

# THE POLICIES AND POLITICS OF SKILL: CHINA,<sup>1</sup> AFRICA, INDIA

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## **Methodological and conceptual issues and a little history**

The trade of comparativists is by its very nature ambitious – to say something coherent about more than a single country or system of education.<sup>2</sup> Yet, many individuals and institutions that probably do not think of themselves as being connected to the field of comparative education do just this on a regular basis. Consultants, whose original field of expertise may have been a single analytical problem in one country, find themselves engaged in generalising that knowledge base to commenting and advising serially on individual countries or even on whole regions. Doctoral students, whether in international or comparative education,<sup>3</sup> may have focused on a single initiative or set of initiatives undertaken by a single body (e.g. NGO, development agency or government)<sup>4</sup> in a part of one country, and yet one of the most frequently asked questions at their vivas is on the implications of their research findings for other NGOs, development partners, or governments.<sup>5</sup> New academics, like the consultants above, may have cut their teeth (and gained their PhD) on a single conceptual or empirical challenge in one situation, but within a few years, they are advising doctoral candidates from very different contexts on very diverse research questions. Finally, development agencies, such as DFID, that support research have a quite explicit bias against making a single country the unit of analysis; thus DFID's three education consortia funded in 2005 all propose to carry out fieldwork in at least four different countries in the developing world. Equally, these same agencies, while they routinely carry out single-country economic and sectoral analysis, which guides their loans, grants and country assistance strategies, also engage in much more ambitious synthetic work which cuts across sub-regions, regions, continents and sometimes the entire developing world.

Thus, in our field of education and training, the World Bank is widely recognised for its country studies, its regional analyses (e.g. on Sub-Saharan Africa), and then for a

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<sup>2</sup> It has been noted by Mark Bray and several other scholars that many comparativists and comparative education journals don't actually engage in direct comparison between countries but analyse policy or practice, theory and ideology, methods and innovations in single country fieldwork settings. [Bray 2007: 352]

<sup>3</sup> For the distinction between the two, see Bray (op.cit. 353).

<sup>4</sup> My own most recent four candidates, Maeda, Nakamura, Palmer and Wedgwood have done precisely this in Cambodia, Kenya, Ghana and Tanzania.

<sup>5</sup> Doctoral students in comparative and international education from the OECD countries routinely select a research topic in a country or countries other than their own; by contrast, students who go abroad for their PhD to a centre with expertise claimed in comparative or international education very frequently choose to work on their own country. OECD students in these fields thus acquire an 'other-country' advantage.

whole series of policy studies which cut across all their ‘client’ countries. Even since 2000, the Bank has produced such global policy statements in the fields of tertiary education, secondary education, the entire education sector, and also on youth (World Bank, 2002; 2005a’2005b; 2006a). The Education for All Global Monitoring Reports have also had a global reach, and have achieved some of their influence and authority precisely because of this.<sup>6</sup> Bilateral agencies, from Australia<sup>7</sup> to UK, do the same. Sometimes these agencies clarify that their education policy papers are just aimed at their main recipient countries, but sometimes as in DFID’s Briefing paper on secondary, vocational and higher education its audience is more general (DFID, 2006). China does the same. Its new *African Policy* covers the whole of Africa (China, 2006), and has a genuinely pan-African reach, including in education and human resource development.<sup>8</sup>

When we turn to the analysis of skills development or technical and vocational education and training (TVET) more specifically,<sup>9</sup> we also come across national, regional and global analysis of this sector. But we may note that the boundaries of this particular field are uncertain, or rather that there are land disputes and debates about the size and shape of the territory depending on who is doing the surveying. Thus a Ministry of Education or a body like UNESCO (is there any other body like UNESCO!) will look at TVET and drop the ‘T’, because Training is felt to be the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour or of the ILO. So the Second International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education, co-sponsored by UNESCO and the Government of South Korea, focused on the concept of Technical and Vocational Education (TVE). Perhaps for the same reason, it is intriguing to note that the Inter-agency World Conference on Education for All’s discussion about ‘essential skills required by youth and adults’ and ‘skills training, apprenticeships, and formal and non-formal education programmes’ in 1990 was turned into ‘life skills’ in the Dakar World Forum on Education for All, for whose final framing UNESCO had more responsibility. Arguably also, it is because of these territorial claims around skills, between Ministries of Education and Ministries of Labour at the national level, and between UNESCO and ILO internationally, that there has not yet been an EFA Global Monitoring Report on Skills, despite it being a very obvious candidate for treatment.<sup>10</sup>

