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## The Chinese Model of Teacher Education: Retrospects and Prospects over a Century

**Abstract** This article aims at a comprehensive examination of the Chinese model of teacher education by critically revisiting the developmental trajectory of the teacher education system in China over the past century, with a particular focus on policy trends since the 1990s. It interrogates the Chinese model of teacher education with two macro lenses: the historical and the comparative. The historical lens looks deeply into the Chinese way of reform with a catch-up mentality in various stages, while the comparative lens locates the Chinese model of teacher education in an international context. The paper begins with a comprehensive review of the related literature, surveys the historical pathway of China's modern teacher education system since its birth in 1897, presents an overview of the current provisions of the system, and examines recent policy trends in the landscape of China's teacher education. Finally, the article concludes that the Chinese model consists of a hybrid system of teacher education provided by normal schools, normal colleges and universities, with the participation of comprehensive universities and internet-based higher education institutions, and accompanied by a consistent licensing system for the teaching profession. With such core features as independence, openness, adaptability and diversity based on Confucian epistemology and pragmatism, the Chinese model of teacher education is likely to illuminate new paths for the development of education and the pursuit of excellence in the global community.

**Keywords** Chinese model, teacher education, policy, reform, Confucianism

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### Introduction

In recent decades, China's rising global status has drawn wide attention, and the discourse about the so-called Chinese model continues to expand in various directions. The growing literature has explored the unique Chinese way to economic growth and sociopolitical modernization and has considered its

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implications for both developing and developed countries (Cao, 2009; Jacques, 2009; Lin, Cai, & Li, 1996; Pan, 2009; Ramo, 2004; Zheng, 2010, 2011). However, it has tended to overlook or deemphasize other key domains of societal development in China, such as education. This article aims at a comprehensive examination of the Chinese model of teacher education by critically revisiting the developmental trajectory of the teacher education system in China over the course of a century, with two macro lenses: the historical and the comparative. It begins with a comprehensive review of the related literature, surveys in detail the historical pathway of China's modern teacher education system since its birth in 1897, then presents an overview of current provisions of the system, and examines recent policy trends in the landscape of China's teacher education. The article finally concludes that the Chinese model consists of a hybrid system of teacher education.

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## The Discourse

The term *model* refers to an ideal typical concept for analysis (Weber, 1949), which represents the characteristic features of various relationships in a context as an internally consistent system. As a global issue (Shimahara, 1995), the reform and developmental models of teacher education have been widely discussed. A vast number of studies have emerged on China's policy case. In these studies, three themes can be identified: historical development, alternative pathways, and international comparisons with the Chinese model.

### Historical Development

The publication of *A Brief History of China's Teacher Education*, written by Liu Wenxiu in 1984, ended a period in which research on the history of Chinese teacher education had been neglected. This pioneering study concluded that teacher education is the key for the development of China's national education system, and paved the way for studies on the development of China's teacher education, though the scope of this study was limited to the period before 1949. At the centennial commemoration of the establishment of China's modern teacher education system, Wang Bingzhao, an influential figure in the field of the history of Chinese education, briefly reviewed the historical development of modern teacher education in China, including its history after 1949. Wang (1997) made the point that the two contradictory traditions of Chinese culture, i.e., respect for teachers, originating in Confucianism, and the non-professional status of teachers, are impediments to teachers' socioeconomic status which was one of key concerns for teacher education reform.

Recent scholarship has reflected on the practical model of teacher education in China. Liu and Xie (2002) highlighted the longstanding debate on the relationship between the profession-oriented model and the academic-oriented model in teacher education. The profession-oriented model means that normal colleges and universities set a high priority on pedagogical learning (professional development) for teacher students, but tends to give less emphasis to academic curricula, the areas that are highly emphasized by comprehensive universities. On the contrary, the academic-oriented model sets the same standards for academic curricula as those offered by comprehensive universities, but the pedagogical focus and the identity of teachers tend to be deemphasized or left out. The debate is in fact about the different models of teacher education system, i.e., whether or not to have an independent, closed system, or an open, hybrid system of teacher education.

### **Alternative Pathways**

Theoretical deliberations on alternative pathways have also been attempted for teacher education reform. Paine (1992) discussed the challenge facing Chinese teacher education by looking into two competing discourses, “modernizing” and “nationalizing” perspectives. The modernizing view typically links teachers’ needs and teacher education reform to economic and technological development or modernization; the nationalizing view stresses teachers’ moral role and the social obligations of teacher education (pp. 84–92). Paine and Fang (2006) further proposed a hybrid model for teacher development in China in a process of global convergence. Following Paine’s accounts, Shen (1994) focused on teacher education reform in China under the national drive towards modernization and a market-based economy. The Project Team of East China Normal University (2001) envisaged a high quality dynamic teacher education system. They stated that a dynamic teacher education system is an open teacher education system providing high quality teacher education, and that normal colleges and universities should be the major providers of teacher education. They further asserted that the new system must be based on a transformation to a professionalized teacher workforce.

Some researchers are not satisfied with these deliberations for teacher education development. Instead, they provide reflections for alternative development and suggest new directions for teacher education reform based on empirical case studies. For instance, Li (2010) demonstrates how three different “logics,” that of institutional strategies, economic demand and state political initiatives have driven the developmental model of teacher education institutions in China, including a detailed comparison of three leading universities for teachers, i.e., East China Normal University, Southwest University and Yanbian

University. She concludes that different logics have tended to interact with one another to determine the developmental direction, strategies and model of universities in different historical periods.

### **International Comparisons**

The Chinese model of teacher education has been compared with others in an international context (Hayhoe, 2002; Hayhoe & Li, 2010). Hayhoe distinguished four models of the modern development of teacher education through a comparative historical analysis of three Western and three Asian societies:

- Model A: Normal colleges absorbed into major comprehensive universities as faculties of education (U.S., U.K., and Japan);
- Model B: Normal colleges upgraded to become universities of education or local comprehensive universities in which faculties of education play a leading role and shape the ethos (U.S., U.K., and Japan);
- Model C: Normal colleges merged into independent university level institutes that cooperate with universities in the training of teachers for primary and secondary schools, but have their own separate legal existence (France);
- Model D: Normal colleges upgraded to or integrated within normal universities that retain a strong profile as single purpose universities focused on the teaching profession (Chinese Mainland and Taiwan, 2002, pp. 16–17).

