Education published by the Ministry of Education, pleaded for a solution to the dilemma:

> Of course, in solving these problems we cannot rely completely on the State. So long as we are reasonable, the peasants will be happy to take on the burden. Moreover, for many years they have already been bearing the expense of making needed repairs and maintaining the desks and chairs. In this matter, it would be best to have some stipulated guiding principles, the better to be followed uniformly in the various areas (Zhang, 1982:10).

In other words, the government felt that because peasants were growing wealthy due to the new agricultural policies, they should be able to completely fund their own schools from their own resources.

'Key point' schools have been rather controversial since their inception in the 1950s. They were designed to concentrate limited resources in a relatively small number of schools in order to cultivate outstanding students. During the Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976), it had been argued that the raising of standards (quality) was achieved at the expense of popularization (quantity). Furthermore, it was pointed out that this system promoted capitalist competition rather than socialist norms of equality.

Manpower planning and the emphasis on technical skills came back into favor with the longing for modernizations. There came a revival of the 'key school' in the 1980s even in the rural areas. On the one hand, the county-level Education Bureau tried to follow the central government's desire to provide more academically competent students. This led to a considerable misallocation of resources away from rural popularization of elementary education. On the other hand, the newly rich peasants, especially those who benefited under the rural responsibility system, began to donate money to support the rural county level 'key point' schools, both at the primary and secondary levels.

'Key point' schools were superior to other schools in the educational hierarchy. They were provided benefits over ordinary ones - in the form of additional funding, better equipment and better quality teachers. 'key point' schools themselves were hierarchically organized with the best schools run by the Province, followed, in descending order of quality, by schools run by the

municipality, the district, and the county. Thus, a system of 'key school' went into operation at national, provincial, city and county levels in the 1980s.

'Key point' schools were highly selective. Once the students were in the key school system, graduates were more likely to be admitted to universities or higher educational institutions. In Hebei Province the result was that "within 51 counties, the establishment of 'key schools' apparently entailed the withdrawal of all State funds for all rural schools, both elementary and junior secondary, and including the State subsidy for the Minban rural teachers" (*Hebei Daily*, June 12, 1983). The State money thus saved within any given county was to be concentrated in its 'elite', county-centered rural 'key schools'.

The rural school environment was also affected by the lack both of funds and the Maoist voluntarism of the peasants in the 1950s to 1970s. Also there were continuous reports on the severe rural school environments including school buildings, chairs and desks, and teaching equipment. Taking the Ganshu province as an example, "17.2 percent of the school buildings were collapsing and of those, almost 77 percent were primary schools buildings; there was also a desperate need for about 600,000 sets of chairs and desks in high schools" (He, 1988:164, translated from the Chinese by the author.)

In the last decade, though, a lot of readjustment has been made in overhauling the network of primary schools in order to make primary education more accessible to the populace. However, because of educational financial difficulties, many rural school have been simply closed. (The greatly reduced schools both at the primary and the secondary levels can be seen from Table 4.8 and Table 4.11.) The State claimed that it was willing to finance rural schools as a necessary supplement to the compulsory education. However, the facts showed that it failed to do so. If the government funding and responsibility remained reduced, compulsory schooling will only remain a hollow shell for most rural children.

The Decreased Rural Enrollment Rates and the Rural Responsibility System

It is important to reinforce the memory that, before the dismantling of the rural communes, Chinese peasants had long been tightly enmeshed in a complex system of rural collectives. The three-tier system of commune, brigade and production team dictated almost all aspects of rural life such as:

the collective production, marketing, consumption and redistribution of peasants' income. The rural collectives were far from just economic units only; they were also political, medical, and educational organizations. According to official statistics, the Maoist rural development model "succeeded in bringing 85 percent of the relevant age group into elementary schools by 1965 and upwards of 95 percent a decade later" (Pepper, 1990:77). However exaggerated the official figures might be, the increased rural elementary enrollment was one of the major achievements of the Maoist government. (Refer to Table 4.4)

After the single-child-family campaign was launched in 1979-1980, with all its attendant publicity, shrinking age cohorts became a standard rhetorical defense of the government when talking about reduced enrollment in schools. Yet, if we take a closer look at the changes in the country's population, we see the absolute numbers of the population increase in the late 1970s and early 1980s. See Table 4.6 and Table 4.7. Further, according to Loftsted:

> in 1949, there were about 540 million Chinese and the number thus almost doubled in the following thirty years. The annual population growth rate was just below 2% in the 1960s and 1970s, but the vigorous campaign for family planning starting in the late 1979s brought it down to 1.17% in the 1980s. Although life expectancy has been going up in China and reached an impressive level of almost seventy years, the population structure still has the typical shape of a Christmas tree with the largest age cohorts between 14 and 21 years of age (1986:4).

Thus, the school-aged population in China was not greatly reduced in the 1980s.

However, the overall enrollment at both primary and secondary levels since late 1970s and into the early 1980s has been less favorable. It decreased from the peak years before the implementation of the rural responsibility system implying that the holding power of many rural primary schools had been reduced.

The number of primary schools decreased at the same time that school enrollment decreased. In early 1984, "an authoritative presentation of education statistics acknowledged that the number of elementary schools in 1983 was 18,000 fewer than the year before, and the number of students in

schools had fallen by 3.9 million during the same year" (Pepper. 1990:79). Table 4.8 reveals this fact clearly.

Table 4.6: Increases in Population Growth for China, 1973-83 (per 1,000 population)

Year	Natural increase in population
1973	20.89
1974	17.48
1975	15.69
1976	12.66
1977	12.00
1978	11.61
1979	12.00
1980	14.55
1981	14.55
1982	14.49
1983	11.54

Based on: For all years except 1980 and 1983, Zhongguo Tongji Nianjian, 1983 (China Statistical Yearbook) (Beijing: State Statistical Bureau, 1983. p.105. For 1980, see State Statistical Bureau, "Communique on Fulfillment of China's National Economic Plan," Beijing Review, 1981, No. 20 (May 18): 20. For 1983, see 1984 , Zhongguo Jingji Nianjian (Economic Yearbook of China), pp.4-60. (Beijing: Economic Management Publishers).

Table 4.7: Population in Urban and Rural Areas by Year

Year	Total (Millions of Persons)	Urban		Rural	
		Millions of Persons	Percent	Millions of Persons	Percent
1950	(550.80)	61.69	11.1	(489.11)	(88.8)
1952	574.82	71.63	12.5	503.19	87.5
1957	646.53	99.49	15.4	547.04	84.6
1960	(660.25)	130.78	19.8	(529.52)	(80.2)
1965	725.38	101.70	14.0	623.68	86.0
1970	(825.00)	102.30	12.4	(722.70)	(87.6)
1975	919.70	111.71	12.1	807.99	87.9
1979	970.92	128.62	13.2	842.30	86.8
1981	996.22	138.70	13.9	857.52	86.1
1982	1,003.94	144.68	14.4	859.26	85.6

Sources: *Zhongguo jingji nianjian*, 1981. Vol. I-3. *Zhongguo jingji nianjian*, 1982. Vol. 3. and Zhong Zehou and Chen Yuguang, 1981. "On the Relationship between the Population Structure and National Economic Development in China," in Social Sciences in China,Vol. 2, No. 4 (December): 73. The 1982 figures are midyear figures from the 1982 census. Population Census Office, *Zhongguo disanci renkou puchade zhuyao shuzu* (Beijing, China Statistics Publishers) 1982. p.14-15. The urban figures exclude the population of towns.
Note: Data in Parentheses were derived from urban population figure and the percentage share of urban in the total.

Table 4.8: Elementary Schools and Enrollments

Year	Number of Schools	No. of Students (Million)
1949	436,800	24
1965	1,681,900	116
1966		103
1971		112
1972		125
1973		136
1974		145
1975		151
1976	1,044,300	150
1977		146
1978		146
1979	923,500	147
1980		146
1981	894,074	143
1982	880,516	140
1983	862,165	136
1984	853,740	136
1985	832,309	134
1986	820,846	132
1987	807,406	128
Six Year Schools	458,671	75
Five Year Schools	348,735	55
1988		125

Sources: Number of Schools for 1949 to 1979 from Zhongguo baike nianjian, 1980. (China Encyclopedic Yearbook, 1980) (Beijing and Shanghai: Zhongguo dabaike quanshu chubanshe,1980. p.535. Number of students for 1949 and 1965 from Beijing Review, Feb. 3, 1978. p.16-17. Number of students for 1966 to 1980 from Zhongguo tonji nianjian,1981 (China Statistical Yearbook,1981), State Statistical Bureau, ed. (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 1988), Statistical Bureau,ed. (Beijing:Zhongguo tongji chubanshe,1988:873-876. Breakdown for 1987 between six-year and five year schools from Zhongguo jiaoyu tongji nianjain,1987 (China Education Statistical Yearbook, 1987), State Education Commission,Planning and Financial Affairs Bureau,ed. (Beijing: Gongye daxue chubanshe,1988:78-79. Schools and students for 1988 from State Statistical Bureau Commission for 1988, renmin ribao, March 1, 1989) (People's Daily).