It is precisely because of these land disputes amongst ministries and specialised agencies that it is easier for a body like the World Bank, or regional banks such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), to cover skills in a much more comprehensive fashion than would be possible for national governments or the UN specialised agencies. Hence it was the World Bank (1991) which was able, for the first time in 1991, to do a global policy paper on TVET that looked across a wide range of the locations of skill, covering schools, public and private training provision, enterprise-based training, and training in the

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<sup>6</sup> For the first 5 EFA Global Monitoring Reports (GMRs), see [www.unesco.efareport.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.efareport.unesco.org)

<sup>7</sup> Australia, through its Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) is launching a new education policy paper in early 2007.

<sup>8</sup> China must be one of the few countries to maintain embassies in 48 of Africa’s 53 countries.

<sup>9</sup> Skills development has begun to be used more frequently, especially by development agencies, to refer to what was termed technical and vocational education and training (TVET). It typically goes beyond formal public or private schools, institutions or centres, to cover also informal, traditional apprenticeships, or non-formal semi-structured training.

<sup>10</sup> See King (2007) on the case for skills to be treated in this influential series of reports. The GMRs are based in UNESCO but have an independent structure and separate sources of funding.

informal economy, for urban and rural employment. Using a similar framework but at the regional rather than the global level, the Bank carried out a very influential analysis of *Skills development in Sub-Saharan Africa* (World Bank, 2004),<sup>11</sup> and it was also the Bank which led, at the national level, on the analysis of *Skills development in India* (World Bank, 2006b), using the same framework as had been used for the Sub-Saharan Africa report. And again in China, one of the more comprehensive studies of TVET, which covers ‘all kinds of formal, nonformal and informal training and technical education programmes and learning environments’ is the study done for the World Bank, *Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in China* (Copenhagen Development Consultant, 2005: 13). Equally, it has been the ADB and IDB which have been able to carry out studies that look right across the complex field of technical education and vocational training in their respective large regions (ADB, 2004; IDB, 2000).

Conscious of these important territorial sensitivities, the rest of this short paper will attempt to pick out some salient trends and issues that may assist in understanding something of the culture of technical and vocational education in a number of African settings. We shall then contrast this with the particularity of vocational education and training in India; and finally seek to examine what is characteristic about the delivery of technical and vocational skills in China. In doing so, we would like to highlight what may prove to be suggestive approaches to understanding what can be learnt from each of these, but more specifically what can be learnt from China, but also what are the barriers to cross-national policy learning.

### **From industrial and practical training for the ‘Coloured Race’ to Training in Africa’s Informal Sectors?**

For a substantial part of the last century, Africa was the object of advice from outsiders about the appropriateness of the education and training it should receive, and on grounds of its low level of development as well as on grounds of race, industrial and agricultural training were claimed to be particularly suitable. As this is a comparative education conference, it may be worth reminding the audience that it was the brilliant early comparativist, Michael Sadler, who was one of the first to disseminate widely the view that industrial training was specially relevant for the ‘coloured race’. Although it was Sadler in 1900 who famously warned against picking bits and pieces out of foreign education systems, and transferring them elsewhere (Sadler, 1900), nevertheless his ‘Education of the Coloured Race’ played an important role in internationalising the view that the industrial and agricultural training schools of America’s racially divided Deep South would be of great value to the parts of the British Empire ‘where there are large black populations’. His admiration for the work of Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee, offering ‘the kind of *practical* instruction which the coloured people would specially need’, paid no attention to the political context of this dispensation, or to the fierce debates in the States about whether higher education for black Americans was even necessary (Sadler in King, 1971: 48-9).