After comparing the four models of teacher education, Hayhoe (2002) noted that Model D, which is found in Chinese Mainland and Taiwan, tends to see the school sector as separate and distinct from society as a whole and gives little attention to how professional areas of study might relate to the wider needs of a learning society.

Chinese scholars have actively examined the transformation of teacher education models in major developed nations such as U.K., U.S., Australia, and Singapore. Zhu (2001) introduced to Chinese scholars the U.S. model of professional development schools (PDS) and the British model of school-based education (SBE). Researchers also extended their attention to the Japanese teacher education system. Based on his comparison of Chinese teacher education with its counterpart in Japan, Xie (1995) concluded that the reform of the teacher education system in China could not simply follow Japan, which adopted an open model after World War Two, because China currently faced a drastically different situation. Xie hinted that the transformation of China's teacher education system should follow a gradual, transitional path from the independent, closed system to a more open one.

The literature presented above provides valuable information about the background and issues of teacher education reform in China. The persistent

national debates surrounding the maintenance of a profession-oriented system as opposed to the adoption of an academic-oriented system highlight dilemmas scholars and policy makers face when examining the Chinese model of teacher education. However, the discourse about the Chinese model of teacher education is unfortunately still very limited, for a number of reasons. First, there are few, if any, scholars who have attempted to investigate the developmental model of teacher education reform in China, and the analysis of the Chinese model is particularly missing from historical and comparative perspectives. Secondly, many analyses have neither been rigorously designed with appropriate analytic theories or frameworks, nor conducted using a carefully selected research methodology. Finally, Chinese academic culture tends to cater in a practical way to the needs of the central polity, and critical thinking and theories are rarely attempted in policy studies, as shown in a recent book about the Chinese model of development by Pan (2009).

The Chinese model of teacher education in the 21st century has resulted from a long, adventurous exploration of a system, in various historical contexts, that balances the need addressing the huge demands of qualified teachers for the school sector at all levels, which favors the separate normal education system, and the importance of academic excellence with a more open system that orients education and teachers to the wider needs of a rapidly changing society. In the 1990s, the problem for China was even more severe than in the system under the Soviet model; not only was pre-service teacher education a completely closed system, relating mechanically to different school levels, but in-service teacher education was completely separate in another sector, the provincial and prefectural colleges of education under direct local government control, and not at all coordinated with the pre-service (Hayhoe & Li, 2010).

Built on the above discourse the following sections analyze the Chinese model of teacher education from two macro lenses: the historical and the comparative. The historical lens looks deeply into the Chinese way of reform in various stages in the trajectory over a century, with a particular focus on how China has muddled through with strenuous effort and finally managed to establish a model based on its own tradition. The comparative lens locates the Chinese model of teacher education in an international context, comparing different models from other nations, examining how they have influenced the Chinese model which is shaped for its own societal needs, and reflecting on how it may contribute, in return, to the global community in the future.

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## The Trajectory Revisited

The term teacher education is *shifan jiaoyu* 师范教育 in Chinese. Literally, *shifan* means teacher and teacher's role model and was a translation of the

French word “normal,” which means setting a norm or standard; *jiaoyu* carries the meaning of educating and nurturing. Both *shifan* and *jiaoyu* are neologisms of the 1890s, borrowed from Japanese. Although China has a long tradition of respecting teachers and attaching importance to education, there was no real training system for the teaching profession until the late 1890s.

### **Establishment (1897–1911)**

Unlike the Western tradition where teacher education schools were initially set up for religious purposes, the Chinese system was established for political purposes, based on the Confucian tradition that teachers are always the foundation of education for individual and societal development. The prosperity of the Qing Empire had waned steadily during the early 19th century, and continued to decline afterwards due to serious internal problems such as bad harvests, natural disasters, overpopulation, government corruption, social unrest, and the increasing inroads of foreign imperialism. It was weakened by the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864), the Boxer Movement (1900), as well as military defeats in the wars with Britain (1842 and 1864), with France (1884–1885) and with Japan (1895). The Qing Empire tried to revive its regime with various reforms, such as the Self-Strengthening Movement (1861–1895), the Hundred Days’ Reform (1898) and the New Reform (1901–1911). These political reforms initiated radical programs of institutional change and economic modernization. They consistently sought to develop new, practical talent as opposed to revitalizing the traditional Confucian intelligentsia. Subsequently, it became widely accepted that renovating the old education system and establishing modern schools were vital and urgent tasks. With a strong catch-up mentality, a number of politicians and educators agreed that teacher education was crucial for meeting the political goals of national survival and self-strengthening. Thanks to these political reforms, modern teacher education came into being and was institutionalized in the late 1890s.

The first school for training teachers in China, *Nanyang Gongxue* 南洋公学, was founded in 1897, which was about two hundred years after the first Western normal school, the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools was set up in the early 1680s by Jean Baptiste de La Salle in Reims, France. A forerunner of Shanghai Jiaotong University, *Nanyang Gongxue* was founded in Shanghai by Sheng Xuanhuai, as an institute for teacher education which was the first school for training professional teachers in modern China (Education Compilation Committee, 1948, p. 909). On May 21, 1902, the first independent normal school, Hubei Normal School, was founded by Zhang Zhidong (Chen, 1981, p. 117). Later in the same year, the first private normal school, Tongzhou Private Normal School was founded by Zhang Jian in Nantong, Jiangsu Province (Liu, 1984,

pp. 7–8). In addition, *Jingshi Daxuetang* 京师大学堂, the first modern national university, founded by the late Qing government in 1902, opened an institute for teacher education.

In 1902, an independent teacher education sub-system was included in the first national educational legislation *renyin xuezhi* 壬寅学制, which aimed to create a modern school system based on the model borrowed from Japan. The 1903 legislation, *guimao xuezhi* 癸卯学制, revamped *renyin xuezhi* and was enacted in 1904. In *guimao xuezhi*, teacher education was consistently envisioned as an independent school system for the first time in China's history (Chen, 1979; Gu, 1981; Sun, 1971). For example, *guimao xuezhi* stipulated that every county or prefecture should open a junior normal school and every province should open a senior normal school, in order to train teachers for local elementary and middle schools, respectively. By 1911, there were a total of 253 normal schools with 2,894 teachers, enrolling a total of 28,605 students (Education Compilation Committee, 1934, p. 311).

