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# Literacy education in China

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# Literacy Education in China

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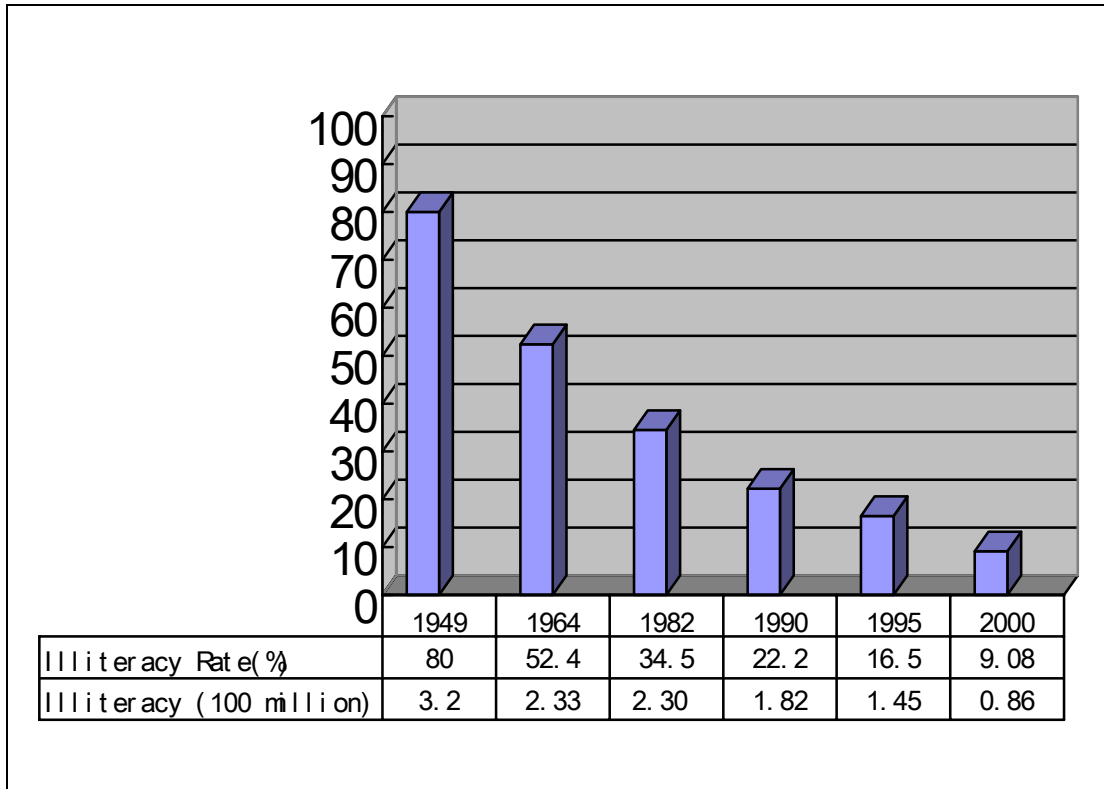
## I. General Development of Literacy Education in China

### i. Development of Literacy Education in 1990s

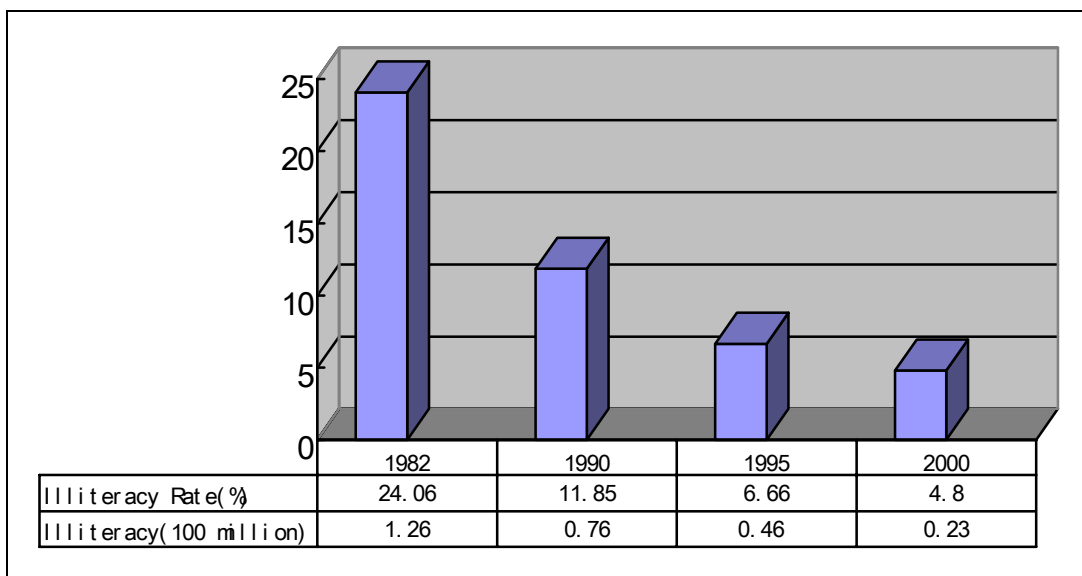
Chinese Government attached great importance to the literacy education. In July 1994, the State Council issued the policy on implementation of *Outline on the Reform and Development of Education*, which put forward the policy goal of eliminating illiteracy among youths and adults all around China by the end of twentieth century and reducing the illiteracy rate among youths and adults to below 5%, and established a series of policies to promote the development of literacy education. By the end of 2000, the above policy goal has been reached all around China as expected. The illiterate population decreased greatly. The fifth national census in 2000 shows that, the illiterate population of above 15 years of age has decreased to 86 million, that is, a 100 million reduction of illiterate population during the last 10 years; the adult illiterate rate has dropped to 9.08%, among which the illiteracy rate among youth and adult has dropped to 4.8% .

