

## EDUCATION: A COMPARISON OF INDIA AND CHINA

Charles F. Bingman

India and China have developed two distinct forms of centrist elitist states which are very different but which share common characteristics. First of all, they are highly centrist in nature which means that they exhibit a compelling urge to gather power into the government, and then to hold such power at the national government level. Both have made significant delegations to state level governments, but China in particular believes in the central control of decentralized operations. There is a collateral urge to concentrate power in the hands of a small elite group especially around the power of economic development. In both cases, the logic is that centralized power is more easily controlled and manipulated, and that any sharing of power invites the undesirable prospect of having to negotiate and perhaps to be forced to compromise.

This centrist urge is common to all forms of government: democracies, dictatorships, state socialist regimes, and even in Islamic states, where many of the control mechanisms are guided or compelled by religious imperatives rather than secular principles. While the key to power is usually economic, governments that are particularly authoritarian seek to extend their control to all elements of society: political, economic, social services, and even the definition of acceptable national cultural mores.

Once in power, centrist governments tend to become the captives of their own compelling need to hold on to power. They become very "doctrinaire"; that is, they use a doctrine or philosophy as justification for the correctness of their position and as a political justification for holding on to their power. Examples include the 65 year history of state communism in the Soviet Union, most of Eastern Europe, Cuba, China and North Korea. Islamic states tend to rely heavily on religious doctrine as defined in the Qur'an and Shari'a. Most political parties establish some degree of a doctrinal base as a means to attract supporters and define what the party stands for. The great wave of movement toward state socialism was elaborately defined by doctrine that emphasized the necessity for state control of national social services and large segments of the national economy, accompanied by official suspicion of the private sector, and this pattern persists officially in China, even where communist/socialist doctrine has lost a good deal of its relevance. Ruling elites, even if essentially honest, are still narrow in vision, often isolated and unrealistic in their understandings, and tend to be reactionary, parochial, self-centered and self-important.

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## THE FAILURES OF EDUCATION IN INDIA

After WW II, the great clash between the concepts of a largely private market based world, and a world of centrist socialism seemed to have been won by the forces of State Socialism in a variety of forms from the total absolute centrist dictatorship in the Soviet Union and China to more moderate versions such as those in Sweden, France, Italy or India.

The leadership in both China and India believed that centrist authority and control was vital in managing their vast, chaotic countries, and both felt that this centrist control should be exercised by a small self chosen elite. In China, that elite took the form of a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) dictatorship under Mao Zedong, who could only see the world in terms of enormous revolutionary conflict with ominous “foreign imperialist” enemies, seeking to ally themselves with dark reactionary forces within the country.

In India, the elite was more benign and not as militant. Power was held as a matter of “right” by a combination of Fabian Socialist theorists, high caste Brahmins, and socialist economists who never doubted their own superiority. Indians eventually learned from painful experience that their State did not necessarily work on behalf of the people. It worked on behalf of itself –the politicians, bureaucrats and the interests that directly supported them – sustained by the theology of centrist Socialism. Thus buttressed and sustained, State employees became a powerful vested interest that was responsible to no one.

This attitude manifested itself in the design of the national education system that emerged after independence. Most positions of power and influence were held by upper caste Brahmins many of whom strongly felt that even elementary education for “lower castes” was a waste; that education was a privilege to be reserved for certain elite castes; that even mid level castes needed only very basic education; that education for girls was outrageous; and that the possibility of lower castes learning to read sacred texts was sacrilegious.

The two giants of post-independence India – Gandhi and Nehru –opposed widespread formal education, but for different reasons. Gandhi felt that educating the people’s children was a good thing, but that it should be confined to basic things such as crafts and practical skills for the boys and child rearing and household skills for girls. Nehru typified the elitist, class biased interpretation of the government’s responsibilities for education, which meant that formal education would be largely reserved for a relatively small elite, mostly the sons (but not the daughters) of senior government officials, military officers, high caste Brahmins, and influential political figures. For this elite group, nothing was spared. Their elementary/secondary schools were first class – all of the amenities, often including swimming pools, tennis courts and cricket fields. Meanwhile, within walking distance were crowded slums where schools for the urban poor were held in rickety buildings lacking toilets, running water and even books and blackboards. The children of the elite were sent away at government expense for advanced degrees in economics, political science, science and engineering, and military training, all very much in the patterns employed by the British in the Victorian era and up to WW II. As with China and the Soviet Union, state socialism was the perfect justification for elite centrist control; the masses were to be led (or driven), and all they needed to know was to do as they were told. India’s political leadership, including the Nehru and Gandhi family dynasties drew their political support largely from the upper caste elite. This caste elitism was especially strong in rural/village areas where it was linked with the landed gentry, most of whom sought preferment for their own children, but were not about to pay for the education of the children of the poor.

