinese government are outlined: (1) by 2020, to establish an essential educational institutions, forming vigorous, efficient, and open

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<sup>5</sup>The “Three Increases” of compulsory education funds refer to the following: “Appropriations for compulsory education by the State Council and local governments at all levels shall increase at a faster rate than regular state revenues, and expenditure on education per student, faculty salaries and funds per student shall also increase steadily” (The State Council 2006; Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress 2006).

<sup>6</sup>“Two exempt and one subsidy” students are exempt from tuition and incidental fees during compulsory education, free text books are provided for students with financial difficulties, and living expenses are subsidized for boarding students.

educational system mechanisms conducive to scientific development; (2) to further settle and solve the well-concerned educational issues and problems by the general public; (3) to bring to perfection the pattern of government exerting macro-management of the educational system in accordance with the law, schools running themselves autonomously in accordance with the law, the orderly social participation of the general public, and the joint efforts of all parties for the further improvement of the educational system; and (4) to provide institutional enabler for the development of a world-class modern education system with Chinese characteristics (Xinhua News Agency 2017).

### **6.3 Changes in Educational Institutions: Seeking Appropriate Tension and Stimulating Vigor**

Reform has altered the relations of production and interest. The first 30 years of Reform and Opening-up advanced economic growth and accumulated wealth by following the principle of efficiency. After that, the issue for further reform is the readjustment of interest relations, redistributing wealth by fairness so as to promote the harmonious and sustainable development in China. Therefore, the overall deepening of reform involves “resolutely break[ing] away [from] all outdated ideas and disadvantages of institutional mechanisms and break[ing] out of barriers of interests consolidation” (Xi 2017). For Chinese society, the 40 years of reform and opening-up is a process of restoring and reconstructing social order to break through institutional barriers and to stimulate social vitality, from a planned economy to a market economy, through the unified, centralized management of the government with the participation of multiple parties. Therefore, the conflicts and compromises between different parties’ interests will inevitably occur throughout the process.

Following this line of development, in the field of education, changes and innovations of educational institutions inevitably involve a series of complex processes and ambivalent relationships, including centralization and decentralization, central planning and the market economy, government and society, government and schools, and schools and society. The process of educational reform is to seek balance and harmony among multiple parties to maintain order and stimulate the passion and vitality of all interested parties.

#### ***6.3.1 To Adjust the Central–Local Relationship and Promote Integration of Top-Level Design and the Local Exploration of Educational Institution Changes***

Since the beginning of the Reform and Opening-up, the core of educational institution reform has lied on the improved mobilization of “all levels of government, general staff and students, and all members in society,” while “decentraliz[ing] the



responsibility of developing basic education to local governments” (CCCPC 1985). However, when educational management responsibility was decentralized level by level to the township, it resulted in serious regional disparity in education development. In 2001, the State Council issued the *Decisions on Basic Education Reform and Development*, which changed the rural compulsory education management institutions that had been in place for 15 years and made it clear that in “implementing the institutions under the leadership of the State Council [...] the local government is responsible for the institutions, which practices hierarchical management and is county-oriented.” The establishment and perfection of provincial-level and county-oriented educational management institutions became a useful exploration in deepening educational institutional reform and promoting the balanced regional development of education in China.

Taking curriculum reform as an example. Over the last 40 years, explorations within tensions between the authority of the national curriculum and the flexibility of local curricula have never ceased. Balancing games among the state, local governments, and school levels have been continuously staged. Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, concerning the teaching materials used in primary and secondary schools, the state has been responsible for providing standard teaching plans, syllabi, and educational materials. At the beginning of the Reform and Opening-up, in the context of the “streamlining administration and decentralization” brought about by the *Decisions on Education Institutions Reform by CCCPC*, the National Education Commission allowed Shanghai in 1988 to experiment curriculum reform. Shanghai then launched the “first-stage curriculum reform” as an attempt to change the exam-orientated education centered on university admission to a curriculum and instruction model featuring “Three Breakthroughs,” including reducing workload, improving quality, strengthening basics, cultivating capabilities, and developing personal characteristics. After 5 years of such efforts, Shanghai developed a curriculum for primary and secondary schools, curriculum standards, teaching materials, and supplementary educational soft wares suitable for economically developed areas and has carried out corresponding experiments (Sun et al. 2016: 25). Shanghai thus provided useful experiences for the national-wide curriculum reform. In the 1990s, the National Education Commission proposed that general high schools be managed in three levels, that is, at the central government, local government, and school levels, which enables administrative authority at all levels. “The establishment of three levels of management of curriculum teaching materials is to ensure and promote the curriculum’s adaptability to different regions, schools and students and to implement guided gradual decentralization” (Secretariat of the National Curriculum Professional Committee 2001: 90). The basic education curriculum reform initiated at the beginning of the new century requires “to change the situation of excessive concentration of curriculum management, to implement three levels of curriculum management of central government, local government and schools, and to the curriculum’s adaptability to different regions, schools and students” (Ministry of Education 2001). The implementation of a three-level curriculum management system delivers the over-centralized curriculum power at the national level to local governments and schools, enabling local governments and