This view that there was something specially relevant about industrial and practical training for black populations, whether in USA or in Africa became the stock in trade

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<sup>11</sup> For the impact of this analysis, see McGrath in *NORRAG NEWS* 38

of both missionary and colonial advice about African education for decades, reinforced by the influential African Education Commissions of the 1920s, and by the British Colonial Office. This connection between racial priorities for blacks and industrial and practical skills in white-dominated societies was particularly unfortunate for the long-term status of technical and vocational education and training in Africa. The popular and political resistance in Africa to this view about the appropriacy of low level industrial and agricultural training for so much of the continent is probably one reason why the coverage of TVET is so very small even today. The racial and colonial politics of skill helped to explain the reluctance to invest in academic secondary and higher education during the colonial period in so many countries, from the Congo to Kenya, and from Rhodesia to South Africa. At Independence, this legacy of skill and racial discrimination helped to explain the abandonment of special industrial and vocational training by many Africa governments in favour of expanded academic secondary and further education. It is one factor in explaining why the enrolment today in technical and vocational education as a proportion of total secondary enrolment in Africa's least developed countries is as low as 5% (King and Palmer, 2006: 54). For the totality of Sub-Saharan Africa it is only slightly higher at 7%, with an enrolment of just 1.8 million students in vocational education.

The many decades of colonial rule with their associated education priorities was followed by a relatively brief period when secondary and higher education were expanded with the support of external bodies, including the newly founded multilateral and bilateral donors. But by the 1980s with the severe impact of structural adjustment on African education systems, the new external advice coming from America (the World Bank) for Africa had turned against the vocationalisation or diversification of general secondary education.<sup>12</sup> Paradoxically, therefore, at the very point in the 1980s when a number of African countries, such as Kenya and Ghana, were ready seriously to re-assess the status of technical and vocational education, there was very little external disposition to support them. They had to go it alone, with very inadequate finances.

This very dependency of many African economies on external financing meant that their own educational priorities were much more severely affected by the shifting priorities of the donor agencies than were either India or China. Thus when basic education became increasingly established as a donor priority from the time of the Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in 1990, African countries were generally in a very weak position to pursue their own priorities. Several countries in Africa find themselves in the extraordinary position of receiving very large amounts of external aid to help them achieve the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education, but having to rely on their own resources for much of post-primary education.<sup>13</sup>

The impact of these last several decades of under-financing has been very severe on post-primary education as a whole. This has been recognised finally in the

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<sup>12</sup> For an account of the rise and fall of vocational education as a priority of the World Bank, see King (2003).

<sup>13</sup> Uganda has just announced in January 2007 that it has been obliged to 'abandon vocational and technical training in the initial stage of implementation of universal secondary education', <http://allafrica.com/stories/200701060002.html>

recommendations of the Commission for Africa<sup>14</sup> for the revitalisation of university education, but the state of technical and vocational education and training in many African countries is even more parlous. Workshops with non-functioning equipment dating from 30-40 years ago, linked to abandoned donor projects from Russia, the ILO, CIDA, SIDA, Danida and ODA, can be found in many different countries, a testimony to the risks of reliance on aid cycles of priority as well as to the dangers of not integrating external projects into national systems of education reform, quality assurance and sustained maintenance.

The larger macroeconomic problem is that technical and vocational training has most often not been part of a wider strategy for national industrial and technological development, and in too many countries formal industry which was already very small was further decimated by structural adjustment and the associated liberalisation of cheap imports.<sup>15</sup>