## Education: A Comparison of India and China

This Brahmin elitism was blended in with several other prejudices, the strongest of which was and is against the education of girls. It seems never to have occurred to the ruling elite that girls were capable of serious intellectual attainment, or that almost half of the talent base of children was simply being neglected. Despite repeated earnest and pompous policy utterances to the contrary, in 2005, it was still true that less than 1/3 of girls ever got into any kind of school<sup>1</sup>.

India remains an absolutely incomprehensible puzzle of religious, ethnic, cultural, regional, social, economic, and language differences, representing formidable barriers to acceptable progress in the reform – or even the creation – of an adequate education system. For example, classes may be taught and books provided in local languages rather than English or Hindi. This may satisfy some narrow cultural or political need, but it leaves children who are unable to connect with the greater world outside of their own region.

Government schools are certainly not free; instead they charge heavy fees and related expenses. Many rural/village families are so poor that they can't afford to pay these fees. In addition, upper castes tend to think that it is perfectly acceptable for the children of the poor to work, and that it is equally acceptable for the privileged classes to design for themselves a rich and highly subsidized system of education. Child labor is not, in the last analysis, officially illegal, since huge exceptions are allowed for work in agriculture, family households, restaurants, and so called cottage industries. In other cases, the laws mandating compulsory elementary and secondary education are simply ignored<sup>2</sup>. This helps to explain why, despite laws supposedly mandating universal primary education, almost 50% of all children are not in school. There is a big slippage between "student enrollment" and student attendance.

One of the most significant policy decisions made by Nehru was to delegate responsibility for elementary and secondary education to India's 28 States and 7 Union territories. There is nothing really wrong with such a delegation, but the decision was largely based on some perverse motives. First, it appears that the national (i. e. Union) government was really signaling its complete indifference to elementary education; the delegation to the States was with the full recognition that almost all were relatively poor and could ill afford, without central government help, the costs of educating what is now over 200 million children in more than 740,000 schools. It was also understood that this de-aggregation of authority would certainly result in wide disparities in the quality of education. But the national government really did not seem to care.

A second motive exactly parallels the decisions made in China: by delegating responsibility for education and other vital social services, the central government avoided huge costs, and was able to concentrate its resources on economic development. Finally, the main political conflicts have been between Congress Party – the party of the Nehrus and Gandhis – and Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). When the BJP has been in power, it has shown a tendency to "Hinduize" education by meddling with the content of textbooks and the substance of classroom curricula.

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<sup>1</sup> See Nussbaum, Martha C., "The Clash Within," Chap. 8, Harvard U. Press, 2007. See also India Guide, [www.JUSTLANDED.com/](http://www.JUSTLANDED.com/) India Guide. Asian Human Rights Commission, Asia Child Rights, [www.ACR.HRSCHOOL.org](http://www.ACR.HRSCHOOL.org).

<sup>2</sup> See Panagariya, Arvind, "India: The Emerging Giant", p. 432-437, Oxford U. Press, 2008.

What has finally emerged from this pattern of neglect and indifference is a school system that has the following major components<sup>3</sup>:

1. Public schools
2. Private schools: but publicly aided
3. Private schools: recognized, but not aided
4. Private schools: unrecognized.