schools' participation in curriculum development, thus forming the situation that the national curriculum, local curriculum, and school curriculum coexist so that the curricula are more suitable for local and school-specific teaching situations. It reflects the trend of curriculum management moving from centralization to limited decentralization. The curriculum issue not only involves the classic question of "what knowledge is most valuable" (Spencer 1860: 21–97) but also involves the key problem of "whose knowledge is most valuable."<sup>7</sup> To fully implement the Party's educational policy and integrate the cultivation and practice of core socialist values within the process of national education, since 2012, the Ministry of Education unified textbook compilation for three subjects including ethics and law, Chinese, and history. These textbooks were put into use nationally during the autumn of September 2017 in high school. An audit system consisting of disciplinary review, comprehensive review, thematic review, and final review was established and practiced to ensure the overall quality of teaching materials. In March 2017, the Textbook Bureau was established by the Ministry of Education for the planning, production, and management of textbooks. In July of the same year, the National Textbook Committee was formed by the State Council to guide and coordinate textbooks nationwide.

In the process of promoting modernization of education governance institutions, "promotion of partial and phased Reform and Opening-up shall be carried out on the premise of strengthening top-level design, and [the] strengthening of top-level design shall be planned on the basis of advancing partial and phased reform and opening-up" (Xi 2012). As is proposed in *Opinions on Deepening Reform of Education Institutional Mechanism*, the combination of top-level design and grassroots exploration not only strengthens system planning but also respects grassroots initiatives. It also fully mobilizes the enthusiasm, initiative, and creativity of local districts and schools and timely serves to distil successful experience to systems and polices (Xinhua News Agency 2017).

A salient feature of educational institution reform in the new era is the strengthening of top-level design, such as deepening the reform of examinations and enrollment systems, the construction of modern vocational educational institutions, the construction of first-class universities, the reform of educational laws, and other major educational reforms, which are deliberated by the Standing Committee of the State Council before promotion and implementation by the State Council and relevant ministries. In March 2018, to strengthen the centralized and unified leadership in education, a leading group of education experts was established according to *Program for Deepening Party and State Institutional Reform* of the Third Plenary Session of the Nineteenth Central Committee of the CPC (CCCPC 2018). The leading group was established as a decision-making and coordination organization of

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<sup>7</sup>Michael W. Apple, professor of the Department of curriculum and teaching and education policy at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in America, tried to reveal the complex relationship between knowledge and power in education and critically examine "legal knowledge" of particular social groups or classes during particular historical periods and, in particular, institutional contexts by using his concept of ideology and hegemony. See Apple (1990).

the CCCPC, whose major duty is to put forward and organize the implementation of policies adhering to the Party's leadership and strengthening the Party's construction, to study political and ideological work in the field of education, to deliberate the national education development strategy, medium- and long-term planning, major policies for education and institutional reform plans, and to solve current problems in education. This is of great significance to strengthening the top-level design of educational reform, in dealing with relationships between central and local, partial and whole, and improving the system in its entirety, thus forming an overall effect. On the other hand, with educational reforms entering the "deep end," many regions and schools proceed from reality, adhere to problem-oriented principles, and summarize a lot of experience of reform and exploration. Some of the experience proved to be effective, which provides important support for macro-decision-making at the national level. The City of Qingdao, for example, has conducted school administration reform experiments and modern school construction according to law since 2014. On this basis, in February 2017, the Municipal Government of Qingdao issued the *Regulations for Primary and Secondary Schools in Qingdao*, which specifies that the "principal may nominate [and] appoint [a] vice-principal," as well as other school autonomy recruitment of professional and high-level personnel in shortage," "independent establishment of internal institutions and [the] appointment of [a person in charge] in accordance with provisions" (Municipal Government of Qingdao 2017). Those were previously controlled by the local government. In recent years, Shanghai, as an experimental region responsible for initiating comprehensive educational reform, has actively explored and proposed many new ideas and reform measures under the guidance of the top-level design of national macro-educational reform. In December 2017, Shanghai People's Congress formulated the *Regulations for Higher Educational Promotion in Shanghai*, which is the first local regulation dealing with higher education. It distills new achievements and experience in the form of laws and provides a strong guarantee for modernizing higher education management system and the sustainable development of higher education in Shanghai (Fan 2018).