The Dengist government, though, also aimed at making primary education universal during the 1980s, this goal had been achieved in most of the urban areas but not in the rural areas yet. According to the State Education Commission, "there were 7.15 million dropouts at both primary and junior high levels in rural areas in 1988 alone" (Ethridge, 1990:201-202). Further, it should be noted that when analyzing the reported high enrollment rate by an official estimate, one finds that it was much out of line with the actual attendance rates. (See Table 4.9) When the contradiction was pointed out, the

Educational Commission explained that the figure referred to initial enrollments only, and acknowledged that unfortunately many children do not remain in school very long. Another reason for the high figure of enrollment lay in the fact that "about 19.5% of primary school children were over-aged" (World Bank, 1985:6-8).

Table 4.9: School-Age Children Enrolled at the Elementary Level

Year	National Elementary School-Age Cohorts (millions)	School-Age Children Who Have Entered Elementary School (millions)	School-Age Children Entering Elementary School (percent)
1949			25.0
1965	116.03	98.29	84.7
1976	121.94	118.39	96.0
1977	121.01	116.79	95.5
1978	121.31	115.85	94.0
1979	123.23	115.80	93.0
1980	122.20	114.78	93.0
1981	120.18	111.75	93.0
1982	117.63	109.58	93.2
1983	112.51	105.78	94.0
1984	106.69	101.70	95.3
1985	103.62	99.43	95.9
1986	100.67	97.02	96.4
1987	97.51	94.77	97.2

Source: Based on the information from Zhongguo tongji nianjian,1988. (China Statical Yearbook) State Statistical Bureau, ed., (Beijing: Zhongguo tonji chubanshe, 1988. p.889.)The 1949 figure only is from the World Bank, 1988. China: Socialist Economic Development. p.134. Washington, D. C.

When further analyzing the reported high percentage of enrollment carefully, we find problems. As written by Lewin:

> About one-third of a cohort fails to make the transition to junior high school. Of those who do, over 30 percent fail to complete this cycle. Thus by the end of the first year of junior high school, less than 50 percent of a cohort are enrolled; this drops to less than 13 percent for senior high schools (1988:180).

One regional survey in the Anhui Province, for example, "found that about 19 percent of the elementary-school-age group (children aged 7 to 12 years) in the province did not attend school" (*China Daily*, Feb. 20, 1989). A survey conducted by the Rural Investigation Team of the State Statistical Bureau

found that "the number of rural schools in Hubei Province was 10 percent less in 1986 than in 1980, while close to 1.5 million students had stepped out of schools in 1987. Similarly, in Shanxi Province, 2,890 elementary schools had closed between 1982 and 1986, while over a half-million children between the ages of 6 and 11 years had recently dropped out..." (*China Daily*, June 4, 1988). In the State Statistical Bureau's 1987 sample survey of nine provinces (Inner Mongolia, Heilongjiang, Zhejiang, Shandong, Hubei, Guangdong, Sichuan, Yunnan and Liaoning), "about 15 percent of the 6 to 14 year olds were not in school in the cities and 25 percent in the countryside, or 17.9 percent and 26.4 percent respectively for 6 to 12 olds" (State Statistical Bureau, 1989:95-167). In the same vein, "a report from the Hebei Province complained that the number of primary and secondary school students in the province had declined by 700,000 during 1982 alone" (*Hebei Daily*, July 11, 1983). In Ningxia Province, "the number of children enrolled in elementary school also dropped from 628,867 in 1977 to 553,900 in 1982" (Chen, 1984:80); or again, Ding An Village, located in the south-eastern part of rural China, which had been quite well known for its youth's active participation in education began showing a contrasting picture:

Table 4.10: Ding An Village Student Attendance (1978 and 1984)

Year	Total No.	Elem. No.	Junior No.	Senior No.	Post Second	Family Labor
1979	188	102	45	37	4	0
1984	94	0	22	2	0	70

Note: This Table is based on the statistics from He, Buowei, 1988. Crisis in China. p.177-178. Hong Kong: Wide Angle Press Ltd. (Translated from Chinese by the author.)

The number of students declined during the decade of the 1980s dramatically. According to the information provided by Pepper:

> the number of students enrolled in elementary schools declined from a high of 150 million in 1975-1976 to 140 million in 1982 and on down to 128 million in 1987. The number of elementary schools declined from just over one million in 1976 to 894,000 in 1981. Between 1979 and 1981, the number of students enrolled in the first grade declined from 37.79 million to 27.49 million (1990:79).

Table 4.11: .Secondary Schools and Students (Including General Secondary and 'Key Point School')

Year	Schools	Students (Million)
1976	192,15	58.36
Junior		43.53
Senior		14.84
1977		67.80
1978		65.48
1979	144,233	59.05
Junior		46.13
Senior		12.92
KeyPoints	5,200	5.20
1980		55.08
1981	106,718	48.60
Junior		41.45
Senior		7.15
1982	101.649	45.28
Junior		38.88
Senior		6.40
1983	96,474	43.98
1984	93,714	45.54
1985	93,221	47.06
1986	92.967	48.90
1987	92,857	49.48
Junior		41.74
Senior		7.74
KeyPoint	2,243	3.08

Sources: Schools from Zhongguo baike nianjian, 1980 (China Encyclopedic Year book) (Beijing and Shanghai: Zhongguo dabaike quanshu chubanshe). p.535. Zhongguo baike nianjian, 1982 (China Encyclopedic Yearbook) (Beijing and Shanghai: Zhongguo dabaike quanshu chubanshe). p. 568. Zhongguo tongji nianjian, 1988. State Statistical Bureau, ed., p. 873. Students figures from Zhongguo tongji nianjian, 1980, p. 536. Zhongguo baike nianjian, 1982. p.568. Zhongguo tongji nianjian, 1988. p.876.
Note: Keypoint schools and students figures for 1979 and 1987 only, from Zhongguo baike nianjian,1980:541 and Zhongguo jaioyu tongji nianjian,1987 (China Education Statistical Yearbook), State Education Commission, Planning and Financial Affairs Bureau, ed., 1988. (Beijing, Industrial University Press). Furthermore, although the absolute number of the Key schools reduced, the absolute enrollment of the Key schools increased. Unfortunately, the increased enrollment rate was not available.

In the regions where rural education was at its best, according to a report in 1989, "Only 1.326 out of China's 2,017 county-level administrative divisions have achieved universal elementary education" (*People's Daily*, March 25, 1989). Most of these schools were located in economically well-developed coastal areas. Thus, the development of rural education also reflected differences in the rural economic situations and geographical locations.

A decline in secondary school enrollment is also undeniable. The above Table 4.11 shows this fact. Historically, "the secondary system had grown overall from 14 million students enrolled in 1956 to about 68 million during the 1977-1978 academic year, when the Maoist line began to be implemented" (Pepper, 1990:970). *Guangming Daily*, a newspaper which is mainly concerned with educational and cultural issues in China, reported:

> When the decline finally stopped in 1983, enrollments stood at 43.9 million. During 1980 alone, more than 20,000 secondary schools were closed. The cutbacks have been more severe at the senior secondary level where, according to one claim, enrollment from 1981-1982 were down by approximately two-thirds from 1978 (October. 12th, 1984).

Table 4.12: Promotion Rate From Junior to Senior High School

Year	Elementary Graduates Entering Junior High School: %	Junior High Graduates Entering Senior High School:%
1975	90.6	60.4
1980	75.9	43.1
1981	68.3	31.5
1982	66.2	32.3
1983	67.3	35.5
1984	66.2	38.4
1985	68.4	39.4
1986	69.5	37.8
1987	69.1	35.7

Source: Summarized from combined information. Columns one and two from Zhongguo tonji nianjian (China Statistical Yearbook), 1988. State Statistical Bureau, Edited by (Beijing : Zhongguo tonji chubanshe) p.889. column three calculated from ibid. 878-881.