The rise of private school education is a powerful reflection of the universal failure of public schools, which are so bad that even the poorest of parents give up on them and somehow find the money to send their children to the more expensive private schools. Every aspect of public schools is miserable – the management, the teachers, the curricula, the physical plant. Even recognizing that India has been and remains a poor developing country, had there been the will, the funding for adequate schools could have been found. The national government need not have abdicated its responsibilities and dumped the full costs of elementary/secondary education on the States as huge unfunded mandates. The central government tends to be defensive, arguing that it exerts a real leadership role, but this is unrealistic. Time after time, the central government has issued national “Plans” to achieve universal elementary education. The first such scheme was issued at the time of the new Constitution in 1950. The Constitution did not mandate universal education but merely “urged” it. This first Plan targeted universal education for 1959! No clear government policy was even published until 1984, and again it was phony. Another National Policy on Education was drafted in 1986 and revised again in 1992, each stating goals for free mandatory primary education, but neither having any real impact. In 1998, the National Council of Education Research and Training issued another “National Policy on Education” which appeared to make elementary and secondary education a shared responsibility between the national government and the States. But here were the assigned roles of the national government:

1. To develop a national policy (since it is not mandatory, everyone is free to ignore it)
2. To provide consultation about education
3. To establish necessary commissions, committees and working groups
4. To stimulate and promote public debate and discussion

This is the perfect expression of the Indian education elite; highly sophisticated and intellectual, lots of discussion, but no money, no action, and little actual help.

In 2000, the government once again issued a new “Education for All” policy aimed at promoting universal elementary education. Then finally in 2009, a law was passed that provided for universal, free and compulsory education for all children between the ages of six and fourteen. Unfortunately, after 60 years of neglect, half of the children, and about 300 million adults were unable to read the new law.

There are about one million schools and five million teachers, and generally their reputation is unbelievably bad. Administration in public schools suffers from gross

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 449.

## Education: A Comparison of India and China

inefficiency, an intensely bureaucratic mind set, timidity, cowardice and corruption. There are too many administrators and too few actual teachers. Local politicians and school administrators have never been able to generate adequate funds for school systems, and a lot of the money that is provided is squandered, stolen or misappropriated. Teacher appointments may be sold to the highest bidder without regard to qualifications. Politicians “intercept” funds destined for schools and cause them to be spent on other things, or simply to disappear. Parents endlessly complain about how the high school fees that they can ill afford end up in the pockets of administrators. Administrators supposedly hire contractors to make badly needed school repairs, but the work is never done and the money vanishes.

Money for basic education actually began to increase in the mid 80s, but most of the money has gone for higher teacher salaries and benefits. Yet the numbers of teachers in classrooms has declined, classes are larger, and performance remains drastically bad. Today, almost 90% of school budgets go for teacher/administrator salaries and benefits, and still, repeated surveys and opinion polls say the same thing: many classes are practically useless<sup>4</sup>. Teachers have been known to collect their salaries and then pay some local substitute to show up in their place, so that they can be marked “present”. The rate of teacher absenteeism and truancy is absolutely astounding. Repeated school samplings, even by school administrators themselves, have shown that, on any given day, as many as from 25% to 65% of the teachers were absent. This level of truancy, according to the UN, is the highest measured anywhere in the world<sup>5</sup>. It is inconceivable how any school administration could be so pitifully incompetent as to allow this truancy to persist year after year. School inspectors, who cannot fail to know about these problems are famous for their ability to solicit bribes.

One explanation relates to the power of teacher unions in India. The Indian Constitution provides for a special representation of teachers in the upper houses of Indian State legislatures. The unions take great advantage of this preferment and have exerted what seems to be an unwarranted degree of leverage on laws and policies. No school administrator can afford to cross these unions. If teachers want to be truant, their absence is “excused”. Teacher strikes and agitations over pay, benefits and working conditions are intimidating and almost always successful. Many teachers are absent from classes, but can be found offering “special tutoring” to their students – for an extra fee.

Many of the same kinds of incompetence can be found in course content. Classes are often judged so simplistic and obsolete that they are all but useless. Many schools in every system are “one teacher”, and 80% of the schools in rural areas teach only elementary level classes. More than 70% of students live in India’s 550,000 villages, and many children cannot even reach a school. Books are old, poorly written or non-existent, and many are in regional languages of limited usefulness. Even where better texts are available, often the money to buy them is not.

