

Chapter 2

The Concept Exploration and Theoretical Basis

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2.1 The Concept Exploration

2.1.1 System and Education System

Based on existing research, “system” refers to a regimen, standard of organizations, things or business.¹ System of education is a generic term denoting educational institutions and regimen.^{2,3} Hence, based on synthesis of literature both at home and abroad, and combined with the spirit of *National Medium Long-term Education Reform Development Plan* (2010–2020), and *Pilot Implementation of National Education System Reform* issued by the General Office of the State Council

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¹Li Yixian, and Xu Qi, Social Economic Development Men Education [J]. *Journal of the Chinese Society of Education*, 1988(10):1–6.

²Archer, M.S. *Social Origins of Educational Systems* [M]. London: Sage, 1979: 1–26.

³Sun Miantao, and Kang Cuiping, Analysis of the Relationship between Education Mechanism Reform and Education Mechanism Innovation. *Educational Research*, 2010(7):69–72.

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education system in this report mainly concentrates on educational institutions related to preschool education, compulsory education, secondary vocational education, higher education, and non-state funded education, and standards and systems that would maintain the normal operation of educational institutions, including running of schools, management of personnel, funding, talents training and evaluation.

2.1.2 Mechanism and Education Mechanism

“Mechanism” originally means “the structure, working principle, or the inner functioning of the machine”. It is widely used in natural and social phenomena referring to “the structure, function and the relationship of organisms”; “law of the internal organization and change”; “the process and way of the interaction between the organization and the parts of a working system”. Mechanism plays a basic, fundamental role in any system. Education mechanism denotes “the internal relationship and its operation mode among education factors” (see Footnote 4). Specifically, “education mechanism means social factors and educational factors which are related to education activities, both internally and externally, in close interaction with education, combine into a multi-dimensional, multi-level, self-control, self-balanced, and unstable interaction system and relationship structure between society and education. It can regulate, control, promote, and guide the education to develop at the right speed, with the right size, form and trend”.⁴ Based on the existing documents, education mechanism, in this report, specifically refers to institutional factors of preschool education, compulsory education, secondary vocational education, higher education, and non-state funded education such as school-running system, personnel system, financial investment system, talent training, and evaluation system, combined with social, economic, political, and demographic elements, playing different functions, combining and interacting differently at various levels of education, and forming a dynamic operation mode and laws of a comprehensive structure formation. It determines the current status and future development of the level of the education system.

2.1.3 The Relationship and Function Between Education System and Education Mechanism

Education system and education mechanism are categorically two different concepts, though closely interrelated, both in terms of the courses of development of the two

⁴Sun Miantao, and Kang Cuiping, A New Annotation of Education Mechanism Theory [J]. *Educational Research*, 2006(12):22–28.

concepts and their harmonious structure. Wang Changle thinks that education system is part of the education mechanism⁵; Sun Miantao believes that education mechanism includes the education system and vice versa (see Footnote 4). Under certain conditions, the concepts of education system and education mechanism interchange; hence, through policies, rules, and regulations, education mechanism becomes education system, while when operation elements, principle, and mode of education system combine, a kind of education mechanism evolves. Further, education system and education mechanism are complementary in terms of nature and function. Education system only stipulates the scope of education activities, its nature and requirements. It does not influence education activities directly, but creates an impact on them through education mechanism in a certain way, and education mechanism exerts impacts with the help of education system which sets certain scope and requirements.⁶

Education mechanism is dynamic, constantly changing, unlike education system which has certain stability once formed. As a result, the two complementary but different concepts form into a contradictory unity which needs to adapt and coordinate to promote a healthy development of the whole education system. If one wants to build a system, one needs to establish a certain mechanism corresponding with those involved, so that it can directly play a positive role in education activities under certain specifications and requirements.⁷ Thus, education system and education mechanism are closely linked and are interdependent on each other.

2.1.4 *The Comprehensive Reform of Education System*⁸

2.1.4.1 The Connotation of Comprehensive Reform of Education System

To answer questions on the changes to be conducted on comprehensive reform of education system and the means to do so, we need to explore the meaning of comprehensive reform of education system. Based on existing research both at home and abroad, comprehensive reform of education system is seen as a necessary means to meet the needs of internal demands and external needs. It is regarded as a better way to find the source of the growing chronic illness in the existing education

⁵Wang Changle, Discussion about the Internal Rules of Oden Education Essential Progress in China [J]. *Higher Education Administration*, 2001(1):77–80.

⁶Chen Enlun, and Dai Xiaojun, Evaluation of Dismissal System of Teachers from Public Primary and Secondary Schools. *Teaching and Management*, 2006(10):12–15.

⁷Sun Miantao, Discussion on Some Important Theoretical Issues during the Reform of Education System of China. *Journal of South China Normal University (Social Science Section)*, 2010(2):27–32.