Since the legislation of 1902 and 1903 was virtually copied from the Japanese school system, the teacher education system was also borrowed from Japan. In fact, the term *shifan jiaoyu* was taken verbatim in Japanese characters from *shihan kyōiku*, the Japanese terminology for teacher education. China's emulation of Japan was explained by acknowledging that the two neighbors shared geographical vicinity, cultural similarity, and an identical need for national self-strengthening (Shen, 1994, p. 60). Moreover, the increasingly shaky Qing Empire viewed Japan as a successful example in the way it competed with Western powers through self-strengthening reforms (The Meiji Restoration).

### **Institutionalization (1912–1949)**

The Qing government attempted to revitalize itself but was unsuccessful, and the Empire finally collapsed in 1911 as a result of the Republican Revolution led by Sun Yat-Sen. This was a critical turning point in China's history since the revolution overthrew the feudal system that had existed for more than two thousand years. In his inaugural address on January 1, 1912, Provisional President Sun announced that the task for his government was to “sweep out the baneful influence of autocracy and build the Republic to meet the goals of the revolution and the will of all citizens” (Sun, as cited in Chen, 1981, p. 218). Sun Yat-Sen's Three Principles of the People<sup>1</sup> paved a solid foundation for the goals and visions of educational establishments, which were imperative for the

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<sup>1</sup> The Principle of *Minzu* (民族 civic-nationalism, i.e., government of the people), the Principle of *Minquan* (民权 power of the people, i.e., government by the people), and the Principle of *Minsheng* (民生 welfare or livelihood of the people, i.e., government for the people).

transition from the feudal system to the new democratic Republic.

Shortly after the Republic was established, the new administration passed several pieces of legislations regarding the school system. Two of these, issued in 1912, *The Teacher Education Act* and *The Normal School Regulations Act*, guided the objectives, programs and curricula for teacher education. Through such new regulations, teacher education was instituted at two levels: normal schools for elementary school teachers, and normal colleges and universities for secondary school teachers. Normal schools were provincial while normal colleges and universities were either provincial or national. A district system for normal schools was set up in 1912 for the first time in China's history in order to match various local circumstances, followed by a licensing system for elementary school teachers on April 28, 1916 (Sun, 1971, pp. 530–533). The latter was the first certification system for teachers in modern China.<sup>2</sup> In addition, women were included in formal programs of the teacher education system for the first time in China's history. Peking Women's Higher Normal College was upgraded in April 1919 from Peking Women's Normal School, becoming the first independent higher teacher education institution for women in China (Liu, 1984, p. 41). The initiatives for teacher education in 1912 and 1913 were revolutionary and effective in terms of providing new visions of teacher education programs and institutions. By 1922, there were 385 normal schools with a total of 5,013 teachers and 43,846 students (Education Compilation Committee, 1934, p. 311). However, because the 1912 and 1913 Acts emulated the Japanese version of school system which was not well indigenized on Chinese soil, the two bills drew much criticism for being rigid and incapable of accommodating various socioeconomic and educational needs in different regions of China's huge land.

The changing political circumstances greatly challenged the Republic's education reforms. The 1912 and 1913 acts were soon impeded by the restoration of the feudal system under Yuan Shikai, a powerful politician and notorious warlord of the late Qing period. The two great movements, the New Cultural Movement in 1917 and the May Fourth Movement in 1919, waged a revolutionary culture war against conventionalism by advocating Western values of democracy and technology and criticizing traditional Confucianism. The two nationwide movements fundamentally changed traditional politics, culture, values and education in China. During this time, overseas returnees such as Chen Duxiu, Lu Xun, Hu Shi and Tao Xingzhi, introduced to China various Western ideas and values of modern education. Among them, Deweyan pragmatism and scientism from the U.S. were the two most influential schools of philosophy that brought new incentives for education reform in China. John and Alice Dewey

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<sup>2</sup> There is a widely accepted inference that China's teacher certification system was first established in 1996, i.e., Department of Teacher Education of Ministry of Education. (2001). *教师专业化的理论与实践* [*Theories and practices of teacher professionalization*]. 北京, 中国: 人民教育出版社. [Beijing, China: People's Education Press], p. 225.



made a two-year visit to China from May 1919 to 1921, which fuelled many educational initiatives for social change in China.

*Renxu xuezhì* 壬戌学制, the new legislation which passed on November 1, 1922, radically shifted from the Japanese model of the school system to the American one. This model was characterized by the flexibility and adaptability to various local conditions, a 6-3-3 system with education levels tailored for different stages of students' development, and distinctive secondary schools (Qian & Jin, 1996, pp. 284–300). Under the new legislation, teacher education was planned at two levels: normal schools, and normal colleges and universities. For elementary schoolteachers, normal schools were generally merged into comprehensive secondary schools. Some provinces began to stop providing subsidies for students enrolled in normal schools, resulting in a decline in enrollment in teacher education. Normal colleges and universities were still positioned as independent institutions on paper. In practice there was only one teacher education institution, the Beijing Higher Normal School; other higher teacher education institutions were merged into comprehensive universities. Although the 1922 legislation was praised as a milestone in modern China's educational history for its flexible school years, operational adaptability and profound influence, teacher education was actually undermined (Sun, 1971, p. 539). Liu (1984) documented the fact that from 1922 to 1928 the number of "normal schools was reduced by 63%, student numbers declined by 49%, and budgets were cut by 34%" (p. 54).

The decline in teacher education began to turn around in the early 1930s. From 1932 to 1935, the Kuomintang (KMT) Government made great efforts to restore the pre-1922 system of teacher education. Normal schools were removed from comprehensive secondary schools, and some higher education institutions became independent normal colleges and universities for training teachers again. But the sociopolitical context changed dramatically from 1921 to 1949, with a succession of wars breaking out in China: the First Civil War between the KMT and the warlords, with the communists joining the KMT later (1921–1927); the Second Civil War between the KMT and the Communist Party of China (CPC) again (1927–1937); the Anti-Japanese War (1937–1945); and the Third Civil War, in which the CPC defeated the KMT. While the country underwent these bitter hardships, the modern teacher education system thrived. There were 364 normal schools with 48,793 students in 1937. By 1946 the number of normal schools almost tripled to 902, and the number of students increased five-fold to 245,609 (Education Compilation Committee, 1948, pp. 929–930).