And what about the children? Overall, nearly 50% are not in school (70% for girls), and in rural areas this gap can be as high as 80%. For those who manage to get in, 50% will drop out after the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and just 20% will ever make it through secondary education, which is seriously neglected. Only 17% of the current adult population has any secondary education. Of

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<sup>4</sup> Kandar, Mira, "Planet India", pp. 203-215, New York, Scribners, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Nussbaum, Martha C., "The Clash Within", Chap. 8, Harvard U. Press, 2007.

those children who reach the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, an unbelievable 1/3 of them are still unable to read or write. In rural areas, only about 5% of parents can even read their children's report cards<sup>6</sup>.

In sum, the elementary/secondary school system is a national disgrace, and has been forever. The elite leadership of the country badly underestimated the number of reasonably educated people needed to run a modern economy, so for 60 years, education was ignored. While illiteracy has been greatly reduced, somehow it seems never to have sunk in that to be "literate" is not the same as being educated. India's new laws still aim merely at universal **primary** education, and still, most children can't make it through the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Even less is being done for secondary education, which is the portal to higher education. While India targets achieving education through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, much of the developed world is thinking in terms of master's degrees. Other developing countries, many in the Far East like Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines have achieved universal primary education, and China is very close.

A lot of hope for an educational resurrection is being placed on two tides running in the country. The first is the obvious high degree of success that has followed the retreat of the government from state socialist economics and the license Raj. The political leadership is finally realizing that the surge of economic expansion demands a far broader base of young people educated at least through 12 grades. One of the real success patterns for the government has been that they have produced some really outstanding enhancements in higher education. India is no longer trying to duplicate Oxford or Cambridge, or even the London School of Economics. Instead, they want to replicate MIT or Cal Tech, or the Imperial Institute in London. The Indian Institutes of Technology, Institutes of Management, Institutes of Information Technology, and the Institute of Science produce outstanding graduates, and these institutions were initiated and nurtured by the government<sup>7</sup>. Clearly, the national government, which ignores primary education, wants to be seen as the patron of higher education.

The second hopeful tide that is running is that, as the private sector becomes more broadly based, sophisticated and technological, it tends to do two things: to pressure governments at all levels to reform; and to provide their own support for education. Education in India now often means private sources providing a broad range of technical and managerial training, and a lot of "how to do it" training programs for everything from computers and office management to motivational sales programs. Both caste and gender prejudices have been carried over into the new private sector world, where high caste males have an edge, but these prejudices are much weaker there. The Indian Administrative Service and the state owned enterprises are no longer the favored path to success. Where do the smartest kids want to work? In private sector jobs with large international corporations.

## EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT IN CHINA

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Also, see Asian Human Rights Commission, Asia Child Rights, [www.ACR.HRSCHOOL.org](http://www.ACR.HRSCHOOL.org).

<sup>7</sup> The Indian Institutes of Management are located in Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Lucknow, Kozikodi, Indore and Shillog. Indian Institutes of Technology are located in Kharghaur, Mumbai, Chennai, Kanpur, Dehli, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Patna, Punjab, Rajhasthan, Madras and Roohee. The Indian Institutes of Information Technology are located in Mumbai, Kharaghpur, Delhi and Chennai. The Institute of Science is located in Bangalore.

## Education: A Comparison of India and China

The inability to provide adequate education for China's children is one of the greatest failures of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). China has 235 million school children - one fourth of the world's total. There are about 13 million primary and secondary school teachers, and it is estimated that 10 million of them need far better training, and 3 million of them, called Minban, are essentially untrained. Universities were badly battered in the Mao years, and few improvements were made in the period up to the late 90s; in other words, a whole generation of 20 years was lost. It is not surprising that there is a huge gap between the numbers of well educated people needed in the new economy, and the numbers that are being produced. But at least, this is one gap that the Chinese government is seriously attempting to fill<sup>8</sup>.

The CCP attempted to make primary education universal in the 60s, but delivery depended on Maoist communes and brigades (now townships and villages) which were incompetent. These "people run" schools operated outside of the regular government structure and used untrained villagers as teachers in obviously inadequate facilities. In many villages, schools can't be used during rainy weather. Many have dirt floors, outdoor rest rooms, no running water (except thru leaky roofs), and not even blackboards. In rural areas many of the schools are still financed voluntarily by villagers. China has 800,000 substitute teachers who are even less qualified than the minban and they earn next to nothing. Further, much instruction has been rote memorization and recital, and a lot was really communist political propaganda aimed at brainwashing students. Adults as well were subjected to mandatory training sessions aimed at "ideological remolding". There were many students and academics starting in the 60s who advocated change in the education system, but who accepted the communist/socialist state. No student "democracy" movement ever seems to have had much impact, and many students bought into the Cultural Revolution. In fact, students were one of the mainstays of the revolution, often against their elders and professors, and most of the Red Guards were students.