Statistic again shows "the number of senior high graduates has declined from an all-time high of 7.2 million in 1979 to 1.96 in 1985" (China Encyclopedic Yearbook, 1986:433). As a result, "the promotion rate of elementary school graduates on to the junior high level fell from 90.6 percent in 1975 to 66.2 percent in 1984. For junior high graduates moving to the senior level the rate fell from 60.4 percent in 1975 to 31.5 percent in 1981" (World Bank, 1984:34). The above Table 4.12. provides the facts.

The most forthright published criticism, from the *Journal of the Dialectics of Nature*, argued that quality and quantity were two sides of the same question. It calculated that:

there were about 332 million youth aged 6 to 18 years indicating that, given the existing level of education in 1980, 20 million would grow up illiterate, at least 133 million would have no more than a primary school education, and only 10 million would receive any kind of professional or tertiary schooling (1980:44-47).

The situation in rural senior-level was worse compared to performance in the cities, as we can see in Table 4.12 and 4.13.

Table 4.13: Number of Urban and Rural Senior High Students (1962-1983)

Year	No. of Total Students (Million)	% of Students in Cities and Towns	% of Students in Rural Areas
1962	133.9	92.2	7.8
1963	123.5	93.0	7.0
1964	124.7	91.1	8.9
1965	130.8	89.0	9.0
1971	558.7	38.7	61.3
1972	858.1	44.7	55.3
1973	923.3	50.0	50.0
1974	1,002.7	52.0	48.0
1975	1,163.7	46.0	54.0
1976	1,483.6	37.7	62.3
1977	1,800.0	43.9	66.1
1978	1,553.1	48.9	61.1
1979	1,292.0	47.3	52.7
1980	969.8	54.4	45.6
1981	715.0	57.7	42.3
1982	640.5	61.7	38.3
1983	629.0	66.3	33.7

Sources: Calculated from the data provided by the Statistical Yearbook of Education in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1983. p.197.

To analyze the data in Table 4.12, one should not only see the superficial data. The real fact is that though the percentage of city and town students is only twice of the percentage of the rural students, the data contain a hidden fact. When one remembers that more than 80 percent of the Chinese population are living in the rural areas, one can find out that, in fact, the population in the rural China is four times more than these in the cities and towns. Thus, the ratio of the percentage of students in the cities and towns are eight times more than these in the rural areas.

One example in the urban Beijing area shows the seriousness of the problem in the city as well. As *Beijing Daily* reported:

> In 1989, the junior high graduating classes were 80,000 in Beijing, and 60,000 went to the senior level. In 1987, class at the senior level was made 90,000. But there were 150,000 junior high graduates, based on the estimate, there would be 4 out of 10 students unable to continue their studies (July, 5th, 1987).

In absolute terms, both the enrollment and school numbers had been falling since the early 1980s. The reason for falling enrollment is not only because of smaller age cohorts resulting from the one-child family planning policy, but also the actual drop in school participation. These declines have been known to occur especially in connection with the introduction and implementation of the rural responsibility system in rural areas which have boosted the value of child labor. It is unthinkable to rely on such quality of the population to build a modern nation.

Due to the reformers' one-sided attention to quality but not to quantity of popular education, there grew a generation of illiterates after liberation in 1949. It may be difficult to answer the question of whether China could afford to produce new illiterates as it did during the ten years of the Cultural Revolution, however, the question should be asked.

Economic reforms implemented since 1978 have had unintended but obvious effects on rural education. Besides the reduced rural school enrollment, the rural economic reforms have further contributed to the collapse in the 1980s of the rural Minban school system in the following aspects.

The Increased Rural Drop-out Rate and the Rural Responsibility System

The ideal situation towards which China has been striving is 100 percent enrollment of both boys and girls, and 100 percent retention at least up to the end of the primary school stage of education which usually requires a minimum of five years to complete. This is the presupposition on which the modernizers' drive for universalization of primary education is based.

Drop-out or repetition, is regarded in many countries as a kind of wastage. In China, this has been a most critical form of wastage as well. Its intensity varied from region to region in rural China in the past decade. On the one hand, students dropped out because rural education was faced with great financial troubles. On the other hand, many student simply did not

finish their school years because of their occasional dropping-out of school which made them unable to move up to a higher grade and forced them to repeat the same grade again and again. This phenomena has been investigated as the figures show in Table 4.14.

The rural responsibility system unintentionally reinforced the perception common in rural areas that sending children to school means a loss of family income. Peasants thus prefer to keep their children tend domestic animals, do simple work in the fields or just look after the siblings. Peasant parents think that the cost of education is not adequately compensated by future income increases only through literacy and numeracy education.

Table 4.14: Rural Primary School Student Retention and Repeating Survey (in ten thousand)

Grade V Attn. No.	Retention No. and %		Attendance No. and %		Students who had repeated No. and %							
	No.	%	No.	%	rep. once		rep. twice		rep. 3 times		rep. 4 times	
					No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
15,146	7,933	52.4	7,213	47.6	4,432	29.3	2,034	13.4	657	4.3	90	0.6

Source: Ma Yuqi, 1984. "The Current Rural Primary School Repeating Rate Survey." Jiaoyu yanjiu (Educational Research), September. p.47.

Influenced by the ideology that more farm work and increased production directly increase family incomes, many rural parents preferred to keep their children at work on the farm or in the household rather than allow them to go to school. The following Table 4.15 shows that even in the economically well-developed rural areas with a high educational participation rates, the reasons for dropping out were closely related to the implementation of the rural responsibility system.

Reasons for dropping-out may be classified into internal and external categories. Neither group should be treated in isolation. An educational system reflects the values and priorities of the society it serves. It can rarely be more advanced than the general cultural matrix which supports it. Integration between internal and external factors is continual and this interrelationship should be borne in mind when the various factors are discussed to expose the drop-out issue in rural China.

Table 4.15
Some Causes of Primary Drop-out Rate in Regional Perspective
(School year 1982-1983)

Unit of Village	No. of Drop-outs	Causes											
		Serving as Auxiliary Labour		Engaged in Rural Trades		Family Financial Difficulties		Having Trouble in Learning		Illness		Other Causes	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Unit of Village A	35	17	48.5	4	11.5	8	23	4	11.5	2	5.5	0	0
Unit of Village B	31	13	41.9	9	29	1	3.2	3	9.7	2	6.4	3	9.7
Unit of Village C	49	8	16.3	16	32.6	5	10	12	24.8	1	2	7	14.2
Total	115	38	33	29	25.2	14	12.2	19	16.5	5	4.3	10	8.7

Note: There are 23 primary schools with 4,304 pupils in Unit of A Villages, 21 primary schools with 4,370 pupils in Unit of B Villages, and 13 primary schools with 4,014 pupils in Unit of C Villages; The Statistics given in the Table represent regional educational performances in an economic development is on the average line according to the national standard. Sampling analysis of drop-out in Huxian County, Shanxi Province, located in central land China.

Sources: United Nations, 1990. "ShanXi Province, People's Republic of China" in The Drop-Out Problem in Primary Education: Towards Universalization of Primary Education. p.47. Asian and the Pacific - Some Case Studies and Cultural Organizations, Number 84.

Internal factors affecting drop-out rate include several aspects, such as the school facilities, pedagogical methods, lack of teachers, schools being so alien to students that they did not wish to stay in it, and so on. All these aspects need more time and effort to study fully. Considering the nature of the research, this study is more focused on the external factors - the rural responsibility system as the most important rural developmental strategy which was implemented since the late 1970s and reconfirmed in the 1980s in most parts of rural China.

Traditionally, people agree that the external factors are those within the child's social, cultural and economic milieu. Of these, the economic and social condition of the family is the single most important cultural variable affecting the drop-out rate. It is generally understood that this rate is greatest among children from poor and deprived sections. This generalization is also applicable in China.

Although many apparent external causes may be cited, such as parental illiteracy and malnutrition, the one main cause of high student drop-out rates is the parental social and economic conditions. Many poor parents have little understanding of the need to enrol and ensure attendance of their children, and such children became the most easy candidates for dropping out of school. Moreover, in a situation of extreme poverty where the family struggles at the margin of survival, education has no immediate significance. The contribution of the child's labour to the family is the only reality.