**Diagram: Decline of Adult Illiteracy Rate in 1949, 1964, 1982, 1990, 1995,**

**2000**



**Diagram :Decline of Illiteracy Rate among Young and Middle-aged People  
in 1982、1990、1995、2000**



ii. Follow-up of Literacy Education in 21<sup>st</sup> century in China

In order to carry out Dakar Framework for Action of 2000, Chinese Government

has taken a series of actions, including the enactment of *Chinese Action Plan on EFA (2005~2015)*, and has established a series of domestic policies on the strengthening and improving of EFA. All of such efforts contributed to great accomplishments in the cause of popularization of 9 year compulsory education and elimination of illiteracy among youths and adults.

**Diagram : Literacy Campaign from 2001 to 2004**

Year	Classes	Trained		Training	
		total	female	total	Female
2001	163052	2205127	1296312	2014915	1189124
2002	143225	1744471	1029673	1773880	1023877
2003	107545	2031417	1058157	1952204	1048443
2004	102122	2045819	1086513	2425446	1335766
总计	515944	8026834	4470655	8166445	4597210

In 2002, the State Council transmitted *Recommendations on Eliminating Illiteracy during the Tenth Five-year Plan* issued by the Ministry of Education and other departments, and took out a series of plans and measures; therefore, new progresses have been achieved in literacy education. In 2004, Chinese Government started *the National Plan for Tackling Critical Difficulties in the Work of Basically Popularizing Nine-year Compulsory Education and Basically Eliminating Illiteracy among Youths and Adults in the West (2004-2007)*, and mobilized all kind of forces to struggle for the goal of “Basically Popularizing Nine-year Compulsory Education and Basically Eliminating Illiteracy among Youths and Adults in the West China”.

From 2001 to 2004, 8.03 million illiterate populations have been educated with an average of more than 2 million per year. By the end of 2004, there have been 2,576

counties achieving the goal of “Basically Popularizing Nine-year Compulsory Education and Basically Eliminating Illiteracy among Youths and Adults”, which take up 90.1% of all the counties in China. In the UNESCO International Literacy Awards 2004, Qinghai Province has won the 2004 King Sejong Literacy Prize for its outstanding achievement in literacy education.

## **II. Main Methods Practiced by China in Literacy Education**

i. Exerting government functions and insisting on administrating education by law. In August 1993, the State Council amended and re-promulgated *Regulation for Literacy Education*, and worked out a series of coordinating policies and measures. At present, governments at all levels have already brought literacy campaign into their Economic and Social Development Plans and Government Goal of the Term, and carried out responsibility system on Literacy Education work in governments and education departments. Education departments at all levels have already established special divisions in charge of literacy education, and assigned special staff to manage literacy campaign.

ii. Three categories of literacy programs have been laid down and carefully carried out in accordance with the principle of “promoting actively, truth oriented, and planning respectively”.