There are only very weak government motivations for social services delivery, provision of public infrastructure, the principles of public administration responsibility, the notion of individual rights and freedoms, or even the need for "truth". Much of the policy has also been driven by the shortage of funds and the fact that social services including education and public infrastructure runs a poor second to economic development. In most cases, social services were shoved down onto local governments and their expenditures as a percentage of the total has risen steadily and now only about 5% of social services funds are provided by the national government, and this has changed little in the last thirty years. Total expenditures on education and health remain less than 3% of the national GDP. Of local government expenditures for social services, 77% are at the municipal and township level. Much of the provincial and county level expenditures are in fact merely fund transfers to lower government, often in the form of categorical grants, which are partly political whitewash and part bribes or favoritism.

Until the 80s, much elementary/secondary education was provided largely through State Owned Enterprises (SOEs), but in the late 80s this responsibility was shifted to local governments, which finance schools largely by charging lots of relatively high fees, and the higher the fees, the more children are withdrawn. The whole system is marginal at best, and despite rhetoric to the contrary, it is not getting better very fast. This is a Maoist legacy, but

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<sup>8</sup> Becker, Jasper, "The Chinese", pp.202-224. Oxford U. Press, 2000. See also Tsai, Lily L. "Accountability Without Democracy", chap 3, pp. 60-70; pp. 77-79. Cambridge U. Press, 2004.

even after more than 20 years of “reform” the education system is still in very bad shape. During the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76, universities were shut down, some for as long as five years, and a whole generation of Chinese received little or no formal education. In 1982, half of the population, or 520 million people were still illiterate. While this number has commendably shrunk in the last 20 years, simple literacy, meaning a minimum ability of Chinese children to read and write, does not even begin to prepare them to match education levels in the rest of the world. Faculty salaries are miserable; prestige of teachers has been very low; existing schools were often converted barns and were ill maintained, dirty, and lacking even basic equipment. Despite the fact that there are 515,000 schools, damaged school systems could not meet the pace of demand for classrooms and only 60% of children are able to complete elementary school.

As the economy strengthens, more and more teachers are bailing out and looking for better jobs elsewhere. Repeated government promises over 20 years to improve the system have not been kept. In a UNESCO study in 1995<sup>9</sup>, the Chinese system was ranked 119<sup>th</sup> out of 130 countries in terms of per capita expenditure (at less than 2.8% of GDP), and 103<sup>rd</sup> out of 130 countries in number of university graduates per 100,000 people. Only 2% of students attend universities, compared to over 50% in the U. S. There has been significant growth of private schools – driven not by national policy but by parents who see official schools as bad news.

Local governments tried to obtain financing by charging high school fees, and special taxes on farmers, enterprises and collectives; by the mid 90s, about half of all school costs were off budget. But too much of the fees justified to parents to finance schools simply disappeared, or were diverted to cover other expenses such as economic enterprise costs or bureaucratic perks. Ideas for reform abound, but one must constantly be reminded of the “drop in the bucket” dimensions of proposed solutions, which are periodically announced by some government agency or Chinese Communist Party (CCP) “Plan”.

There are 2236 higher education institutions with 20 million students, but many of these institutions are Party schools, available only to Party members, and largely devoted to political indoctrination. The government is deliberately selecting a limited number (maybe 100) for elevation into first class institutions, which concedes that many university level institutions are inferior, and that the new “top 100” are not really expected to educate that many people. In typical CCP fashion, a set of “key institutions” are being created at all educational levels: 7,000 primary schools, 5,200 middle schools and 96 universities. They have been declared to be “centers of excellence” and draw the bulk of state funding, but they are really used to provide education for the children of the elite and have become an excuse and justification for ignoring the pitiful quality of most schools. Entrance to most schools beyond the elementary level is by competitive examination, a system that has grown increasingly perverse. Protests against Chang Kai-shek pointed out that his regime had cut education spending to only 3.6% of GDP; but in 1992, that number, under CCP rule, had shrunk to about 2%.