The child's sex also affect dropping-out. In a society like China where less attention is given to women and girls, fewer girls enrol in school and more girls than boys drop out of school. See Table 4.16. Furthermore, there also exists a large number of female adult illiterates. For example, "in 1987, of China's 220 million illiterates over the age of 12, 156 million were women. Of these, a full 88% are rural women" (Robinson, 1991:180). Therefore, the female illiteracy situation in rural areas was shocking in the 1980s. The rural responsibility system which demands more labor to improve rural households' income, contributed to the increasingly high drop-out rate in rural areas in the 1980s.

Although the drop-out rate was found high at both primary and secondary levels, it was more significant at the primary level and junior high level.

Table 4.16: Drop-out at the Various Grades in One Primary School by Sex (1982-1983 School Year)

Grade	Total No. of Drop-out	No. of Drop-out by Sex		% for Girls
		Boy-Student	Girl-Student	
Grade I	92	50	42	45.6
Grade II	66	27	39	59.0
Grade III	140	47	93	66.4
Grade IV	237	104	113	47.6
Grade V	207	91	116	56.0

Source: United Nations, 1984. The Drop-out Problem in Primary Education: Towards Universalization of Primary Education in Asia and the Pacific - Some Case Studies. p.33.

Analyzing these facts, the drop-out rate was higher in a higher grade of primary education. Table 4.16. and Table 4.17. provide information which may offer a regional picture of this issue. Further, a great decrease in rural school enrollment is shown by the United Nations document:

> There were 390 million primary school-aged children in the rural regions at the beginning of the 1980s. Of these, some 60 million, about 15.4 percent were out of school. The average annual percentage of repeaters was approximately 10 percent of the total enrollment, 327 million. The total number of drop-outs per year from primary education is estimated to be 31.6 million (1984:10).

Statistics further estimate that "the total number of rural primary and secondary drop-out between 1980 and 1988 is 37 million" (Robison, 1991:180). Thus, as a result, rural innumeracy and illiteracy situation was severe in rural China in the 1980s.

In the countryside, fewer schools conventionally meant lower attendance rates because of distance and transportation difficulties. Shockingly, since 1979, "the government closed about 58,000 rural primary schools and 47,000 rural secondary schools primarily because of financial

Table 4.17: Students Distribution Rate at Rural Primary Level

Year	Percentage of Distribution Rate in Rural Primary School				
1980	I	II	III	IV	V
	25%	21%	20%	18%	16%

Source: United Nations, 1984. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. p. 16. New York.

shortages and low quality" (World Bank, 1985:13). These closures probably also decreased school accessibility in most rural areas. Thus, physical inaccessibility was also a constraint to the universalization of basic education in rural China.

An early school drop-out rate soon lapses to illiteracy. It also diminishes the probability of their re-entry to the formal school system. According to the National Survey by the State Statistical Bureau:

> there are 3.22 billion people in the rural labor force in the rural areas in 1982. The educational levels among the main rural labor force is calculated as the following: 0.1% above college education; about 30% high school education level, (most of them belong to the junior high level); 40% has gained elementary education; and about 30% could only be said as illiterate or semi-illiterate (1982: 119).

Statistics further reveal that in 1983, "there were 135.78 million primary school pupils throughout China and a net enrollment ratio of 94 percent has been attained" (China Year-book,1985:15). Unfortunately, this did not tell the whole truth. The high enrollment and low drop-out rate was only in the economically well-developed cities. It has been reported that "primary enrollment in rural areas was normally about 93 percent of all eligibles but over the five year from 1980 to 1985, in reality, only 65 percent of rural children who were steady attenders" (Stewart, 1987:93). Elementary and secondary education in rural areas of China remains weak. Elementary education is not universal while new generations of illiterates continue to emerge.

Although there was significant expansion of both primary and secondary education from 1949 onwards, enrollments began to decline in the 1980s because of both lower intake and higher drop-out rates. If no immediate efforts are made to reduce the drop-out rate in rural areas, the Chinese government will definitely be unable to realize its target of universalization of general education. By ignoring its large rural population and by busying itself with improving higher education in the 1980s, the Chinese government (through its educational development priority - the internal force and through the preference for the rural responsibility system - the external force), no doubt, has moved rural education into an impasse.

Using the Drop-outs as Child Laborers and the Rural Responsibility System

The costs of rural schooling began to climb as the advantage of non-attendance rose under the new household responsibility system. Peasant families were given more incentives and more opportunities to make money in the 1980s. Their economic well-being suddenly depended sorely on using their own 'legal' resources - their children to provide working hands on their private family land.

There appeared great crops of free youth waiting to be engaged in any lucrative business. In order to become rich, they either farmed on the land, were employed by the newly flourishing rural factories, or learned particular skills. The desire of each family for instant wealth was reflected in a prevailing attitude that education was useless, tasteless and profitless especially when peasant parents saw how much and how quickly money could be earned by more hands participating in the family economic business. In addition, education was seen as a waste of time and family money compared with the benefits of early employment.

As the rural reform was carried out in increasing depth, household-run industries flourished as a form of the private economic growth of rural areas. Therefore, there was a rapidly growing demand for labor power which has given rise to the problem of using child laborer. Judging from an economic point view, the low paid child labor became very popular in many suburban and rural areas in the 1980s. There existed a desire to hire child labor among the rural factory mangers and an eagerness to be hired among those who had just dropped out of schools.

Moreover, the closure of many rural schools made it difficult for children to pursue an education. The increased distance between the county-run schools and rural peasants' families also caused students to leave school. Instead of spending a great sum of money on bus fare or boarding, many rural children transferred into suburban areas or even into big cities in order to either work, if it was a situation for girls, as suburban or city residents' homemakers, if it was a situation for boys, more commonly, to be employed by the newly expanded enterprises as the cheapest available labor. The investigation of what kind of occupations the drop-outs, from a small rural primary school, were engaged in is provided in Table 4.18.

Table 4.18: Regional Survey of Drop-outs in Labor Force

Total No. of Drop-out	Causes of Drop-out				
	city residents' home helpers	Take care of siblings	handicraft appreciate	rural factory labor	family farm labor
49	5	2	7	27	8

Source: Ma Yuqi, 1984. "The Current Rural Primary School Repeating Rate Survey." in *Jiaoyu Yanjiuo* (Educational Research), September. p.47.

School drop-out rates in various localities and various school levels were sharply contrasted before and after the implementation of the rural household responsibility system. The drop-outs formed a major source of re-emergent child labor. It has been found that the absolute majority of child laborers working in individually owned or jointly owned rural factories were:

1) those school-aged children who have not yet graduated from primary schools but left schools.
2) primary school graduates who failed to be promoted to junior high school and who have not yet reached the legal working age of sixteen.
3) dropouts of junior high and graduates who failed to continue their senior high.

According to a regional survey conducted in the school year from September 1985 to September 1986, "a total of 182 pupils had dropped out of elementary schools, and 48 of them entered a privately-run factory; there were also 1,627 junior high school students who dropped out of school, and 467 of them went into rural joint factories too" (China, Office of Legal Counsel, 1987:20-21).

The rural factories or private family plots became the regular places where school-aged children were appearing rather than staying in schools. Those rural drop-outs faced many challenges fitting into their new working environment. Having not finished their normal education, and not being legally protected by the Workers' Union as workers legally hired by the government; having been thrust into a comparatively modern and mechanized working environment; lacking the right operating skills and defensive concepts of handling modern machines, they were the most vulnerable laborers in both an agricultural and industrial setting.

Both national and regional newspapers frequently reported that young laborers from rural areas were food poisoned because they were unable to read instructions and explanations. Accidents occurred frequently simply because of ignorance. For example, it was reported that some rural youth labors were poisoned by mistaking industrial chloride for eatable salt.

In the mid-1980s, for the first time in Chinese history the compulsory education law was announced. According to the law:

> compulsory education is to be tuition free. Organizations and individuals are forbidden to employ school-age children under sixteen. To be specific, it is illegal to hire those who are under the age of sixteen. Local governments are authorized to take action against parents who do not send their children to school and employers who might hire them (*People's Daily*, April 18, 1986).

To what extent would the law be effective in the remote rural areas in curbing the phenomena of rural parents using their children as the family's auxiliary laborers? To what extent would the law prevent the rural children from working in the factories? These questions need to be asked, otherwise, the new law protecting the rights of children will only be effective on paper but not in reality.