### **Re-Institutionalization (1949–1993)**

Soon after the foundation of People's Republic of China in 1949, the Western powers turned their backs on the newly born socialist regime while the Soviet

Union supported it. Before they broke their ties some years later, China and the Soviet Union built a strong partnership which allowed China to obtain considerable aid and ideological support. As a result of this new political alliance, China's education system began to emulate the Soviet model, which featured independent specialized higher education institutions.

The new government, with dreams of eliminating illiteracy and providing universal education for all school-aged children in the shortest time possible, immediately re-established teacher education and made it one of the nation's priorities to catch up with Western powers including the U.S., U.K., France, Germany, and Japan. In August 1951, the First National Meeting on Teacher Education called for re-establishing the district system for normal schools. Two months later, the State Council published the *Decision on School System Reform* which clearly urged that a teacher education system be set up independently within the national education system. Based on this decision, the Ministry of Education promulgated the *Regulations on Higher Normal Institutions (Draft)* in 1952.

Given the sociopolitical circumstances, the Soviet model of teacher education was adopted, and remained in place for more than two decades thereafter (Chen, Zhu, Hu, Guo, & Sun, 2003, p. 7; Pepper, 1996, p. 149). With this model, China relied solely on an independent teacher training system, and teachers were exclusively prepared by normal schools, normal colleges and universities, and provincial or regional colleges of education, which provided in-service education for teachers. By 1953, there were a total of 31 independent normal colleges and universities nationwide (China National Institute for Educational Research, 1984, pp. 90–91).

The national policy on “the reorganization of colleges and departments” brought tremendous changes to the teacher education system in the mid-1950s. For example, East China Normal University was founded in Shanghai in 1951 on the basis of several private universities, by merging the departments of education from Fudan University, Aurora University, Datong University, St. Johns University, and Shanghai University in 1951 and 1952. Although departments of education had been integrated within comprehensive universities before 1949, they were then affiliated with the newly established or combined normal colleges and universities.

Since the late 1950s, teacher education, like all other fields, was also deeply involved in politics while its other functions were largely neglected. Due to this political situation, teacher education was fundamentally weakened and even destroyed in many places during the ten-year Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Political-ideological movements and struggles hampered the entire system, and student recruitment and enrollment ceased for several years. In addition, the profession of teaching suffered tremendous criticism and teachers' sociopolitical

status declined significantly. Teachers were despised as “little bourgeois,” and were “under great strain with many of them suffering considerable mental and, often, physical abuse” (Guo, 1999, April, p. 3). During this period of dramatic uncertainty, some teachers were persecuted and even executed.

Mao Zedong’s death in 1976 did not immediately end the nightmare. After fiercely fighting against the Left extremists, progressive leaders such as Deng Xiaoping took over the political power of China. In 1978, with the government’s adoption of the national policy of reform and opening-up in order to modernize the country, China’s teacher education began to recover, entering a period of radical transformation. In June 1980, the Fourth National Meeting on Teacher Education was held to reflect upon the previous 30 years’ experience of teacher education. The meeting agreed that teacher education was the foundation for national education development, and set it as a national policy priority for both pre-service and in-service levels. For example, in 1983, elementary and secondary schoolteachers were required to complete a secondary teacher education program, a two- to three-year postsecondary teacher education program, and a four-year college-level teacher education program. In addition, all national policy actions, such as the *Opinion on Strengthening and Promoting Teacher Education* in 1978, the *Decision of Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Reform of Educational System* in 1985, the *Opinion on the Plan for Basic Education Teachers and Teacher Education*, and the *Opinion on Strengthening and Promoting Teacher Education* in 1986, asserted that teacher education must be the first priority of education development. Furthermore, in order to create favorable circumstances for teachers and teacher education, the first National Teachers’ Day since 1949 was instituted on September 10, 1985 as a symbol of respect for the profession. Since then, National Teachers’ Day has been celebrated every year. These strategies helped restore the regular functions of the teacher education system, and provided possibilities for future policy actions.

### **Professionalization (1993–2012)**

In the post-Mao era, and particularly since the early 1990s, Chinese leaders have embraced a sweeping wave of neo-liberal ideology, e.g., marketization, privatization and decentralization, with various promises about socioeconomic development and global status assumed by human capital and modernization theories. Although the socialist regime remains highly centralized, the economic, education and cultural sectors enjoy certain freedoms that used to be restricted by the central government. For example, the CPC has called for the decentralization of economic planning and increased reliance on market forces to determine the prices of consumer goods.

In pursuit of modernization to catch up with developed countries, the new

round of education reform aims to expand education at all levels while maintaining or improving quality. The rapid expansion of compulsory education and postsecondary education has generated an urgent demand for highly-qualified teachers. The Soviet model of an independent teacher education system no longer meets the demand for a stronger and larger teacher workforce. For example, the old model of an independent teacher education system failed to meet the rapidly changing demands of preparing and developing a teacher workforce. There was even some doubt about whether teacher education institutions were competent in terms of what comprehensive universities were capable to offer. Meanwhile, the Soviet model separated pre-service and in-service teacher education into two exclusive sub-systems, in effect dissipating resources for teacher education. The national campaign for quality education demanded a process of professionalization of teachers. This was very challenging and problematic, for there were a large number of incompetent teachers who had received limited teacher education or qualifications. In rural schools, there were many teachers who had never had any form of teacher education.

To respond to these challenges, Chinese policymakers have initiated a retooling of the teacher education system, seeking overall structural adjustment and improvement, as part of restructuring the higher education system based on the neo-liberal reform strategies for decentralization of economy and governance. The goals are set on a new status for teacher education and the improvement of educational qualifications for new teachers, the establishment of continuing education for teachers, and remarkable improvement of the overall quality of the teacher workforce (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2002). The goals of the policy action are to produce enough qualified teachers and to professionalize the manpower of teaching; to reform and diversify the teacher education system; and to continuously improve teachers' economic and social status. In addition, China viewed the U. S. as an ideal model for catch-up in economic development and modernization, and tried to pilot the American model of teacher education provided by comprehensive universities in Chinese soil again, but in a new era of intensified globalization.