The supreme paradox for the continent that has been the recipient of so much advice from missionaries, colonial authorities and then the new ‘missions’ from donor agencies and international NGOs about the supreme suitability and then unsuitability of industrial training is that they lack today functioning national systems for skills development. Philip Foster’s famous adage that ‘the education history of the Gold Coast is strewn with the wreckage of schemes [of vocational education]’ could be applied to modern Ghana, and indeed to many other African countries (Foster, 1965: 145).<sup>16</sup> Of course, African leaders cannot be absolved from any responsibility for the crisis of skills development. They have continued to expect a great deal from technical and vocational education, in terms of employment creation, enterprise development and the realisation of the goal of becoming an industrial society, without seriously investing in or planning for the sector. As recently as 2001, Ghana was investing only 1% of its education budget in TVET. Yet despite the under-investment, politicians continue to expect very much more from TVET than from academic secondary schooling. Thus, in Kenya, TVET is often mentioned as being critical to the achievement of its plans for industrialisation by 2020. But as a consultancy report has admitted, ‘the current TVET curriculum was so weak ‘in various aspects of technology development and transfer of skills that Kenya cannot achieve meaningful progress towards industrialisation, no matter what the deadline’ (GoK, 2003: vii).

A last point in this series of rapid comments on the history, culture and context of skills development in Africa is that after more than a hundred years of receiving bountiful advice and irregular external assistance to the TVET sector, the situation now is that Africa is more likely to be discussed in the literature for the crucial importance and potential of its informal sector, and of the potential for training

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<sup>14</sup> It says something about the critical dependency of Africa that a Commission for Africa should be accepted with external financing by African leaders; it is very hard to imagine a Commission for India or for China on similar lines.

<sup>15</sup> One of the notable exceptions here is South Africa which has been acutely aware that its national plans for transformation of the economy are threatened by an acute shortage of priority technical, artisan and technicians skills (See McGrath and Akoojee, 2007)

<sup>16</sup> It is perhaps unfortunate that Foster’s well-known article on ‘The vocational school fallacy’ was related to an African country. It was not of course hostile to vocational schools at all, but to the optimism of politicians who thought that making the school curriculum more vocational could radically re-order the labour market aspirations of young people. The article is much better known for its title than its content.

therein, than of its national systems for vocational preparation. **Yet, it is precisely the informal economy that has had no external assistance at all** but which is today responsible for 85% of the employment and the very great bulk of all technical and vocational training in many countries. The World Bank's latest global *Education Sector Strategy Update (ESSU)* seems almost to be suggesting that there is something peculiarly appropriate about leaving Africa to its informal economy, but with the future offer of some support:

In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, finding productive employment for the 7–10 million annual new entrants to the labour force is a key challenge, given largely stagnant wage employment and an informal economy accounting for typically as much as 85 percent of total employment. Given the region's low literacy rates and educational attainment; the impact of wars; and the impact of HIV/AIDS—which is deskilling the workforce, driving up labour costs, and reducing incentives for investing in skills—reaching the informal sector with skills development will be important for poverty reduction. (World Bank, 2005b: 32-3).

Although the discourse is very different from that of *Education for the Coloured Race*, 100 years earlier, there is a danger of misinterpreting this prescription to imply that for Africa, training in the informal sector – for poverty reduction and not for growth – will be sufficient. It is however worth underlining that the situation may be set to change if we are to believe the substantial demand for TVET that has been registered in the 10-year development plans which DFID has asked its target countries in Africa to supply (Levesque, 2007). If these came to fruition, it could mean the building of much needed provision.

### **India: planning to challenge a culture of low skills**

When we turn from Africa to India, we might have anticipated that we would be entering a different world of high skills for engaging with the knowledge economy. India is very seldom coupled with Africa; but in the last two years the number of articles and papers and research projects which have coupled India and China as 'Asian Drivers' is significant.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, quite typically, there is a workshop on 'Asian Drivers: China and India shaping the global political economy' taking place in Beijing on 12-13<sup>th</sup> January 2007 as part of the Eighth Annual Global Development Conference. But before we imagine that India is a sub-continent high level IT skills, we should enter a word of caution. There are analysts in India today who are saying something that sounds very similar to what Foster said about a history of education being strewn with the wreckage of schemes for vocational education. A current example would be Ashoka Chandra:

Various commissions and committees over the last 150 years have emphasised the need for vocational education and suggested a variety of initiatives for instituting a meaningful system of vocational education, but, unfortunately,