Rural School Curriculum and the Rural Responsibility System

The tendency for rural residents to see school as a channel for social mobility is quite common in developing societies. China's rhetoric has always been geared toward encouraging people in rural areas to send their children to schools and providing curriculum relevant to the community's needs. But the educational system actually rewarded those who either pursued academic achievement or social mobility. It is not surprising that China's peasants, no different than peasants in other countries, resisted efforts to transform local schools into agricultural schools. If their children were going to attend school at all, they are more likely to regard receiving education as the only escape route to the non-agricultural sectors. Therefore, peasants were not happy about schools, especially rural high schools being changed into agricultural schools only.

In the 1980s, rural school curriculum varied according to different rural situations. First, in primary and secondary schools of the more prosperous

areas, the syllabus followed the stipulations of the Ministry of Education. Though the Ministry of Education was not supposed to be directly in charge of the rural education, each year there would be national or provincial educational meetings which explained and spread the central government's educational goals. Thus, it was ironic that the central government was claiming that it was no longer responsible for rural local education financially, yet still it gave directions to local administrators and planners.

The rural responsibility system made little or no apparent impact on changing a primary curriculum which should have been more connected with rural practical needs. It was still strongly academic and aimed entirely toward passing the crucial entrance examination of higher education. There was no widely available alternative curriculum oriented toward the rural life which was inevitably the lot of the vast majority of peasant children.

Rural primary schools were not sophisticatedly equipped. Most of them were still the remains of the past Minban schools. The major curriculum in primary schools included Chinese Language, Science, both social and natural. Chinese Language and Arithmetic were the core courses. Chinese History and Chinese Geography which were compulsory courses if a student wanted to pass the entrance examination for entering a high school.

As a symbol of catching up with Western countries, first, either Japanese or English were taught in many of the rural high schools. Second, there was an attempt to convert most of the regular secondary schools into secondary agricultural or technology schools where children could 'learn more and earn more'. Unfortunately, these changes were only cosmetic compliance with higher directives from the central government. For example:

> a study of 43 agricultural technical institutes in Shandong Province showed that only 14 offered any sort of a program irrelevant to agriculture. A few schools were known for their examination pass rates and offered only one optional course in agricultural per grade. The rest of these agricultural high schools only offered a mediocre education in general academic imitating the city-based curriculum (Zou and Xu, 1983:20-24).

The government planned to convert the existing rural secondary schools into secondary agricultural schools and to adopt a more rural oriented curriculum

in opposition to the desire and the desires of the peasants to access a higher academic education. Sadly, these vocational high schools did not actually instruct the agriculturally-related skills which would aid students in adapting to and then successfully improving rural life. As a result, the students nurtured by these schools in the 1980s, whether from the point of view of quality or practical value, were far from having their needs met because of inappropriate selection of curricula. In summary, in the name of providing relevant courses for the rural young people, the vocational secondary school became the equivalent of the old agricultural high school in form. In essence, these agricultural high schools did not achieve their intended objective of combining study and work.

It had been hoped that as the peasant's economic situation improved, farming would become a more attractive career choice to rural youth. Educational curricula not specially aimed at preparing students for academic examinations were hoped to be more acceptable and practical to the majority of the rural school population. However, the rigidity of the curriculum, the dominant role of examinations, the narrow expectations of schooling and the financial difficulties were all factors which, added together, contributed to the rural educational ebb in the 1980s.

Rural Teachers' Quantity and Quality and the Rural Responsibility System

Teacher crops in urban areas after 1978 were regarded as an important force to promote and increase the educational quality so that they could serve the national economic development well. Instead of being deliberately devalued as they were during the Cultural Revolution period, they were honored and respected through all mass media. There was an increase of teachers' salaries, a remarkable re-evaluation of their work and a great improvement of their living conditions. It was reported in China Daily that: "Salaries of teachers who are employed by the Ministry of Education, which range from 42 to 120 Yuan a month, were raised by 10 percent in 1981, and rural Minban school teachers who are not on the payroll of the State will have their annual subsidy from the government increased by 50 Yuan" (1981:1). However, the government's plan to improve teachers' status, both social and economic, was not at all carried out for the rural teachers in the 1980s. It is not an exaggeration to say - that the rural Minban teachers - a big

percent of the total teacher crops - were faced with a different situation. They, as one part of the rural human resources, were forgotten.

Before the rural responsibility system was implemented, most rural teachers received a distribution of money and grain quota comparable to that given for an ordinary peasant's labour. They also earned work points by occasionally participating in collective tasks such as road repairs, irrigation works, reforestation, and so on. Locally appointed teachers received work-points each day (equal to those of an average commune peasant) and at the end of the year shared in the distribution of commune profits according to work-points accumulated by the People's Commune. Their income from the commune along with a government allowance gave rural teachers an income higher than the average of rural peasants. This increase was in line with Maoist governmental directives before the 1980s.

Liao noted that before the 1980s, "about 60 to 70 percent of primary school teachers were appointed by their local communities, which were responsible for their wages; the other 30 to 40 percent were assigned and paid by the State" (1983:52). In one survey of Minban rural teachers, by far the most common complaint was that they simply had not been paid. Another report noted that in the Liaoning province of Northeast China: "several million Yuan in back pay was owed to teachers in rural Minban schools throughout the province in early 1989. Because of limited educational budgets in many rural areas some school teachers had received no cash payment for as long as two years" (*New China News Agency*, Jan. 26th. 1989).

Furthermore, the work point-system was no longer in use under the rural responsibility system and there was no mechanism for the rural teachers to share in production. The teachers had no opportunities for bonuses either. It had been reported that "teachers in State-run local schools earn in the range of 60-80 Yuan per month, while teachers in rural locally run schools earn 30-40 Yuan per month" (Ethridge, 1990:207). In both cases, these wages were less than the teachers' students could earn immediately after leaving junior high school when they became engaged in the rural free market economy. If a rural teacher were to receive anything, he or she had no other choice but to farm on his or her own private plot. Thus, most of the rural teachers were doing two jobs to earn their living.

As a way of equalizing their opportunities, rural teachers were also allocated responsibility plots in the 1980s. (See Table 4.19). This consequently

led to teachers neglecting their teaching responsibilities. They had to divide their attention between their private plots or sideline business and their teaching. Another regional survey found that class schedules were often thrown into disorder by teachers cancelling regular classes in order to get home early to work on their fields. They were called the 'not-to-be-found teachers' whose motto was 'the sooner home the better'.

Table 4.19: Situation of Rural Teachers Owning Private Plots In Jihua Prefecture in 1982

Levels of Teachers	Total No. of Teachers	Teachers having Private Plots	Percent%	Working as Major Family labor%	Working as auxiliary Labor%
Senior	304	164	54	40	60
Junior	178	125	70	46	54
Total	482	289	62	43	57

Source: Based on Jiaoyu yanjio (Educational Research), 1983. July, p.50-52.
Note: This Table is structured and summarized by the author. The information is translated from the Chinese language.

Rural teachers' economic circumstance always seemed to determine the degree of reliance on rural responsibility system participation. "A higher percentage of 91% of lower-paid rural primary teachers had responsibility plots while 60-70 percent of the secondary teachers had their own plots, and primary teachers' plots are larger, averaging well over 3 Mu (1/15 of a hectare) per teacher. Also, more teachers in poorer remote areas had more and larger responsibility plots than teachers in prosperous rural areas" (Brown, 1986:382). Another investigation into the situation of rural teachers undertaking field labor in the South-East rural areas of Jihua Prefecture in 1981 shows the serious situation of a teacher's burden besides academic teaching. From Table 4.19, one also sees that a majority of the rural teachers were either working as main or auxiliary laborers on the family private plots.

Instead of using their spare-time to improve academic skills and teaching ability, most of the rural teachers had to be engaged in private agricultural production to have a decent life because there were chances for them to be unpaid by the government or County Educational Bureaus. This resulted in worsened teaching quality in the rural areas. According to statistics, "the total number of teachers in elementary and secondary schools in 1983 was 5.5 million. Out of them, more than 50% were locally employed

and formally not qualified rural 'Minban' teachers" (Lofstedt, 1986:34). The quality and quantity of the rural teacher crops neither satisfied nor were appropriate for rural needs. Statistics in 1982 also revealed that "30-50% of them (rural teachers) had senior high education, 10% of them had junior high education; actually about 20% of them could handle the teaching well, 40% of them were generally qualified, 30% of them had great difficulty in teaching; 10% are completely unqualified"(Wu, 1988:49). World Bank data further indicated the serious situation. (See Table 4.20.)