--illiteracy rate among youths and adults in the region with a advantage level of economic and education development, whose population takes up 35% of the whole population in China, shall reduce to 5% by 1996;

-- illiteracy rate among youths and adults in the region with a middle level of economic and education development, whose population takes up 50% of the whole population in China, shall reduce to 5% by 1998;

--since the *Decision on Further Strengthening Education in Rural Areas* enacted by the State Council in 2003 has expressly stated that illiteracy rate among youths and adults in the west China shall be below 5% by 2007, such goal shall replace the former one which requests that rate below 15% by 2000.

iii. Establishing a system, **namely National Forum on EFA**, in which governments take the lead, relevant departments coordinate and collaborate. In order

to win mass people to support and participate in literacy education, governments at all levels have widely set up coordination teams, which consist of heads of 11 departments and institutions of education, advocacy, culture, broadcasting and television, agriculture, forestry, civil affairs, ministry, Youth League, women's federation, and science associations. Members of coordination team shall coordinate and collaborate, regularly exchange information, do research work, and promote literacy education together.

iv. Literacy education and popularization of primary education shall be carried out at the same time and developed harmoniously. The Ministry of Education requests, that local primary schools shall be responsible for all illiterate youth under 15 to help those youth to be literate; that primary and middle school in countryside and adult school shall actively participate in literacy education, drafting plans to try their best to cover literacy education to each village and each person, developing after-literacy education, and organizing students who have just received literacy education to continue to participate in various cultural activities and training on practical technologies to let them master knowledge and skills that is essential for them to develop agriculture and adapt themselves to social lives.

v. Contents of literacy education must be closely connected to learners' practical needs in work and life. Contents of literacy education shall consist of not only cultural knowledge of recognizing characters, reading, writing, and basic accounting, but also education on civil rights, skills of running business, common sense, and sanitary and health. Literacy education in regions where ethnic minorities populated shall also increase education on folk and traditional cultures, and such education shall be carried out in languages of that particular minority.

vi. Reducing girls' drop out, and pay attention to literacy education for women. Nine year compulsory education shall be vigorously popularized; number of girls, either being unable to attend school or dropping out, shall be gradually reduced. Rate of girls unable to attend school shall not exceed 2%; drop-out rates of girls shall be controlled below 2%, and the new generation of illiterate must be reduced as much as possible. Governments shall actively develop literacy education for women, explore

different methods and ways of literacy education that fit for women's needs, and add following contents to texts book for literacy education for women: production skills, health knowledge on women and children, family education, and management of house and properties.

vii. Forms of education are of great variety and adjustable according to the place, time, and people. With regard to the vast territory and great imbalance of economic and education development in different regions, the need of and study condition for illiterate students are quite different from one another; therefore, various forms of literacy education have been adopted in different regions. For example, literacy class is opened for concentration education in regions where illiterate people are densely populated; neighborhood team study has been adopted in regions where illiterate people are dispersedly populated; One-teach-one method or visiting-teaching method have been adopted in regions where illiterate people are extremely dispersedly populated, in which each illiterate people would be taught by a primary school teacher or a senior primary school student. Besides, China Liaoyuan Broadcasting and Television School have produced many TV teaching programs suitable to illiterate people, and regularly show such programs to all over China through China Education TV. Those TV teaching videos won lots of good comments because its attention to knowledge and skills aiming to rich the illiterate.

viii. Strengthening development of textbooks and teaching management. In October 1992, Ministry of Education released *Outline of Literacy Education*, *Outline of Primary Education for Adults in Countryside*, and other teaching policies. As to development of textbooks, a practice, in which education department at provincial level mainly compose unified literacy textbooks, while county, and town make supplementary textbooks, has well coordinated the relation between the unified standards on literacy education and the variety of learners' needs. There are more than 100 kinds of literacy textbooks for choice, and nearly 1000 kinds of textbooks and reading materials for continuing education after literacy education. Every province pays much emphasis on the improvement of contents and methods of literacy education to assure the quality of literacy education, in accordance with the local

economic and social developments and various needs of learners. For years, the development of textbooks and reading materials for women has gradually caught each province's attention, and Ministry of Education and education departments at all levels have organized great efforts to develop textbooks for literacy education and continuing education for women.

ix. Raising funds for literacy education through various channels. As to the raise of funds, China collects such funds in accordance with the principle of "funds being mainly raised by mass people or collective units themselves with proper subsidies from the central government". Grass-root funds through self-financing are used to provide allowance to teachers and pay fees for free education. National education funds are used mainly to train teachers, develop textbooks, award advanced teachers, and develop teaching research. Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance together set up "Government Award", and transfer a special award fund of 8 million Yuan to praise region that makes outstanding achievements in literacy campaign.

x. Establishing system of inspection and recognition. As to literacy campaign in China, graded system of inspection and acceptance have been carried out. The State Council has laid down standards for units who are considered to have eliminated illiteracy and standards for individuals who are considered to get out of illiteracy. In March 1993, the Ministry of Education enacted *Measures for Checking Units Eliminating Youths and Adults*. Governments of State, provinces, regions, counties (districts) have established departments of education supervision, in charge of graded inspection and acceptance work of "basically eliminating youths and adults".