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<sup>17</sup> By contrast the refrain about 'drivers' in Africa is all about how important it is that Africa should be in the 'driver's seat' in development policy when so often, very conspicuously, it is not.

the experience of implementation on the ground has been less than satisfactory. (Chandra, 2006: 1)

Chandra picks out for particular mention the fact that the famous Kothari Commission of 1964 urgently recommended that the proportion of vocationalisation at lower secondary should be 20%, higher secondary 50% and higher education 30%. This was later reinforced by the National Policy of Education (NPE) in 1986; but 40 years after Kothari and 20 years after NPE, the total enrolment in vocational classes is standing at 2.5%, which is as low as some of the least developed countries in Africa. Even though the vocational preparation under the Industrial Training Institutes of the Ministry of Labour and Employment is relatively stronger, Chandra concludes that 'the undeniable fact is that the size of VET remains small' (Chandra, *ibid*: 2). The combined total of VET in all the relevant ministries in India comes to barely 3.3 million, while in China, as we shall see shortly, the numbers under just one ministry, Education, totalled 20 million in 2006 in vocational schools, and 7 million in higher vocational institutes.

Like Africa, it may be worth reflecting on whether there are particular reasons within the culture and history of India's formal and unorganised sectors that have some bearing on these low enrolments in VET. Part of the answer is provided by a fascinating account of the 'Building of technical skills' in the *Human Development Report (HDR) in South Asia 1998* (Ul Haq and Ul Haq, 1998: ch.7). This provides a searing account of the state of skills across the countries of South Asia. The start of the chapter gives a flavour:

The vocational and technical education programmes in South Asia are often inadequate, irrelevant, and qualitatively poor. There is perhaps no other field in education that requires from South Asian policy-makers more fundamental rethinking, sweeping reforms, and extensive change. (*ibid*. 96).

The HDR is aware of evidence about the higher rates of productivity associated with skills training, and also about the high rates of employment in such countries as South Korea of vocational graduates. But what is surprising about South Asia is that there are very low placement rates for the technical school and technical institute graduates. Only 30% in Bangladesh, even less in Nepal get employed, and in India over 100,000 technical graduates were unemployed or under-employed when the report was written. It is also refreshing to see the HDR reject as 'totally unjustified' the conclusions of Psacharopoulos' studies which purported to show the lower rate of return to technical as compared with general education. After demonstrating the flaws in the studies, the HDR comments that 'Irrelevant studies are no basis for sensible policies' (*Ibid*. 97). It also berates the World Bank for reducing its support for TEVT from 30% of its total educational aid in the 1970s to 5% in the 1990s.

The paradox therefore is that in a global situation where there are strong returns to technical education, and good productivity gains, why are the systems of vocational and technical education in South Asia characterised by low enrolment, high drop-outs, poor quality of teachers, inequitable access for women and rural populations, limited private sector involvement, and very inadequate budgetary allocations?

The HDR's critique of the crisis is more persuasive than its analysis of the cause of such dramatic neglect. Admittedly, there is a motivational problem on the part of the students and their parents, but so there is in many other parts of the world, where there are nevertheless excellent facilities for skills development. The Report does raise the key point that many employers have a preference for on-the-job training as opposed to institution-based training, but the point is not elaborated. In fact, this goes to the heart of the problem. Across South Asia, there is a very widespread preference for training workers on the job. Typically, workers are taken on as unskilled, casual labourers, and over many years, the more promising and hard-working are sifted out, and attached to older, skilled workers. In the early years, the trainees are paid little and sometimes even nothing. Frequently, they get none of the social benefits accorded to permanent workers. Because the labour laws give great protection to permanent workers, employers go to great lengths to avoid staff gaining such status. Many workers are literally 'permanent casuals'; they sign contracts which agree to their being sacked before the deadline that would entitle them to be permanent, and they are then rehired.<sup>18</sup>

The certificate and diploma holders from the Industrial Training Institutes in India and their counterparts in other South Asian countries do not fit into this pattern at all. Where they do get hired, it will tend to be more modern, export-oriented firms, and certainly with growing foreign direct investment, there will be also foreign firms that will appreciate those graduates that are well-trained in appropriate technical skills. But the great bulk of small and medium-sized firms are operating in a culture of training on the job that is diametrically opposed to these institutional approaches.