Table 4.20: Primary Teacher Stock by Qualifications and Age, 1982

	Level of Qualification				
	Severely Unqualified	Unqualified	Partially Qualified	Fully Qualified	
Age groups	Less than secondary school	Some secondary school	Full secondary school, but no education training	Teaching Training Certificate graduate	Total
Up to 30	156	235	465	470	1,326
30-39	160	260	470	630	1,520
40-49	206	275	412	413	1306
50-54	138	165	138	82	523
55 and over	165	165	165	55	550
Total	825	1,100	1,650	1,650	5,225

Source: Based on data provided by World Bank, 1985. CHINA: Issues and Prospects in Education. p.36. Washington, D.C., U.S.A.

To conclude here, both rural teachers' morale and teaching quality were profoundly affected by the rural responsibility system. There appeared an even greater de-stablization of their status. Therefore, about "two-thirds to three-quarters of all rural teachers were locally hired rather than State supported" (Brown, 1986:380). Among this overwhelming numbers, rural Minban teachers had suffered most from the inequities of their situation. The issue of teacher salaries had been one of the most critical and persistent problems which affected primary and secondary education in most of Chinese rural areas.

Rural household farming jeopardized almost all the social services in rural China. The diminished accessibility to basic education for the mass of rural children was the most obvious. In addition, when the work-point system was abandoned under the dominant household responsibility system, there was no established way to pay rural teachers since the majority of them

depended upon the collective funds as the source of their salaries. By 1984, in order to alleviate this severe problem, the government granted that "at least 250 Yuan per teacher per year would reach to the rural teachers" (Wei and Li, 1983:23). However, this amount of money was not paid to the teachers but rather was earmarked for sponsoring the county-level key schools which were most commonly located in the center of the county, and included a boarding system. The local educational agencies had considerable latitude in determining how the subsidy should be used. Thus, rural teachers did not directly benefit from the government's help once the money had gone through several lower educational agencies before it eventually reached rural schools.

With the development of the rural small household economy, the income of an ordinary laborer was at least the same and usually exceeded that of a Minban teacher. Both the social and economic position of rural teachers dropped. By 1983, as observed in some provinces, rural teacher salaries were by far the lowest when compared with the income of other teachers. Though the State has stepped in to help subsidize the salaries of some local teachers, it is yet to be seen whether this will be sufficient to improve rural education.

As far as quality of the rural teachers was concerned, most of them have no more than a primary education themselves. They became teachers during the Cultural Revolution when training for rural primary school teachers hardly existed. Further, in the interests of seeking educational quality, local and rural teachers began being tested. Some areas required refresher courses for those who failed. Others simply sent them back to the 'front line of production.' In terms of quantity, millions of city youth sent down during the Cultural Revolution period of 1966 to 1976, also returned to their urban homes in the late 1970s. Many of them had served as rural school teachers. They left without knowing who their replacements might be. Thus, as one educator observed, rural teachers in the 1980s had no training, no social status, no job security and often no reliable income.

Under this extreme pressure and burden, there was a shocking rate of rural teachers' job transfer in the 1980s. A large amount of rural teachers, hoping to change their low economic and social status, were looking for some more lucrative jobs rather than continue their teaching careers. The reduced percentage of rural teachers is shown in Table 4.21.

Table 4.21: Proportion of Minban School Teachers

Year	Number of Teachers		
	Total No. of Staff	Minban Teachers	Percent (%)
1946	77,936	33,470	42.9
1949	66,640	28,239	42.4
1950	69,108	23,755	34.4
1951	73,242	22,878	31.2
1952	93,930	14,000	14.9
1953	113,233	8,469	7.5
1954	137,946	9,615	7.0
1955	149,107	10,259	6.9
1956	187,197	1,497	0.8
1957	233,783	16,880	7.2
1958	305,107	42,225	13.8
1959	350,408	28,960	8.3
1960	425,530	15,738	3.7
1961	417,622	7,949	1.9
1962	399,456	22,723	5.7
1963	420,465	27,857	6.6
1964	441,515	29,359	6.6
1965	457,075	23,041	5.0
1972	1,657,614	369,990	22.3
1973	1,695,934	323,416	19.1
1974	1,781,993	369,780	20.8
1975	2,092,155	549,861	26.3
1976	2,728,979	987,039	36.2
1977	3,186,692	1,272,653	39.9
1978	3,181,999	1,224,933	38.5
1979	3,077,750	1,102,905	35.8
1980	3,019,750	939,080	31.1
1981	2,843,957	714,976	25.1
1982	2,680,559	531,671	19.8
1983	2,596,900	465,300	17.9

Note: Minban Teachers are those employed by People's Communes (Non-State Employed).
Source: Educational Statistical Yearbook , 1949-1983. p.219.

Another regional survey found that:

> in the Baoding county of the Hebei province, nearly 90 percent of the rural teachers temporarily left or abandoned their teaching job. In the Liaoning province, since 1979, rural teachers asked for retirement earlier, then later over about 6300 teachers changed their profession, thus some of the primary and secondary schools had to be closed; in addition, among the eleven principals, eight of them resigned from their position in the Chocheng county of the Anhui province (*Guangming Daily*, August, 6th, 1986, translated by author).

With the development of the commodity economy and the modernization of agriculture, a major problem relating to economic and social development has emerged. At present, the educational level of rural laborers is the lowest of any group. At the end of 1986, "the number of rural laborers amounted to 313,110,000, about 61 percent of the total labor force" (Wu,1988:49). The education level of the labor force was quite shocking. The educational level of the rural labor force in 1986 is shown in Table 4.22. In addition, *Guangming Daily* reported that "there were about 730,000 graduates from agricultural colleges and universities. However, in reality, there were only 250,000 who still remained in the agricultural sector, or say about 65.7% of them stepped out of the agricultural business" (April, 27th, 1982). Statistics further indicate:

> there is only one agronomist for every seven thousand Mu of land, and one veterinarian for every seven thousand head of cattle. Due to the low educational level of the rural labor force, only 30 percent of the scientific findings in agricultural research can be applied in practice. During the period of the Sixth Five-Year Plan, increases in agricultural production as a result of scientific progress accounted for about 30 percent of the total, where in the advanced countries the figure normally stood at 60 to 80 percent" (Wu, 1988:49).

Thus, rural areas in China desperately need a well-educated and skilled labor force to achieve the government's goal of modernization in China.

Summary

Under Deng's regime, schools were again seen as handmaidens to modernization. They were expected to create the expertise China desperately needs to realize its ambitions. Chinese rulers' political and economic reform strategies was not correlated with its educational strategy in the 1980s. They overlooked the potential negative impact toward rural educational development. As a result, the rural responsibility system, one of the most significant rural economic development strategies, brought undeniably negative effects on the performance of rural education in the 1980s.

China, as reported in 1988, had about "five hundred million laborers and four hundred million of them are in the rural areas" (Zhang, 1988:38). Thus, most of China's national resources, both human and natural, are

Table 4.22

Educational Level of Rural Labour Force in 1986

Total No. of Rural Laborers	Total Rural Labor Force %	College or University Graduates%	Senior High Graduates %	Junior High Graduates %	Primary Graduates %	Technical Personnel %	Illiterates %
313,110,000	61.1	0.04	5.43	21.47	37.1	0.07	35.9

Source: Based on the information provided by Wu, Fusheng 1988. "Problems in China's Rural Educational Reform."*Chinese Education,* 22 (3) (Winter):3-90.

located in the rural areas which have great potential for the development of the nation. However, unfortunately, "Chinese people account for one-quarter of the world 's illiterate population, and 92 percent of Chinese illiterates are from rural areas" (Robinson, 1991:179). After more than forty years since the liberation in 1949, current Chinese leadership still appears incapable of creating a healthier educational system in China.

The Chinese government claimed, after a decade's rural reform, that the initial economic development had been achieved by relying on the policies which stressed the adjustment and restructuring of the productive relationship and the re-introduction of the rural responsibility system. The Chinese government should also admit the fact and face the serious situation that developed in the educational sector. There was a decreased enrollment rate and an increased drop-out rate; an unclear and poor rural school financial responsibility system; an irresponsible rural school management; an irrelevant rural curriculum at both the primary and secondary levels; an economically unsecured and physically exhausted and social devalued rural teacher corps and so on. To conclude, the human resource development strategy was a neglected dimension among the overall rural development strategies in China in the decade of the 1980s.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

"Our celestial Empire processes all the things in prolific abundance and lacks no products within its own borders..." (Backhouse and Bland, 1914:326). These were the grandiose words of a Chinese Emperor. China is a country of immense size, both in area and in population. It is true that China has been rich in natural resources. However, for the past forty years, the abundance of natural resource is far from being used for the nation's development because of a lack of well-educated human resources necessary to accomplish its goal of modernization.