Those educational reforms related to overall reform and innovation in national education law, educational institutions, educational standards, and educational strategy planning and coordination requires national-level coordination and implementation. Education reforms of key and difficult issues can be implemented gradually and adjusted dynamically based on the experiences of local pilot programs. For education reform at regional and school levels, it is necessary to allow room for grassroots educational reform initiatives and encourage individuals at the local and school levels to innovate and explore. Therefore, the process of educational reform mechanisms could integrate state-level design with grassroots exploration. This will lead to general advancement based on the key breakthroughs.

### ***6.3.2 To Rationalize Inter-Government Relationships and Establish and Perfect the Mechanism of Governmental Coordination and Inter-Provincial Consultation***

Inter-governmental relationships refer to the vertical and horizontal relationships among different levels of government, as well as the relationships between governments in different regions. In the same area, it mainly involves horizontal inter-governmental relations among government departments of the same level. In the government education administration system, commissions including development and reform, organization, finance, human resources and social security, compilation, land and resource planning, urban and rural construction, science and technology, supervision of state-owned assets, and economy informatization have their own corresponding educational management responsibilities.

However, the long-lasting situation that each department does things in their own way with the intersection of powers and poor communication between education administrative departments and other functional departments have caused a serious impact on school operation. In the process of reform, the education administrative departments in some regions tried to coordinate education management activities in government-related functional departments. For example, in Shanghai, *Regulations for Promotion of Higher Education in Shanghai* proposed the establishment of a coordination mechanism for the deliberation of major policy reform in higher education at the municipal level and to establish a Higher Education Investment Assessment Committee to evaluate major investments in higher education and supervise the use of funds (Standing Committee of Shanghai People's Congress 2018). Management measures for primary and secondary schools in Qingdao stipulate that “for appraisal, evaluation, assessment, competition, inspection and other activities related to primary and secondary schools, relevant departments need to submit plans for the next year before November of the previous year. The catalogue of the plan needs to be compiled by the administrative Department of Education and is published at the beginning of the next year” (Municipal Government of Qingdao 2017). These practical explorations have resulted in the accumulation of useful relevant experience for deepening government educational institution reform, as well as establishing and improving government coordination and the educational governance mechanism for inter-governmental consultation.

### ***6.3.3 To Streamline Administration and Decentralize, Fair Supervision, Service Optimization, and New-Style Government–School Relationship Reconstruction***

*The Decision of CCCPC on Education Institutions Reform* in 1985 proposed the “reform [of] management institutions, while strengthen[ing] macro-management, resolutely implement[ing] streamline administration and decentraliz[ing], and

expand[ing] schools' operational autonomy" (CCCPC 1985). Educational power was thus reallocated so that the traditional educational administrative relationship has undergone great changes since 1985. Since then, the expansion of school autonomy has been the main line of educational reform. In 2017, in the report *Deepening Reform of Education Institutions Mechanism* by the General Office of the CCCPC and the General Office of the State Council, it was stated that "schools operate independently according to law" was an important part of the educational governance structure, which is "dynamic, efficient, more open, [and] conducive to scientific development" (Xinhua news agency 2017). School autonomy in China is a result of government's decentralization. It is necessary for the government to scientifically plan the types, scale, and speed of national and regional education career development so that each school has a scientific and rational development orientation. A sound system of educational standards shall be established and improved so that schools have standards to follow in the process of independent operation. Schools shall be empowered. Operational and post-operational oversight shall be strengthened, so that the schools operating by law are supervised and guaranteed. In addition, education resources should be allocated in a balanced way, and professional services should be provided for schools for their healthy and sustainable development.

### ***6.3.4 To Actively and Steadily Use Social Organization and Market in Education***

In the 1990s, a global trend of education reform using marketization and performativity emerged to solve the public dissatisfaction with educational quality (Goertz and Duffy 2001; Headington 2000; Heller 2001; Mahony and Hextall 2000). In this process, quality education and competitive schools have become salient, emphasizing education quality management and quality assurance, school monitoring and evaluation, parental choice, education vouchers, marketization, parental and community participation in governance, as well as performance-oriented funding mechanisms and other reform issues (Cheng 2015: 5–29; Cheng and Townsend 2000: 317–344; Mukhopadhyay 2001; Pang et al. 2003: 1063–1080).

With the development of China's market economy, in the process of deepening economic system reform, the role of the market in resource allocation changed from "basic" to "decisive" (Xi 2017). In the process of promoting government institutional modernization, in addition to participating in school operation, social organizations are participating in public affairs, including education, by bringing their professional advantage. The Ministry of Education (2015) suggested to use contract-out services in legal consultation, faculty training, evaluation services, sports and arts curriculum, teaching resources, etc.