Indeed, it could be argued that the enormous informal, or unorganised sector in India arranges its training in a way that is very similar to what we have just described for the 'modern' or formal sector of the economy. By contrast with Africa, there has been relatively little analytical work done on the systems of training in the informal. In fact one of the first books to be written exclusively on this topic has been published in January 2007 (Chandra and Khanijo, 2007). But it pays more attention to different initiatives that have sought to innovate in training for the informal sector than analysing the indigenous training system itself.

The Government of India appears to be aware of the seriousness of the skills crisis in India, and in the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan Approach Paper has promised that 'vocational training shall be accorded top priority' and that 'priority (will be) at par with secondary education in allocating public sector financial and physical resources' (Chandra, 2006: 43). In an extraordinary pledge, the Approach Paper argues that 'The number of skills for which training is provided must be increased hundred fold, from 40 at present to closer to 4000 as provided in China' (GOI 2006b: 48). Equally, the ambition is to raise the overall numbers from a mere 2-3 million to 15 million new entrants to the labour force (ibid. 49).

Like the current plans of several Sub-Saharan governments radically to expand their TVET provision, mentioned earlier, there is lot of planning underway, including the introduction of a National Vocational Qualification system and a National Vocational

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<sup>18</sup> See Jan Breman's work (1996) on *Footloose labour* for confirmation of these patterns in Gujerat State.

Authority, with an elaborate institutional arrangement at central, state and district levels (Chandra, 2006: 44). There is even a ‘Task Force on Skill Formation in the Unorganised Sector’ with ambitious terms of reference, proposed under a new National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (GOI 2004). One of these items is ‘a National Skill Development Initiative for the Unorganised Sector’.<sup>19</sup>

But all these plans, at the end of 2006, are still all on paper. The precise scope and coverage are being worked out. As Chandra remarks: ‘Current thinking is gravitating towards an ambitious plan to do some justice to the huge dimensions of the VET task and variety of target groups, covering both the formal and informal economy’ (Chandra, 2006” 44). It is a very tall order, and not least because there seems to be a longstanding mechanism at the very heart of the formal sector of the economy that is hostile to the recognition of institutional qualifications for the labour force.

### **China: implementing a regime of skills for growth, productivity, export – and equity?**

We have put this last section in the form of a question for the very good reason that the ideas mentioned here are very tentative and are built upon an initial reading of some of the literature (in English), and on discussions and visits to a handful of vocational schools and institutes. It constitutes more of a preliminary agenda for research than a balanced set of interpretations of the dynamic of vocational education since the opening-up of 1978. Hopefully, these few ideas will encourage a reaction from those present who know a great deal more about the Mainland, Hong Kong and Macau than I do.

A first remark about the Mainland’s skills development is made as an Africanist. Since the initiation of the Forum for China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in October 2000, China has been using its newly established African Human Resources Development Fund to support the short-term training of large numbers of African professionals. The totals are not small: 10,000 were successfully trained between 2003 and 2006; and a commitment at the Beijing Summit of November 2006 was publicly made to train a further 15,000 between 2007 and 2009. As part of these commitments, China is already engaged in what is effectively an ‘aid’ process, though this is not a word that the government feel easy with. One element is a project to train vocational educators in Ethiopia which has been underway for several years already (King, 2007b; 2007c). As China re-enters the challenging world of development cooperation, it will become increasingly important to know more about the approach to vocational training that is being used in Ethiopia and to what extent it draws on best practice in China.<sup>20</sup>

The influence of the policy and legal background to vocation education in China is a second issue of great salience. There have been a series of major explicit commitments by the Party to the vigorous promotion of technical and vocational education since the opening-up, and these came together in the Vocational Education

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<sup>19</sup> For further discussion on these multiple initiatives and plans around skills, see King 2006b.