Summary and Findings of the Research

Maoist steps toward building an egalitarian society were undertaken in the first thirty years after liberation in 1949. The premise of the egalitarian model was that a society cannot and need not sacrifice the socialist goal of equal wealth for short-term economic development. Indeed, Maoists considered an egalitarian approach as the faster road to development. They also believed that a market system would give rise to class conflicts based on economic inequalities and would inhibit long-term economic growth. Furthermore, Maoists assumed that inequalities definitely led to exploitation. Thus the Maoist model required the redistribution of wealth and the tightening up of wage differentials. It stressed recognizing those who worked harder with political rewards or perhaps a promotion rather than material bonuses. By so doing, it was expected that people's political consciousness could be raised.

The Maoist collective model of agricultural development, in fact, laid the foundation for further economic development of agriculture. By enlarging the fields, it facilitated the use of agricultural machines. The larger size of the production unit, the easier it would be to utilize agricultural resource. The capacity of the cooperative to coordinate large amounts of labour and resources also enabled it to undertake infrastructure projects which were beyond the scope of individual households but were necessary for further agricultural development.

In addition, socially, the Maoist model of development actually did much to transform traditional and backward societal habits, behavior, and

institutions in such a way that it enhanced economic development. In particular, it modified and even eliminated many of the structural inequalities of traditional Chinese society. Maoist achievements are especially obvious in some aspects of rural development which were analyzed in Chapter III of this thesis, such as the rural literacy and rural children's active participation in basic education. It opened the possibility of adoption of modern technology and organizational forms - all this is evidence of the inexorable march toward modernization of the Chinese countryside.

In the long run, however, the extreme form of the egalitarian model proved detrimental to economic growth. Attempts to eliminate the 'three great differences' by sending down intellectuals and specialists to rural areas, and sending some millions of young students 'up to the mountains and down to the countryside' led to some 'leveling upward' of culture in the countryside. But it also wasted the talents of those most capable of contributing to economic development. The Maoist search for egalitarianism remained to some extent, an anti-urban bias. Furthermore, Maoist political consciousness-raising proved incapable of promoting the necessary economic development against the equalization of poverty. In addition, massive political campaigns took time, time which should have been spent on improving rural economic production. It would certainly be good for all to 'eat out of the same pot,' but this policy is impractical when actually there is hardly anything in the pot.

In the decade of the 1980s, Chinese agriculture underwent a remarkable transformation under the leadership of Deng and those pragmatic reformers. Peasants were given many incentives to increase production. New emphasis was placed on private household farming instead of collective farming. As mentioned above, with these changes came a tremendous spurt in production and income. During the past years, peasant income has been about doubled. This was in marked contrast to the modest growth rate of the previous thirty years. Equally important, many peasants were lifted out of poverty. In the short run, the success of the reformers' goals of economic growth were achieved when one looks first at the increased peasant income due to the new rural economic development paradigm. However, this rural responsibility system has created long-term damage to the rural medical and educational system, which were previously brigade or commune-based. The large-scaled implementation of this rural responsibility system has objectively

destroyed the foundation and the mainstay of support for rural education by the rural communes. There has emerged a rural educational crisis in the 1980s.

The single-minded pursuit of economic growth seems to have temporarily blinded officials in China to the impact of economic policies on other social sectors, most importantly those in the rural sector of China, and China still remains a predominantly agrarian society. These sorts of dysfunctions have not been given adequate thought and action after a decade's experiment in most of rural China. It is difficult to disentangle the positive and negative consequences of the last decade. Yet, a comprehensive assessment of the effect of new Dengist rural development strategy upon both micro and macro structures of the agricultural sector would be of vital importance in solving the existing problems and leading to better and genuine rural development.

The Dengist agrarian modernization in the 1980s replaced the Maoist rural development model of collectivism in place from the 1950s to the 1970s. This rural structural transformation had been regarded as capitalist and the end of collectivism by many observers both in China and abroad. Others, including the post-Maoist leadership have defended it as conforming to the basic definition of socialism. The new agrarian structure is difficult to characterize in a simple or unambiguous way, since it combines elements of individualism, collectivism and State economic control which embodied affinities to capitalism and even pre-capitalist modes of production. Simplistic characterizations of the new development road in rural China as capitalist or socialist should be avoided and efforts should be made to understand them as a new type of hybrid with its own special characteristics and contradictions.

To some extent, the reformers ventured into *terra incognita* without a clear idea of what a 'socialist economy' would be or how it would work. While the previous Maoist concept of socialism had been discredited, and the notion of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' had been put in its place, the latter concept still lacked further clarity. The future of the reforms requires a clear and cogent conception of this new form of socialism.

Since 1978, China's leaders have tried to introduce greater economic flexibility and efficiency through a certain amount of decentralization in production decisions. The government has relinquished many of its central

planning and allocation functions in the agricultural and service sectors, but rigidities remain even today. For example, in the agricultural sector, in promoting the rural household responsibility and household contract system, the government made it almost mandatory for cadres to redistribute the collective property and tools of the brigades and teams. Although household contracting may offer great benefits, to force rural people to function as household units is not really allowing 'flexibility'. Even in those localities where brigades or teams were highly productive, and in spite of the many other social benefits derived from them as collectives, they still had to be disbanded. Once again, the leadership in charge of economic policies mandated institutional changes throughout China neither on the basis of a tested experiment or a piloted project but simply on the assumption that 'smaller was better' and then replaced its predecessor's philosophy that 'bigger was better.'

Throughout the 1980s, solutions to improve rural education were not found. Rural education was closely connected with rural political economy which was not yet sufficiently reconstructed to reinforce education. In particular, the new township and village authorities which replaced local collective leadership at the commune and production brigade levels do not have the will to make up the difference between the small share of the State education budget that reached them. In reality, when the resources of the finance on rural education from the support of the communes were not available, serious problems would follow. Given the unsteady foundations of the new rural social and economic paradigms, the plans for compulsory education by law announced in the mid-1980s in China appeared somewhat premature. The law governing compulsory education still has to be supported by other relevant laws. The government' efforts on improving rural education in the 1980s has been far from adequate.

Some questions should be asked about the future economic development strategy. Can household-sized plots provide the basis for further expansion of agriculture based upon specialization, mechanization and use of modern technologies? Can the investments that are still needed in infrastructure development be planned, carried out, and ultimately managed in the absence of the collective framework allowed for meaningful achievements in this area in the past? Can the political tension built into the growing economic inequalities and exploitative relationships be contained?

Can the contradictions between growing market forces and the continued existence of State planning be reconciled? Most important of all, can China afford to lose another generation (or maybe more than just one generation) of rural youth to illiteracy if it is to achieve its ideal blueprint of a prosperous and socialist China?

In order to evaluate Dengist major economic development strategy in rural China and its impact, it is necessary to mention the social impact of the rural responsibility system. The rural responsibility system redistributed collective land to each household according to the number of individuals in the family. This incentive encouraged larger family size as did the prevailing method of production in rural China which demanded large families. As a result, the natural rate of increase of the population was not reduced satisfactorily in 1980s when the household responsibility system was generally adopted. In many localities, vigorous and coercive policies of birth control quotas and abortion was implemented. But the problem has been further compounded under the influence of the responsibility system. Increasing rural social problems continue to cast gray shadows on Chinese agricultural development in the longer run.

In the past forty years, the essence of Chinese rural agricultural development has been centered on the resource mobilization based on Maoist model of creating a 'Communist Man' on the one hand, and the Dengist model of making an 'Economic Man' on the other. The fundamental issues of the means and ends of national development in rural areas have long been jeopardized in the past forty years under both the Mao and Deng's regimes.

Mao regarded rural development as a means to achieve his idealized socialist vision of China while Deng thought his rural development could be achieved at the expense of neglecting the basic needs and rights, such as education, of the rural young generation. All means were used for short-term economic development regardless of their harmfulness toward the sustained and lasting effect of rural overall development. Mao's purely political focus and Deng's purely economic concern failed to prioritize the people whom development was intended to benefit. Thus, despite development plans by both leaders, the majority of the rural people and their young generations have been greatly neglected.