### **III. Major Problems Facing Literacy Education in China**

China's literacy campaign has achieved great accomplishment through enduring endeavors. However, with regard to the fact that the remain illiterate population is still big, that the women illiteracy rate is high, and that emphasis of reducing illiterate population shall be gradually shifted to disadvantaged areas as to region, and women, senior citizens, and people living scattered as to person, the difficulty of literacy campaign will go on to increase. Therefore, it will be important task in the future education development to eliminate the remaining illiterate population especially the

remaining women illiterate population, and consolidate the so-far accomplishments.

i. Imbalanced development of literacy education. The 23 million population of illiteracy among youths and adults are mainly dispersed in the 7 western provinces of Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, Inner Mongolia, Yunnan, Guizhou, and Tibet, where the level of socio-economic development is relatively low. The illiteracy rate among youths and adults here ranges from 10% to 5%, and illiterate population mainly live in remote and depressed areas and areas where minorities inhabit.

ii. Large proportion of women in illiterate population. According to the fifth census in 2000, women illiterate take up 72.7% of the total adult illiterate population, the adult illiteracy rate is 9.08%, including 4.86% of men illiterate and 13.47% of women illiterate; illiterate population of over 50 takes up 73.3% of the total illiterate population.

iii. re-illiteracy and new illiteracy have not been eliminated. Being restricted by such factors as teaching faculty, textbooks and funds in some disadvantaged regions, there are no continuing educations after literacy education, which leads to serious situation of re-illiteracy; that is to say, people become illiterate again after receiving literacy education. In some regions, the re-illiteracy rate has reached around 8%. There are about 0.2 million populations per year become new illiterate due to being unable to attend school or drop-out.

#### **IV. Objectives and Strategies of Literacy Education in China**

##### **i. Objectives**

##### **a) Remarkable reduction of illiterate population by 2015**

--reduce more than half of adult illiterate population to an amount of less than 40 million.

--through popularizing nine-year compulsory education and culture make-up lessons, eliminate illiterate population from the age of 15 to 24, reduce illiteracy rate among youths and adults between the age of 15 to 50 to below 2%, and reduce adult illiteracy rate of above the age of 15 to below 5%. By 2020, illiteracy rate among youths and adults from the age of 15 to 50 will be reduced to below 1%, and adult illiteracy rate of above the age of 15 of below 3%.

--strengthening elimination of illiteracy among young and middle-aged women, and remarkably reduce the gender difference in illiteracy among young and middle-aged people.

--consolidate literacy accomplishment through skills trainings and other continuing education.

--establish studying communities in regions where ethnic minorities inhabit.

b) Youth's basic needs for study are satisfied

--reform the enrollment system of schools at all levels to provide education opportunities to drop-out youth and adults wishing to further study knowledge and skills.

--actively develop and operate various knowledge and skill training schools in cities and towns, which own a training capacity of more than 100 million person to satisfy the needs of all youth and adults of learning knowledge and practical skills.

--transfer the study to do ourselves good and integrate the expected study effect with future career, income and life quality.

ii. Policies and measures for promoting literacy education

--deepen understandings on the significance of literacy education. Becoming literacy and continuation of study have great significance to illiterate people, which will not only help illiterate people to build up their self-confidence, self-esteem, and independence, maintain their human rights and equity, but also enhance their ability to participate in social activities and job-haunting abilities, increase their incomes and better their life qualities. In the literacy campaign, attentions shall be attached to not only eliminating illiteracy among young and middle-aged people (especially through popularizing compulsory education and make-up lessons for those fail to finish compulsory education to get rid of new illiterate people under 24), but also eliminating illiterate population of senior groups; to not only groups with good foundation, but also disadvantaged groups such as women, ethnic minorities, disable and mentally-retarded, and scattered groups.

--give emphasis on literacy campaign of depressed area, ethnic minorities and women. Literacy programs shall be set up, in the depressed western provinces and

autonomous regions where illiteracy among young and middle-aged people have not been eliminated yet; literacy programs for ethnic minorities shall be set up in their residence whose population are below 0.1 million; literacy programs for women shall be set up in provinces where the task of eliminating illiteracy among young and middle-aged people are basically fulfilled and absolute number of women illiterate population is still quite large. Government at all levels shall take the work of eliminating illiteracy and consolidating accomplishment as their priorities, and put forward their literacy campaign through the promotion of literacy programs.