⁸Note: main part of the articles has already been published on *Journal of Southwest University (Science and Social Edition)* the 6th issue, 2015.

system and resolve it. It is considered an all-inclusive, profound, mass education reform to improve the quality of education. Comprehensive reform of education system involves reallocation of internal resources and power relations, structural elements and the improvement of their relations in all aspects and in all periods. To a certain extent, it would have a positive impact on structure adjustment, institutional restructuring, standard upgradation, and policy improvement of the whole education system. Comprehensive reform of education system is a long-term dynamic project that includes problem diagnosis, goal setting, path selection, in-depth implementation, constant monitoring, effect verification, etc. In addition, owing to its relationship with external environment, comprehensive reform of education system implies a broader connotation. It refers to the unison of constant conflict, negotiation, and cooperation between internal system and external mechanism of education system.⁹

2.1.4.2 Extension of Education System Reform

Based on the important policies of the party and country, and the current situation of education system with Chinese characteristics, comprehensive reform of education system can be divided into the following three aspects: (a) reform of education management system which means adjustment of education structure and management of education departments at all levels, from central to local, as well as non-education departments; clear power and accountability mechanism and its further transformation, and readjust relationship between the government and social power, market, school, and attach importance to transformation of functions and the division of labour, etc.; (b) reform of implementing agencies which mainly includes school education systems of all levels and kinds and reforms of the cooperation between the third party organization of social education and the department of education; (c) reform of education system on specification, mainly includes special system reform such as the school-running system, talent allocation system, investment system, talent training and evaluation system, etc. It mainly embodies the establishment, adjustment, and improvement of standards, policies, laws, and regulations in these special fields. These three aspects are involved in the reform of China's preschool education, compulsory education, secondary vocational education, higher education and non-state funded education. In the process of practical reform of education system, these three aspects constitute a complex system. They are closely linked and layered upon each other (see Footnote 9).

⁹Li Ling, Huang Chen, and Han Yumei, The Comprehensive Reform of Education System: Theory, Path and Evaluation. *Journal of Southwest University (Science and Social Edition)*, 2015 (6):80–88.

2.1.4.3 Characteristics of the Comprehensive Reform of Education System

Comparing to education system reform in the past, we think that *The Current Central Committee of Communist Party's Decisions on Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening Reforms* highlights the following basic characteristics in the comprehensive reform of education system.

- (a) Comprehensive and systematic: Since the third plenary session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist, from the reform of education system conducted by the party and government, it is not difficult to see, in all previous major deployments, topics covered in the previous reforms are usually about a certain education phase or in a single field of education. The biggest difference between comprehensive reform of education system and former earlier reforms is that the former involves a comprehensive and complex relationship of elements in at every level of the system. Meanwhile comprehensive reform of education system also must coordinates with external elements such as economy, politics, culture, society, and ecological civilization construction.
- (b) Interactive: Comprehensive reform of education system emphasizes on the internal and external structure and the interior and exterior factors of education system which are associated with and influencing each other, and interdependent with each other. Changes in certain factors may trigger fluctuations and linkage of other factors.
- (c) Chronic and gradual: Education reform cannot be achieved overnight. It is rather a gradual but dynamic development process which progresses over a long period of time and have unique features. Comprehensive reform of education system must be carried out step by step. It can be of a long duration when the multiple bodies participating transform their beliefs and adapt their behaviour. As education itself is characterized by long residual action, comprehensive reform of education system needs long-term practice tests, which may take unpredicted long time and cannot come into action instantly.
- (d) Macroscopic and deep: Comprehensive reform of education system provides a macro perception of government guiding, overall layout, broad plan, top design, as well as coordination between central government and local governments. At the same time it pays attention to decentralization, involves grassroots governments and looks into problems in depth, such as participation of the entire population, status of school and regional differences (see Footnote 9).

2.2 The Main Theories of Comprehensive Reform of Education System¹⁰

Comprehensive reform of education system not only is policy-oriented and takes practice as the inspection standard, but it also takes scientific theory as a guide to ensure that reform is in the right direction and the path chosen is rational and scientific. Public choice theory, new public management theory, system theory, and multiple system logical theory have laid a theoretical foundation for the comprehensive reform of the education system of our country in the new period from various angles of views, and also provide scientific guidance for the principles and direction of the reform (see Footnote 9).

2.2.1 The Public Choice Theory and New Public Management Theory

Public choice theory and new public management theory are widely adopted in the education reform as two major theoretical bases by many countries in the world since the 1990s. The former theory examines the relationship and interest demands between governments and educational bodies of different levels from the angle of market economy. It believes that education is a public product and decision-making related to education is a process where the government and various participants related to education fight for education sovereignty to serve their own interests rather than that of the public. In order to pursue freedom and fairness of market competition, it advocates that education products should be viewed as an option available for the people and a free market for public education service need to be established, weakening thereby government monopoly and strengthening the accountability mechanism.¹¹ The latter theory tries to transplant the thought and practice of strategy management from private enterprise into the education system. Through instrumental and technology rationality, it hopes to attain industrialization of education and professionalization of teachers. It stresses on the control of different levels, attaches more importance to results, efficiency, effectiveness, rather than process, using performance as evaluation and accountability standards for the

¹⁰Note: main part of the articles has already been published on *Journal of Southwest University (Science and Social Edition)* the 6th issue, 2015.