### 6.3.5 To Expand School Autonomy and Vitalize Schools

As mentioned above, “expanding school autonomy” is the proposition of education reform put forward in the *Decisions on Education Institutions Reform of CCCPC* in 1985 and is still in progress today. The *Decisions* proposed that “schools gradually implement the principal accountability system,” which establishes a framework for school management structure consisting of school party organization, principal, school administration committee, and representatives of faculty and staff congress. “The school Party shall liberate themselves from managing everything in the past and concentrate on strengthening party-building and political work.” (CCCPC 1985). With the deepening of education reform, the school leadership system in China is constantly changing. To further strengthen and improve the Party’s leadership in schools, public colleges and universities should adhere to and improve principal responsibility institutions under the leadership of the CPC and give active political roles to grassroots party organizations in primary and secondary schools and private colleges (General Office of the CPC Central Committee 2014).

Schools are “ecological” systems with structures and their own vitality. Educational management systems and management mechanisms, as being imposed externally, affect or constrain the vitality of schools. The vitality of a school depends more on internal self-organization mechanisms. School vitality is manifested in three aspects: first, in the pursuit of educational values, ideals, and responsibilities, and the shared school mission; second, in internal institutions and mechanisms to inspire, facilitate, and support the school organization as well as individuals to participate and create actively; third, in active self-learning and autonomous development of students in the designed learning activities with teachers and their peers

## 6.4 Educational Institutional Changes and Laws

Reform is integral in the forming process of social regulations (Popkewitz 1991). Change and innovation in educational institutions require the support of the legal system. Fundamentally speaking, the reform of educational institutions in the past 40 years represents the process of the continuous legalization of educational reform. In 1980, when the first educational law, *Regulations on Degrees in the People's Republic of China*, was issued, it signified the starting point of the legal path of educational development (Standing Committee of the NPC 1980). Since then, the two laws of *Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China* and *Teachers Law of the People's Republic of China* were successively issued. The issue of the *Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China* in March 1995 marks the transition toward the comprehensive rule of law in China.

In the new century, with issuing *Vocational Education Law of the People's Republic of China*, *Higher Education Law of People's Republic of China*, *Law of the People's Republic of China on Promotion of Privately-run Schools*, and several

administrative regulations and local laws, a framework of China's education legal system was formed, and education legislation embarked on a comprehensive and systematic stage. In the process of education legislation, an important document regarding national education development issued in 1993 proposed that China would "initially establish the framework of education laws and regulations system by the end of this century" (CCCPC, The State Council 1993). *The Outline of the National Medium and Long Term Program for Education Reform and Development (2010–2020)* issued in 2010 further proposed to accelerate the education legal construction and perfect laws and regulations of socialist education with Chinese characteristics, in accordance with the requirement of the fundamental principle of governing the country by law; and outlined the specific tasks of amending the six laws including the Education Law, the Vocational Education Law, the Higher Education Law, the Regulations on Degrees, the Teachers Law, and the Law on Promotion of Private education and formulating five laws respectively in the fields of examinations, schools, lifelong learning, preschool education and family education (Working Group Office for The Outline of the National Medium-and Long Term Program for Education Reform and Development 2010). The issue and revision of relevant laws and regulations on education have promoted laws and regulations in education. In the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the contradictions and legal relations between various educational stakeholders are becoming increasingly complicated. Tensions among them are unavoidable but can be tuned within a legal framework. Confronted with the arduous task of responding to the national strategic demands the people, there is still a long way to go in terms of legislating, practicing, and enforcing the law.

## 6.5 Concluding Remarks

Education reform enacted in China over the past 40 years of Reform and Opening-up is a process of perfecting educational institution mechanisms and a process of continuously improving socialist education institutions with Chinese characteristics. It also entails a process of moving from promoting scattered reform by using education policies and regulations to regulating educational organization by using laws and promoting the construction and perfection of the education institutions. The process of education reform has explored gaming and appropriate allocation of power and interests, in which educational order has been rebuilt to break the constraints. The course of education reforms features moving from regulation to empowerment, through empowering by law, promoting consultation and shared governance, and vitality stimulation.

The main task of education institutional reform in the new era is to construct and perfect "the pattern of government's macro management according to law, school operation by law, orderly social participation and concerted efforts of all parties," and to make education "dynamic, efficient, more open and conducive to scientific development." In the future, the mission of education development is to

further promote the balanced development of education, to solve the problem of unbalanced and insufficient development, and to meet the increasing needs of people to enjoy fairer education with higher quality (Cai 2017).

Looking forward, we are now entering an era with prevailing new technology. Internet-based big data and artificial intelligence have generated an uncertain but in-depth impact on our lives, work, learning, and thinking. Internet-based learning resources make school no longer the only source of knowledge, while immersion learning happens at any time and in any situation.

Educational institutional reform in the past 40 years in China has been based on institutionalized school education. When the institutionalized, systemic, and regulated school education institutions and its functions have undergone revolutionary changes, and new educational conditions based on the blending of online and offline learning will become the “new normal” of education. A call for new education institutions and education governance mechanism is soon to appear and facilitate this “new normal” education.

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