There are two stages in the retooling of teacher education systems since 1993. During the first stage (1993–1996), the *Guidelines for China's Education Reform and Development* were put into policy action in 1993 (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China & State Council of the People's Republic of China, 1993). Eight months later, the *Law of Teachers of the People's Republic of China* was enacted on October 31, 1993, signaling a new era of teacher education reform. This is the first law in China after 1949 for the teaching profession. The law regulates the legal rights and responsibilities of teachers as professionals and mandates a national teacher certification system. The *Ordinance of Teacher Qualification* implemented in 1995 requires candidate teachers to obtain at least

one of seven licenses to teach (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 1995). Despite great expectations, the enforcement of these laws and regulations was limited in the early 1990s, and teacher professionalism remained at a low level. In this stage, the Chinese government made great efforts such as raising teachers' salaries to improve their overall treatment.

The second stage (1996–2012) of the retooling of the teacher education system started with the Fifth National Meeting on Teacher Education held in 1996. The *Opinion on the Reform and Development of Teacher Education* re-envisioned a teacher education system that is chiefly reliant on independent normal colleges and universities, with some participation from comprehensive universities (State Commission of Education, 1996). This renewed vision has charted a confirmed direction for the restructuring of the teacher education system that includes players such as non-normal higher education institutions. Influenced by neo-liberal ideology led privatization and market forces, the Chinese government has taken substantial actions to reorganize the teacher education system and to address the teaching profession through some key strategies (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 1998; 2000; 2002; Central Committee of the Communist Party of China & State Council of the People's Republic of China, 1999; State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2001).

A new vision and key initiatives have been highlighted for teacher education development by three important policy documents, i.e., the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and State Council of the People's Republic of China's *Decision on Deepening Educational Reform and Bringing forth Quality Education in an All-Round Way* in 1999, the *Tenth Five-Year Plan for Education* in 2001, and the State Council's (2010) *Guidelines for Medium- and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development 2010–2020*. Specifically, the 2010–2020 guidelines has ensured the importance and moral standards of teacher professionalism enhanced by continuously raising the social status of the profession, based on Confucian epistemology of synergizing professional knowledge and ethical principles of teaching, which was inherited in the very beginning when the modern system of teacher education was first established by the late Qing Empire a century ago.

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## Current Provisions

There are a variety of schools, colleges and universities preparing teachers at different levels in China. Generally, teacher education denotes two major forms of education for teaching at three professional levels. The first is the pre-service teacher education at the levels of normal schools, junior normal colleges, and normal universities. Then there is the in-service teacher education at county level teachers' schools, regional level colleges of education, and provincial level

colleges of education. Among these regular teacher education institutions are six major forms: normal universities, junior normal colleges, normal schools, provincial colleges of education, regional colleges of education and local teacher schools. Meanwhile, more comprehensive universities and online colleges are actively participating in teacher education programs.

### **Normal Universities**

Normal universities are the foremost form of pre-service training for secondary school teachers, and some of them also provide educational programs for in-service secondary schoolteachers. Normal universities generally provide four-year Bachelor's programs and three-year Master's programs, and many also provide three-year Ph.D programs. Undergraduate students of these institutions are recruited from senior secondary school graduates through the competitive National College Entrance Examination. Undergraduate curricula include general courses (political theories, foreign language, educational studies, psychological studies, and physical education), specialized core courses (varied according to majors), and fieldwork or internship in specialized areas generally over a period of six weeks. A dissertation is required for a Bachelor's degree. Graduates from normal universities will be granted corresponding degrees after successfully finishing their programs of studies. Normal universities usually have a larger student body, more teaching programs, a stronger faculty and more financial resources than normal colleges do. It is common for each province to have at least one normal university. In addition, as of 2012 there are five national key normal universities: Beijing Normal University, East China Normal University, Northeast Normal University, Huazhong Normal University, and Shaanxi Normal University.<sup>3</sup> Their students are recruited from all over the country.

### **Junior Normal Colleges**

Junior normal colleges generally provide three-year sub-degree programs for pre-service teachers for junior high schools. The curricula are almost identical to

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<sup>3</sup> Since the 1950s, China has adopted a key school system to give development priority to a few universities and schools generally located in the urban centers of big cities or provincial capitals. This system guarantees more financial resources as well as better teachers and teaching facilities to so-called key schools or key universities such as national key universities and schools, provincial key universities and schools, city key schools, and county key schools. Under this system, all other kinds of universities and schools are called "ordinary." The initial purpose of this system is to provide sufficient resources to a limited number of institutions to achieve higher educational excellence. As a result, the system significantly differentiates development opportunities among schools. Some institutions are disadvantaged by fewer available resources resulting in lower social status. Recently, the Chinese government has taken substantial actions to soften the system, but the actual outcome is still unclear.

that of normal universities, but the study workload is less in terms of the school year. Graduates from junior normal colleges are not granted a degree, but instead receive a corresponding graduation certificate or qualification of teaching after successfully completing their program. Students are recruited from senior secondary school graduates with lower scores through the National College Entrance Examination. Junior normal colleges are now being upgraded into normal universities, or they are being consolidated with provincial or regional colleges of education. By 2010, student enrollment in normal universities and junior normal colleges had increased to 1.87 million from 1.35 million in 2001 (Editorial Board of the People's Republic of China Yearbook, 2002; 2011).

### **Normal Schools**

Normal schools generally provide two- to three-year education programs for pre-service teachers for elementary, kindergartens or nursery schoolteachers. The courses include political theories, language studies (Chinese and foreign language), history, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, hygiene, geography, psychology, educational studies, teaching methodology, music, arts, and so on. An in-class internship is required. Normal school graduates will be granted corresponding a graduation certificate or qualification of teaching after successfully finishing the program. Students are recruited from junior secondary school graduates. Normal schools used to offer the major training path for elementary school, kindergarten or nursery schoolteachers. Now these schools are being upgraded into junior normal colleges or being shut down, as elementary schoolteachers are now required to have a college qualification. Furthermore, some elementary schools are being closed due to a decline in school-aged student populations. In 2001, there were 570 normal schools enrolling a body of 0.66 million students (Editorial Board of the People's Republic of China Yearbook, 2002, p. 884). By 2004, the number of normal schools had rapidly declined to 282 with 0.28 million students (Editorial Board of the People's Republic of China Yearbook, 2005, p. 752).