--identify the real number of illiterate population, work out plans to carry out literacy task to each town, village, school, and individual. We shall examine relevant data from the fifth national census in terms of village to identify the real number of illiterate population, and work out plans on literacy campaign and consolidation work at the level of province (municipality, autonomous region), region (metropolitan), county (city), town, and village, and carry out literacy task to each town, village, school, and individual. A graded, paralleled responsibility system shall be set up in governments and education departments. Coordinating institution shall be set up and strengthened in governments at all level to mobilize the masses to participate in the literacy campaign. Inspection on literacy work shall be strengthened, and report, circular, yearly estimation and check system shall also be established.

--carry out literacy campaign by university students. Mobilizing university students to participate in social practices, such as literacy activities and scientific and cultural services, and “three countryside programs” (programs under which officials, doctors, scientist and college students go to the countryside to spread scientific and literacy knowledge and offer medical service to farmers) , to eliminate illiteracy among young and middle-aged people and train teachers for eliminating illiteracy.

--strengthen theoretical and practical research on literacy; actively promote reform on literacy education. Work shall be done to adjust curriculum setting, improve contents of literacy textbooks, reform teaching methods and modes, and set up education mechanism and inspection and evaluation system which oriented by the basic needs of learners and centered on the settlement of practical problems. With

regard to the characteristic of different illiterate groups (such as women, senior citizen, scattered residents, mobile population, and the disables), various forms of education, with combination of concentrated and separate education, or formal and informal education, or school and family education, shall be adopted to satisfy different needs of illiterate groups and the need to consolidate literacy accomplishments.

--raise literacy funds through different channels. Central government finance certain sum of literacy fund every year, and gives awards according to the development of local literacy programs. Local governments at all levels shall continue to establish special fund to finance literacy programs and give awards. Literacy fund shall be brought into the list of education outlay for employees in enterprises and institutional organizations. The cost of training literacy teachers and other faculties, development of literacy textbooks and reading materials, carrying out teaching research, organizing to exchange experiences, awarding advanced persons by education department at all levels shall be listed in the cost for education. Volunteered financing literacy education by social forces and individuals shall be encouraged.

--try to establish an education mechanism that adapts the need of 21<sup>st</sup> century, and is oriented by the need of study, and is capable of satisfying the basic study needs of adult illiterate people, to improve the quality and effect of literacy education. Emphasis shall be transferred gradually from eliminating illiterate people who don't know Chinese characters to eliminating illiterate people who don't know Chinese culture. Continuing education courses shall be established and set up in rural primary and secondary schools and adult schools to provide illiterate people studying opportunities in time. Contents of literacy education shall be expended, and training shall be widely spread to aspects that are closely connected to daily lives, such as applicable skills, policy and law, sanitary and health, family education, and environment protection. The evaluation method shall also be changed from the present method primarily depending on how many characters a student knows to a new method depending on a student's actual ability.

### iii. Policies and measures for skill training after literacy education

--the formation of a fine training network for youth and adult is one of the basic

aspect of construction of education system fit for future needs, and also important component of educational reform and development. Based on good development and operation of agricultural school, vocational school, cultural school for peasants, and vocational training centers, efforts shall be made to develop broadcasting and television education and internet education network, to encourage universities and secondary schools, at the same time of operating their own education, make full use of their education resources to open cultural and vocational training courses to the masses, to support scientific societies, other NGOs, and the masses to run educational and training institutes, to mobilize all powers available and educational resources to try their best to satisfy the study needs of youth and adults.

--enhance the pertinence and effectiveness of training on youth and adults. Rural training shall put emphasis on the continuing enhancement of literate groups, promotion of agricultural skills and processing technology of farmer produce, development of small towns, and emigration of rural population to cities. Various trainings on healthy care and sound care, scientific fostering, prevention of HIV/AIDS and STD, and prohibition of drugs shall also be carried out in rural areas. Trainings in cities shall put emphasis on employment, re-employment of laid-offs, and promotion of worker's adaptability and capacity to change jobs. Trainings in cities shall also cover trainings on the enhancement of citizen's moral standard, life qualities and community services.

--vigorously promote "*Training Plans on Transferring Rural Labors*" and "*Training Plans on Practical Skills*". We shall adhere to the principle of "combination of agriculture, science and education" and "overall plan for elementary education, vocational education and continuing education", perfect rural vocational training network, promote trainings on transferring rural labors and practical skills, and enhance rural labors' capability to start business and become rich.

--Funds for training youth and adults shall be raise through different channels according to the nature of training and situations of students. Subsidy for enterprises to train their employees shall be listed in expense on employees' education, subsidy of re-employment training for laid-offs shall be listed in the employment expense

managed by department of labor and social security, and funds for training peasants shall be assisted by township governments and administrative villages taking the circumstances into consideration.