The government has set a target of 9 years of education for all children by 2000 and likes to take credit for the “rectification” of education, but in fact, it has achieved little or nothing, leaving the problem to local governments as a huge unfunded mandate. The education system outside of government has been heavily skewed toward the practical arts, and vocational and

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<sup>9</sup> Bingman, Charles F., "Reforming China's Government: Fixing the Worst Government in the World", XLibris Press, 2010.

## Education: A Comparison of India and China

technical education, and this is now supposed to be shifted toward broader general education with more emphasis on technology.

Perversely, children born outside of the “one child” policy are excluded from state schools, as are the children of rural residents who are unauthorized urban residents. The whole education philosophy seems to be to teach adherence to established mores, stability, conformity and obedience to authority. It does not allow diversity, or encourage independent thinking. One amazing fact is that 200 million Chinese students are studying English. Children start as early as the fourth grade, and over 2 million college students take a compulsory College English Test. The private fee-paying schools that have been established are widely seen as “aristocracy” schools for the children of the elite. Many of the schools in rural/village areas are private institutions because that is the only approach that works. But villagers complain that local politicians steal or waste their funds. At the same time, efforts are under way to replace the ill trained and uneducated teachers, but there simply are not nearly enough adequately capable people available to meet the needs since salaries are so low, and better jobs exist in governments or the Party, or in the “new economy” businesses.

Because local governments are either too poor, or they are spending their money on economic development, many universities have had to seek other sources of funding. Some went into business, forming collectives in the areas of retail sales, consulting and computers. In some cases, universities seek support from SOEs and private businesses. Many educational institutions were part of some government ministry, such as a “Construction Materials College” or an “Urban Design College”. These enterprises, always weak, are being terminated and folded into stronger and more balanced universities. Information about numbers of college level institutions is misleading in the sense that many of them are of very low value. The Ministry of Education has cut the number of university disciplines by more than half to 300, and has begun to merge universities into bigger units. This appears to mean that the ministry expects more production out of faculty – more class hours taught to larger classes, and with emphasis on the skills needed in the new economy.

Reforms in higher education are now gathering some momentum, largely because the CCP now realizes the wide gap in both numbers and skills, and also, the CCP is deliberately out to gain political credibility as the “creator” of new higher education capabilities. Universities are finally being allowed to widen their academic horizons and offer a more relevant range of courses, and graduates were no longer assigned compulsorily to jobs by the state authorities. The first MBA program was introduced in China in 1990, and MBAs are now the rage. In 2002 more than 5 million students who had finished secondary school took college entrance exams. More than 50% were successful, compared to only 2.4% 20 years earlier. Restrictions on foreign study were relaxed (but not removed). Increasingly, it is desirable to find a future at home. Fewer students who study abroad stay there, but this number is still about 150,000 out of 600,000<sup>10</sup>.

The conflict between education and indoctrination continues. Big money is spent to provide hundreds of indoctrination schools and training centers reserved for the Party membership<sup>11</sup>. Teachers in all schools are at risk and must not allow what happens in the class

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<sup>10</sup> Shell, Orville, and Shambaugh, David, Editors, "The China Reader", pp. 215-223. New York, Vintage Books, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

room to appear to question standard doctrine. Truth is less important than “correctness”, as defined in communist theology. Official policy statements are still saturated with this doctrine. Students are supposed to emerge as both “red and expert”. The official line actually states that students will be allowed to study only for the sake of learning to continue the revolution, and the leaders of the Party have continuously pounded home the great need for mastering “correct political orientation” as the goal of education. Deng’s speeches were full of references to “loyalty to the Socialist Motherland”, or “building revolutionary order and discipline” or “protection of the proletarian cause, Marxism-Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought”.