### **Provincial and Regional Colleges of Education for In-Service Teachers**

Provincial and regional colleges of education are adult higher teacher education institutions that provide two- to three-year continuing educational programs for in-service teachers. Similar to junior normal colleges, the curricula include general courses (political theories, foreign language, educational studies, psychological studies, and physical education) and specialized core courses according to major. Neither an internship nor a dissertation is required for graduation. Graduates are granted corresponding certificates after successfully finishing the program. Students are recruited from in-service teachers who work

in elementary or secondary schools. Every province in China has set up at least one college of education, usually located in its capital.

Provincial and regional colleges of education are now being consolidated with junior normal colleges or being upgraded into normal universities. From 1998 throughout 2002, there were 55 colleges of education that combined with normal colleges, universities or other higher education institutions (Gu & Shan, 2004, p. 103). Consequently, the student body and the numbers of provincial and regional colleges of education have plummeted from 304,000 and 122 in 2001 to 194,000 and 83 in 2004, respectively (Editorial Board of the People's Republic of China Yearbook, 2002, p. 884; 2005, p. 752).

### **County and Local Teachers' Schools for In-Service Teachers**

County and local teachers' schools are adult teacher education institutions that used to be continuing education institutions in local areas for in-service elementary schoolteachers. Now they are being shut down or consolidated into the National Online Networks for Teacher Education<sup>4</sup> as elementary schoolteachers are now required to have a college degree. As well some elementary schools are being closed due to the decline in school-aged student population in local areas.<sup>5</sup> In 2002, a total of 0.18 million students enrolled in 1,703 county or local teacher schools in China (Editorial Board of the People's Republic of China Yearbook, 2003, p. 807). There are no national statistics for teachers' schools post-2004, implying that most of them have since been closed or consolidated.

In addition to the above six forms of teacher education, more and more comprehensive universities are actively participating in teacher education programs. For example, by 2004, 315 comprehensive universities have set up teacher education programs, enrolling a total of 0.48 million students (Editorial Board of the People's Republic of China Yearbook, 2005, p. 752). In addition, as mentioned previously, the National Network of Teacher Education and internet-based programs have played an important role in preparing teachers since their advent in recent years.

With a diverse array of teacher education institutions, in 2010 more than 2.58 million students were studying in regular teacher educational systems (Table 1),

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<sup>4</sup> This is a newly established (September 8, 2003), internet-based national network for teacher education; see Shi, X. L. (2003, September 9). 全国教师教育网络联盟启动大规模开展高水平教师培训 [The National Online Networks Consortium for Teacher Education opened for largely expanding high quality teacher training]. 中国教育报 [*China's Education Daily*], p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> China has adopted a strict national policy of birth control since the late 1970s. According to this national policy, one family is generally allowed only one child. In some rural areas a family is allowed to have two children if the first is a girl. The penalty is very serious with extremely rigid enforcement if the national policy is violated. The school-aged population has been declining since the late 1990s due to this policy.

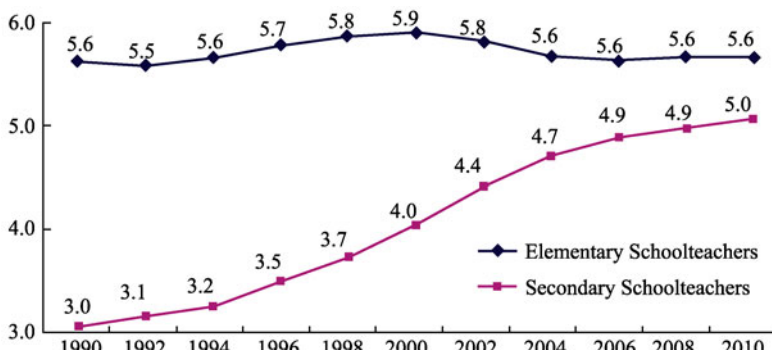


which included normal universities, comprehensive universities with teacher education programs, provincial colleges of education, and normal schools (Editorial Board of the People’s Republic of China Yearbook, 2011). The number of teachers increased from 8.6 million in 1990 to 10.6 million in 2010 (see Fig. 1), and the quality of the teaching profession reached a new level. For instance, the educational qualification rates of elementary, junior and senior secondary schoolteachers jumped from 93.1%, 80.5% and 60.7% in 1997, up to 97.4%, 90.4% and 72.9% in 2002, respectively (Guan, 2003). In 2004, the educational qualification rates of elementary, junior and senior secondary schoolteachers jumped to 98.3%, 93.8% and 79.6% (Editorial Board of the People’s Republic of China Yearbook, 2005, p. 752). As Guan has observed, the restructuring of the teacher education system has been effective in a number of ways: a significantly raised teacher professional profile; continuous expansion of teacher education; and steady improvement in teacher education quality. Teacher education is on its way to higher standards, while its status is being gradually elevated.

**Table 1** Statistics for Teacher Education in China in 2010 (unit: thousand)

Types	Enrollments	Entrants	Graduates
Regular normal colleges and universities	1,864.2	517.4	521.6
Continuing programs for adults	581.6	221.1	269.0
Internet-based colleges	129.3	56.8	47.4
Total	2,575.1	795.3	838.0

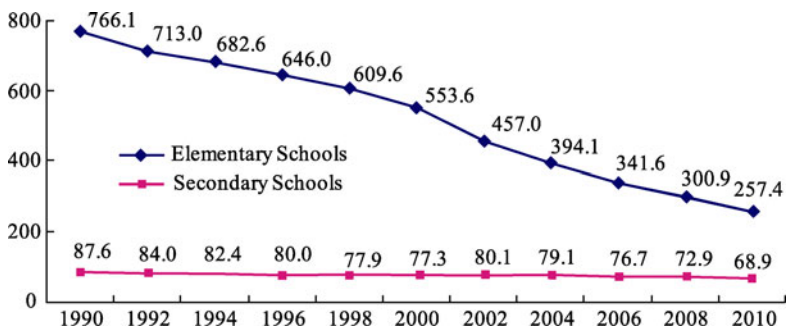
Note. Adapted from “2011 中国统计年鉴” [China Statistical Yearbook 2011] by 国家统计局 [National Bureau of Statistics of China], 2011. 北京, 中国: 国家统计局 [Beijing, China: National Bureau of Statistics of China], pp. 748–749.