Educational policies and development in rural China are shaped by the unique Chinese geographic, economic, social and cultural conditions.

Modernization policies have not only reordered education, but the economy and prevailing ideology as well. Facts pertaining to the last decade painfully showed that strategies for modernization created in agricultural sphere have not been found workable in other social spheres, such as rural education. Education, especially rural education in China, instead of being given more attention and a more important position has deteriorated greatly. This deterioration is best represented first by a high percentage of drop-outs. Second, there has been a lower level of school enrollment rate. Third, rural schools have been faced with the extreme financial difficulties. Fourth, there was a large numbers of drop-outs as cheap laborers. Last, the long-forgotten rural teaching corps were again challenged. Among all the factors, both internal and external, the rural responsibility system made its negative contribution to the rural education decline in the 1980s.

Past experience has proven that peasants could not adequately support rural schools without government assistance. The dependence on only local units to set educational budgets has, in the past, led to the impoverishment of rural education rather than improvement. Furthermore, the local economic resources available for education, marginal in the best of times, can change drastically according to each year's agricultural harvest, market prices, and other local conditions. To depend on the local economy to support education promises no secure educational budget and, therefore, no reliable funds for salaries, rural school buildings, teaching materials, or long-term planning. Not surprisingly therefore, despite ambitious national goals for transforming rural education over the last decade, the education sector has definitely not succeeded in meeting its essential objective of popularizing basic education, either in quantity or in quality.

Dropping-out has been recognized as a worldwide problem. China's educational research institutions have also been monitoring this particular problem in rural areas for decades in efforts to improve educational levels either for political or for economic purposes. It is high time to explore what has gone wrong in the field of rural education in the 1980s. So doing, it should enlighten leaders and educators and enable them to pay attention to the seriousness of the existing problems. Hopefully the leaders will eventually take feasible measures to eliminate the drop-out problem and thereby improve the efficiency of the existing rural school system and to build a solid foundation for rural education of future generations.

Chinese education is in rapid transition. The signs are clear that Chinese education in the 1980s was pragmatically determined. Whether it is possible for the government to balance the aspects of equity, access and quantity while pursuing rapid modernization is still the greatest challenge facing Chinese rulers and educators. Chinese rulers tend to wait for the judgement of history. However, it is highly recommended that the rulers and educators make an active judgement now or they will be held as directly responsible for creating new generations of illiterates in the 1980s and the years beyond.

Recommendations For Rural Education in Future China

Rural human resource development is one of the most complex problems in China. Education in rural areas should rest on a close connection between development of the economic, social and educational sectors. It is important not to overlook the implications of other social factors which may slow down rural human resources development. The development of existing or potential human resources in rural areas must be one of the main preoccupations of planners at all levels. This means that neither rural locals nor the central government should ignore their responsibilities for the reconstruction of social, economic and educational life.

Basic education is an undertaking that confronts the future. These constituting the first-year school enrollments today will supply the main source of labor for China's rural development and construction in the twenty-first century. The extensiveness and quality of basic education will have a decisive influence on the cultural and moral level of the whole nation. The strength and stamina of the rural areas, to a large extent, are dependent on basic education. Without good basic education, there can be no education to speak of, nor can there be a cultural and material civilization. Basic education eventually influences the development of science and technology in the countryside and can lead to a thriving economy and the ultimate progress of the society. Most important of all, stressing the importance of basic education should be orientated to respecting the basic human right of having access to an education and to ensuring that the population are better prepared to challenge and master their own life. There must be basic education of high quality which is continually improving if the government is determined to raise the quality of the rural peasant's life. If

this is not accomplished, China will not be able to educate the future generations, and other forms of education will lose their foundation.

Let it be understood that any government's effective but short-term political and economic development policies should not be achieved at the expense of long-term human resource development. To stress again, the genuine development of any society, whether a capitalist or socialist one, should be people-centered and geared toward the best interests of its children. Development should be of the people, for the people and by the people. Rural education should be based not only on its short-term profits but also should consider its long-term goals for rural China's future masters - the young generation. Basic education in rural areas should be based on the following recommended approaches:

First, it has an obligation to give equal educational and cultural opportunities to all children in both urban and rural areas. It should consider the requirements and nature of each child's environment. This means giving rural children the elementary means of acquiring knowledge, (such as the three Rs: Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic) and knowledge of their rural environment which includes its related history, geographic and natural sciences in which they will be living. All these subjects are vital for rural children so that they may be prepared to adapt to and function well in their living circumstances and in their communities.

Second, it has an obligation to give all children equal opportunities of receiving secondary and a higher level education on the understanding that the learning must be adaptable to rural needs and that the young persons can find the necessary openings. This principle will ensure that they can continue their studies on an equal footing with all other children in the country, if they are willing and capable.

Third, it has an obligation to use all out-of-school forms of training in order to ensure that everyone can become adapted to occupational and environmental changes whether through training for new jobs or through refresher courses. That is, to establish a common denominator of knowledge which will prevent rural children from being locked up in an intellectual or cultural 'ghetto' and will enable them to progress in their own environment, or outside of it.

Fourth, it should provide guidance in vocational and technical trainings for all ages, designed in particular to enable young persons to find occupations corresponding to their capabilities.

Fifth, basic education in rural areas should continuously pay attention to the need for the systematic spreading of literacy programs among persons of all ages and both sexes to provide opportunities for both adults and children as well. By so doing, it is hoped that the end of basic education does not end but continues for a life-time.

Last, but not least important, rural education must aim at reducing the increasingly high drop-out rate in most of the rural areas. To accomplish this, educational planners at all levels should motivate the rural peasants and rural young people to value education. Peasants should be informed not to consider the educational system as merely a path to access higher education but rather regard education as a basic need which prepares and enables their children to join the modern economic sector. They should be encouraged to send their children to receive education. Only by so doing are they respecting their children's natural right to access education as a human being with dignity. Peasants have to realize also that their past experience in production, handed down from older generations can hardly fit in with the needs of developing rural agriculture.

It is necessary to use flexible measures in order to reduce the drop-out rate. First, since the development in the economy and culture is different in different areas, different ways should be considered and preferred. To reduce the drop-out rate, the location of teaching sites should be related to specific rural settings, on the basis of providing education to the majority of rural school-aged children. Second, reducing the drop-out rate and increasing the regular attendance rate are both closely related to raising the quality of the teaching staff. The quality of primary school education cannot be guaranteed without a well-qualified teaching staff. They should be released from the burden of cultivating their private plots and instead be provided with opportunities to attend necessary refresher courses in order to increase their academic capabilities. If teachers were better trained and better paid they could help rural development because they are the main force which determines the quality of rural education. Furthermore, their economic situation should be improved so as to increase their social status and respect.

In essence, basic education in rural areas should aim at fulfilling several goals. First, it should teach communication skills and general knowledge which at the basic level includes literacy, numeracy, and general civic, scientific, cultural knowledge, values, and attitudes. Second, it should teach life skills and knowledge such as hygienic practices, sanitation, nutrition and a defensive common sense to avoid accidents. Third, basic education should provide production skills which embrace all forms of activity directed toward making a living or the production of goods and services at whatever level of sophistication.

Basic education, in a rural setting, needs a close relationship between learning and action, between meaningful work and use. The learning should take place with the learner in his environment - that is, on the farms, in the rural factories or even at home. That is to say, when realizing the important function of formal school education, learning should not be limited only within schools. The rewards of learning should be real and immediate rather than symbolic and abstract. In summary, basic education should respond as a more effective means to achieving the goals of a human needs approach to development by dealing with the following aspects: rural social, economic and educational organizations, pedagogy, finance, legal measures and local community participation in education.

Chinese agriculture remains locked in the traditional mold after forty years of construction. So long as the Chinese agricultural technology remains more or less unchanged and traditional farming practices prevail, education can contribute little to enhance productivity. The rural responsibility system has been regarded as highly successful economically. However, it has contributed negatively to rural education in the 1980s. Nevertheless, China is too large for one to make grandiose generalizations for the whole country. Economic policies since 1978 have brought success to some areas and to some people but failure to others. Rural children have been among the main victims.

It should be understood by any government or set of leaders that instant development will be short-lived. Such micro-level incentive strategies should not be achieved by sacrificing the macro-level overall planning. In China, the rural economic development strategy should regard basic rural education as one of the most important ingredients within its overall rural development paradigm.

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