<sup>20</sup> China is engaged in a huge number of major infrastructural projects across Africa, from Sierra Leone to Sudan, and from Angola to Tanzania, which involve major human resource development and training issues (King, 2006c).

Law of May 15, 1996.<sup>21</sup> This is an impressive and comprehensive document, providing for the rights of citizens to receive vocational education, but also picking out for special mention the targeting of rural areas, ethnic minorities, women, disabled, unemployed and other problem groups in the labour market (China, 1996). In marked contrast to what we just noted for India, there is a strong emphasis on the need for workers to receive necessary vocational education before taking up occupations, and for employers to ensure that workers engaging in technical work receive proper training before going to their posts. The Law also makes very clear the responsibility of the authorities at every different level to make proper provision, and also grants permission to trade associations and enterprises to carry out vocational training. There is in fact considerable decentralisation of responsibility to local governments. In addition, it is clear that vocational education and training are to be integrated into the planning of the national and local economy and into social development. This is particularly evident in the concern that rural vocational education be well integrated into planned development of the rural economy, agricultural science and technology.

The key issue with legal provisions, however elegantly expressed, is their implementation status. This is an obvious research challenge, but it is already clear that there have been really massive quantitative increases in the vocational education sector alone over the last 20 years.<sup>22</sup> Compared to the 2.5% (400,000 students) in India who have entered the vocational streams in upper secondary education in 2006, China has a bifurcated system of general and vocational education in upper secondary, and there were about 20 million young people studying in the vocational segment in 2006, and a further 7 million studying in the nation's higher vocational institutes.<sup>23</sup>

Although there have been major successes in implementation, it is also clear that the requirements of the Vocational Education Law do not just mechanically fall into place. The Law prescribes 20% of the annual education budget to be allocated to vocational education, but the ratio is much lower in practice. Indeed the ratio has slipped to 7.1% apparently in 2004, and in Guangdong where there is an enormous demand for skilled workers, vocational schools only get 3% of the education budget (Wu, 2006). On the other hand, it is obvious that targets, whether for aid to Africa or to the quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement of vocational education are taken very seriously.

A third area of research importance is the relationship in China between what is happening in the wider macro-economic environment and what is happening in the nation's skill development system. Here, too, there is some very suggestive evidence of planned integration between the planning for rural transformation, and poverty reduction in China, and the role of vocational and technical education. Here there

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<sup>21</sup> See also the discussion in Copenhagen Development Consultant (2006: 24)

<sup>22</sup> Even the relatively tiny Hong Kong has as many fulltime places for young people to enter the 9 Institutes of Vocational Education (IVE) as there are fulltime places in the 9 universities. There are, in addition, ten times more part-time vocational students than fulltime students in vocational training.

<sup>23</sup> Of course, India's TVET is delivered more through the industrial training institutes than vocational schools; but even taking this into account, it should be remembered that the total of those being trained in all of India's relevant agencies came to 3.3 million, as compared to China's 27 million for the formal education segment alone.

would be scope for interesting work in the relationship of the State Council's *Development-oriented poverty reduction programme for rural China* (2003) and the implementation of its ambitious commitments to provide the poorer Western provinces with a whole series of integrated investments as well as offer their rural migrants vocational skills (LGOP, 2003:98-9).

There are many more subjects of intense interest in the vocational arena. These would include the increasing involvement of international bodies such as Australia's Technical and Further Education (TAFE), and accreditation bodies associated with the German Delegations of Industry and Commerce (AHK) operating in Shanghai and Beijing. Also of importance is the formal linkage between securing a professional qualification and getting a job and securing promotion within the job. Again, it looks like here there are enormous differences between China and India. Another area would be the role in China of the informal sector. Although for the moment, this is only speculative, it would appear for reasons related to the powerful pressures for formalisation of training, and the massive extension of 9 year compulsory education, the role of the informal sector, not to mention schemes for training in the informal sector, are not on the agenda in China at all.

To be concluded

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