**Fig. 1** Statistical Trends of Teachers in Regular Schools in China (1990–2010) (unit: million)

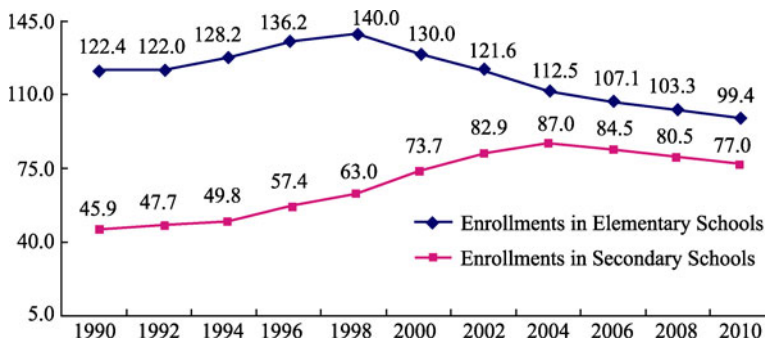
Note. Adapted from “2011 中国统计年鉴” [China Statistical Yearbook 2011] by 国家统计局 [National Bureau of Statistics of China], 2011. 北京, 中国: 国家统计局 [Beijing, China: National Bureau of Statistics of China], p. 743.

But there are challenges down the road. As shown in Fig. 2 and Fig. 3, one of the challenges for teacher education is the dramatic demographic change in China. Due to the success of the government's policy to limit every family to one child, enforced since 1978, the number of new born babies has steadily declined following a population peak in the late 1990s. The rapidly declining number of school-aged students in elementary schools has shifted the focus of China's elementary education system from increasing the number of qualified schools and teachers to improving the quality of the teaching profession. On the other hand, for secondary schoolteachers, while quality is a more serious issue, there is also a huge demand for teachers, posing dual challenges of quality and quantity for teacher education reform.



**Fig. 2** Statistical Trends of Regular Schools in China (1990–2010) (unit: thousand)

*Note.* Adapted from “2011 中国统计年鉴” [*China Statistical Yearbook 2011*] by 国家统计局 [National Bureau of Statistics of China], 2011. 北京, 中国: 国家统计局 [Beijing, China: National Bureau of Statistics of China], p. 743.



**Fig. 3** Statistical Trends of Enrollments in Regular Schools in China (1990–2010) (unit: million)

*Note.* Adapted from “2011 中国统计年鉴” [*China Statistical Yearbook 2011*] by 国家统计局 [National Bureau of Statistics of China], 2011. 北京, 中国: 国家统计局 [Beijing, China: National Bureau of Statistics of China], p. 744.

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## Recent Trends

Since the Chinese government launched a new round of teacher education reform in the 1990s, several key trends of development are observable as below.

Firstly, the closed, independent teacher education model in China has been turned into an open, hybrid system. The newly transformed system is quite distinct from teacher education in the U.K. and the U.S., in that it accommodates various forms of teacher education provided by professionalized and comprehensive universities, while the latter systems rely commonly on teacher education programs provided by comprehensive universities. The transition has dual meaning to the development of teacher education. On the one hand, normal colleges and universities, along with the active participation of comprehensive universities, have become the main channels for teacher preparation and development (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2001). Graduate schools and colleges of education in comprehensive universities such as Peking, Tsinghua, Wuhan, Nanjing and Zhejiang Universities have already established programs of educational studies to compete in the market. More and more comprehensive universities are providing programs for teachers. On the other hand, the two once exclusive subsystems of teacher education, pre-service teacher education and in-service teacher education are now being integrated with each other. Provincial and regional colleges of education, formerly responsible for in-service training and adult learning, are gradually being integrated into normal colleges or universities which have begun offering programs for in-service teacher education. Additionally, the National Network for Teacher Education and internet-based programs have provided numerous open opportunities for the integration process.

Secondly, the traditional three levels of teacher education are being upgraded to a new three level system. Elementary, junior and senior secondary schoolteachers used to be educated in normal schools, two- to three-year junior normal colleges, and four-year normal universities, respectively. A new model is needed in order to meet the demands of a teacher workforce with increasing professionalism. For example, the Ministry of Education now requires elementary schoolteachers to receive higher qualifications from two- to three-year junior normal colleges; all teachers in secondary schools are required to hold Bachelor's degrees. Under the new requirements, normal schools for elementary schoolteachers are generally being shut down or merged into other types of schools nationwide. For some secondary schoolteachers, graduate studies in normal universities are mandatory (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2002).

Thirdly, new programs and teacher education degrees have been established to achieve excellence in terms of teacher quality. Master of Education or Master of

Arts in Subject Teaching (MEd), different from academically oriented Master of Arts programs, has been established since 1996 for elementary and secondary schoolteachers. The new master's degree is an occupational or professional degree, like the MBA or MPA, for those who have been working in the teaching profession. There are around 40 normal or comprehensive universities offering MEd programs for in-service teachers. Students registered in MEd programs have jumped from 1,490 in 1998 to 6,970 in 2003; and more than 20,000 MEd students were enrolled in normal or comprehensive universities in 2003 (Feng, 2003, September 24).

Fourthly, a new licensing system for the teacher profession is fully and consistently operating with standardized procedures, legislative requirements and measurements, and wide participation. Further policy actions focus on establishing an accreditation system for teacher education institutions and an evaluation system for supervising their quality (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2002).

Fifthly, teacher education systems have adopted new forms, thanks to the development of information technologies, to provide and expand training services, especially for teachers and schools in rural areas. For example, China has built up an alternative form of teacher education, i.e., the National Online Networks for Teacher Education. The National Online Networks for Teacher Education is an internet-based, nationwide lifelong education project supported by normal universities for training both pre-service and in-service teachers.