Elementary/secondary education must remain the responsibility of local governments, primarily at the village, township and county level, but with better transportation now available, it should be possible for these jurisdictions to rationalize the physical facilities of school into fewer but better equipped numbers of schools. The policy of individual self-sufficiency is a desirable one, but the governments must recognize that a large percentage of parents have serious trouble paying very high education fees, and they must assume more of the cost of the school physical plant and teacher salary and benefit costs so that exorbitant fees can be eliminated. The government should encourage, and not try to prevent, the development of private schools, but nobody really thinks that these private schools will ever be the answer for the great bulk of China’s 235 million school children. It would be a great advantage if governments sponsored and mandated specific taxes dedicated to elementary/secondary education; but local jurisdictions only rarely seem to take such a step on their own. There is a concerted effort to upgrade the skills and competence of teachers and administrators, but the political leadership must overcome their normal urge to play cheapskates and learn to pay teachers much more attractive salaries, so that they don’t all leave for better paying jobs elsewhere. But the percentage of funding from other than government budgets has grown to over 46%.

At the university level, concentration on a limited number of “key” schools probably foretells the abandonment of hundreds of lesser institutions. Over twenty years ago, the government tagged seven universities for concentrated investment<sup>12</sup>. Millions will struggle to obtain a higher education, but current reforms are still designed to provide preferential treatment for the ruling elite, which are now extended to include the new middle class.

## SUMMARY

If one accepts the premise that one of the most important responsibilities of governments is to provide an adequate level of social services for its people, then both China and India have failed that responsibility in the arena of elementary education, and these failures are enormous, and to a large degree deliberate.

Both countries placed main responsibility for elementary education at the state/province level, knowing that most local governments were desperately poor. Both central governments were fully aware of the fact that primary education would be seriously under funded and neither has ever done anything about it. In both countries, the numbers of schools is

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<sup>12</sup> There are seven universities officially designated as “key”. They are Fudan, Nanjing, Peking, Shanghai, Jiaotong, Tsinghua, Xi’an Jiaotong, and Zhejiang. See Levin, Richard C. “Top of the Class”, *Foreign Affairs Journal*, Vol. 9 # 13, May/June, 2010.

## Education: A Comparison of India and China

seriously inadequate the physical plant for many is terrible to the point that children lack toilets and even running water in some cases. Almost always, schools lack modern accurate books and other teaching aids. Often they even lack paper, pens, blackboards and even desks.

In both countries, teachers are largely undereducated, poorly trained, and poorly motivated. In India, the rate of teacher truancy is terrible – said to be the worst in the world. On any given day, 40% or more of the teaching staff are absent, and classes, if held, are often by substitutes or office staff. In India, the reputation of state run schools is so bad that a high proportion of education is in the hands of private providers.

India has teachers unions that are highly politicized and exert powerful political leverage on politicians. Few school administrators are willing to challenge the unions over teacher truancy or poor performance. In China, teachers unions are under the control of the central government and are used to enforce teacher doctrinal conformity, and the government never hesitates to exert control over course content. India specializes in grand plans and policy statements.

Motivation for better education is in part a function of the level of education of the general population. In China, functional literacy now exceeds 90%; in India, it is about 60%. One third of India's adult population remains illiterate; only 17% have completed secondary education, mostly of low quality. China is headed for full secondary education, while India, 60 years after independence is still trying to get children through 8 grades. Only half of Indian children ever enter school. Of those, another 50% will drop out after the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. And in India especially, it seems pitiful to recognize that many fail to understand that "literacy" is not the same as "education".

In both countries, the central governments remain responsible for higher education but both are still concentrating on educating a small elite. Both governments place top priority on economic development, and both have come to realize the necessity for a big expansion of the numbers of well educated people in reaching economic goals. Both are driven not so much by good government policy, but by growing pressure from their new "Middle Class" of younger people, from the growing private sector, and even by state owned enterprises which have awakened to the fact that they cannot compete with a staff of poorly educated clerks and machine tenders. India has spent a lot of money and effort to create a series of highly respected Institutes of Technology and Institutes of Management. China has spent much of its education money on special schools and training centers for their politicians to reeducate them in the theology of Marxist/Leninist/Mao Zedong Thought.

Finally, in China, all instruction is in Mandarin, with some latitude for local language "add-ons". In India, three languages are authorized: English, Hindi, and many local languages. Thus, many Indian children suffer the added disadvantage of an education in a language that provides very poor access to the outside world.