Finally, fundamental to the above trends is the unchanged focus on the deep integration and synergy of professional knowledge and ethical cultivation of teaching in the provision of teacher education programs, as highlighted repeatedly in many policy documents, such as Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and State Council of the People's Republic of China *Decision on Deepening Educational Reform and Bringing forth Quality Education in an All-Round Way* in 1999, the *Tenth Five-Year Plan for Education* in 2001, and the State Council's *Guidelines for Midium- and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development 2010–2020*. The focus is inherited from Confucian epistemology of pragmatism about knowledge and its applications in social life and world.

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## **Conclusion: The Chinese Model of Teacher Education**

Muddling through over a century of strenuous effort, Chinese teacher education has recently been transformed into an open, hybrid system supported by normal schools, normal colleges and normal universities, with increasing participation by comprehensive universities and internet-based higher education institutions,

and accompanied by a consistent licensing system for the teaching profession. In retrospect and with reflection on a lengthy history, it is observed that Chinese teacher education has gone through a bumpy and sometimes awkward trajectory, with a strong catch-up mentality for societal development, nation-building and global status. Based on the valuable experience obtained in this process, the following observations can be drawn on the Chinese model of teacher education, from historical and comparative perspectives.

There is no doubt about the emergence of a Chinese model of teacher education which is unique and rich, and which is part of a historical experiment in the huge Chinese lab of educational modernization over a century. Central to this model is the pragmatic formula which can be epitomized by “Chinese learning as essence and Western learning for its practical utility” (中学为体, 西学为用 *Zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong*), based on Confucian epistemology (Hayhoe & Li, 2010; Li, 1998, 2009; Li & Hayhoe, 2012). The formula was coined by the late Qing incrementalist Zhang Zhidong (1837–1909), the founder of the first independent normal school in China in 1902 (Chen, 1981, p. 117), based on concepts he drew from Zhu Xi (1130–1200). In other words, the Chinese model is fundamentally characterized by Confucian pragmatism to meet social demand in China, which is manifested in the adaptation of neo-liberal ideology by Chinese leaders to reform teacher education since 1978, including the modernization and human capital theories (Li & Lin, 2008). The reform of Chinese teacher education in recent decade is a pragmatic policy choice through which both the quantity and quality of teacher supply and development become China’s priority agenda for social development, nation-building and international competitiveness in the context of intensified globalization.

Openness is one of the core features of the Chinese model, centered on Confucian pragmatism. The Chinese system has been very accommodative at various historical stages since its birth in 1897, when the Japanese model was introduced to China. The Japanese model was mainly based on the French model which had an independent status in its political system.<sup>6</sup> It was a way that teacher education can be ensured to have a stable status and be a reliable instrument for teacher supply, social development and nation-building. In the 1920s to 1930s, the Chinese system began to shift to an American model which virtually relied on comprehensive universities and within which teacher education lost its unique identity. A Soviet model based on the French model was adopted after 1949, due to limited international resources available to the newly born Communist regime, and it worked very well when China’s population

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<sup>6</sup> The French model is arguably French, in terms of its origin of institutionalization. As the author speculates, the French model may have some historical roots from China. See Li, J. (in press). World-class higher education and the emerging Chinese model of the university. *Prospects: Quarterly Review of Comparative Education*, 42(3).

started to boom in the 1970s to 1980s. Nowadays, the Chinese model is an open system with hybridity which continues with the French tradition but incorporates elements of the American model. Throughout the last century, the Chinese model has been very open, adaptive and flexible in accommodating international experiences from other systems, with a Confucian pragmatism that believes “stones from other hills may serve to polish the jade of this one” (他山之石，可以攻玉 *Tashan zhi shi, keyi gong yu*).

But the stance of Confucian pragmatism is “this one,” the Chinese soil based on its own cultural tradition. The Confucian way of epistemology is that knowledge is interconnected, integrative and holistic, that its ultimate purpose is for nothing else but the individual and public good, that the practical application of knowledge is seen as the main test of its validation, rather than logic and theoretical proof, as in the European tradition (Hayhoe & Li, 2010). The Confucian way of knowing has placed high importance on education as an inclusive, integrative and interdisciplinary field of learning and on normal universities that enjoy the same academic status as comprehensive universities. In addition, professional knowledge and ethical standards are always placed in the center of teacher education provisions, as mandated by policy documents for teacher education reform. In this way, the Chinese model has kept excellence and diversity as its top priority for institutional development and system change. With this Confucian tradition of epistemology, the Chinese model locates itself in the state system and invites government involvement and intervention so that teacher education can be best made use of as a fundamental instrument for the individual and public good, while its own autonomy and academic standards are ensured and enhanced.

The Chinese model of teacher education is naturally not static. Rather, it is vibrant, adaptive and variable, may take different forms in different contexts, and can illuminate new pathways for both developing and developed countries in the future. It may serve as an alternative form of teacher education for such contexts as the U.S., the Philippines, and Hong Kong. In the 2000s, schools in the U.S. began to suffer a severe shortage of qualified teachers. One of the reasons is that the teacher supply mainly provided by comprehensive universities is insufficient, instable and unresponsive. To tackle this problem, an open system with hybridity like the Chinese model with normal colleges and universities may be helpful if this specialized type of higher education institutions for teachers is to be revived on American soil. In the Philippine context, there has been a hot, nationwide debate about whether normal universities in the country should be transformed by way of the American model, i.e., teacher education mainly provided by comprehensive universities. Fierce arguments have focused on whether the only three normal universities in the Philippines should be configured into comprehensive universities. The Chinese model provides an answer with an

indigenous system based on its own socio-cultural tradition and societal needs. In Hong Kong, conservatism has resulted in a refusal to give the main institution of teacher education the status of university, ignoring both the valuable model of normal universities developed in mainland China over the period of a century and the alternative models of universities of education that first emerged in neighboring countries such as Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

It is obvious that the Chinese model of teacher education, with its core features of independence, openness, adaptability and diversity based on Confucian pragmatism and epistemology, can provide alternative ways of thinking about the reform and change of teacher education in the global community. With a lengthy legacy and rich characteristics of its own, the Chinese model of teacher education is likely to contribute, vibrantly and dynamically, to the world in the future.

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