¹¹Udehn, L. The Limits of Public Choice: A Sociological Critique of the Economic Theory of Politics [EB/OL]. <http://xs.cytbj.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=The+Limits+of+Public+Choice%3A+A+Sociological+Critique+of+the+Economic+Theory+of+Politics&source=web&cd=6&ved=0CEcQFjAFahUKewjy68H77aXHAhUMmJQKHQgNBbE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fspea.shufe.edu.cn%2Fupload%2Fhtmleditor%2FFile%2F111216044755.pdf&ei=IXLMVbLNOYyw0gSImpCIAQ&usg=AFQjCNEFBHBY8bkVEnJe64awM31Y93jTyw>, 2015-8-13.

principals and administrative leaders.¹² Although orientation and practice effects of both theories are under scrutiny, they indeed guide the practice of reforms of western education system and improve the efficiency of policy implementation. In the face of so many problems for the reform of education system, these two theories provide theoretical inspiration and practical guidance for comprehensive reform of education system in our country. Methods and bases for solutions as to how to adjust decentralization and accountability of different education levels, improve administrative efficiency, deal with the relationship and the benefit demands among government, public, educational institutions, and the market in the education system, can be found from the two theories (see Footnote 9).

2.2.2 *The Systematic Theory*

Different from public choice theory and the new public management theory which views the education system as a linear structure, system theory gets rid of control and bondage of the top-down bureaucratic hierarchy, and emphasizes on the rich and systematic multidimensional relationships between elements and structures in the education system. Some scholars use loose coupling system theory and complex adaptive system theory to explain the essence and principles of the reform of education system (see Footnote 9).

Loose coupling system theory¹³ thinks that education system should adopt diversified political choices that meet different regional demands. Education departments and agencies of different regions and levels should enjoy full autonomy to adjust the central policy instructions according to their specific needs. Complex adaptive system theory¹⁴ is a network system composed of a large number of closely connected institutions. The network system presents a high degree of order or disorder. The order of a complex system comes from strong micro-structuralization of self-organization. This order is not subject to level controls, but scattered in the basic structure. When it's running in the grass-roots, it brings stability or instability to the macro level of system (see Footnote 9).

These two systems are both opposed to regard the education system as a linear hierarchical administrative structure and emphasize on the diversity, comprehensiveness, complexity, and integrity of the education system. They both emphasize on different functions, correlate internal factors (different regions, institutions,

¹²Fitzsimons, P. Managerialism and Education [EB/OL]. <http://www.vusst.hr/ENCYCLOPAEDIA/Managerialism.htm>, 2005-4-13.

¹³Goldspink, C. Rethinking Educational Reform: A Loosely Coupled and Complex Systems Perspective [J]. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 2007(1):27-50; Weick, K.E. Administering Education in Loosely Coupled Schools [J]. *Phi Delta Kappa International*, 1982(7):673-676.

¹⁴Stacey, R. *Complex Responsive Processes in Organization: Learning and Knowledge Creation* [M]. London: Routledge, 2001:31-69.

schools, teachers, principals, etc.) and think that the success or failure of the reform of education system depends on whether to coordinate its internal elements of functions and mutual relations according to particularity and difference or not. These theories are rather illuminating so as to deal with a complicated relationship between elements and factors such as policy formulation, implementation, and participation that one may experience in framing the comprehensive reform of education system in our country (see Footnote 9).

2.2.3 *The Theory of Multiple System Logic*

Systematic logic refers to a long-term and stable system arrangement in a field and its corresponding action mechanism. Certain system logic plays a role in the process of interaction with other system logic. To implement and promote system reform, multiple systematic elements and the complexity of the relationship of those elements that it contains must be identified and located. Through investigation and analyses of the appearance and behaviour of specific areas, the systematic logic and operation mechanism can be speculated, its effect on the system reform can be revealed, and a feasible top-level design can be put forward.¹⁵ Comprehensive reform of education system is a systematic project which has undergone multiple reforms and changes of the education system. The central government, the education departments at the grass-roots level, schools and classes contain a different systematic logic. For education, funds investment, personnel deployment, talent training, and so on, also have a different systematic logic. Under the action of multiple education system arrangement of stable existence and operation mechanism, to carry on the comprehensive reform of education system, the multiple system logic and its mechanism that are involved must be comprehensively analysed and grasped. Through investigation and study of phenomenon and action of micro education, a more macroscopic multiple systematic logic and its changing path and trajectory can be speculated and developed. In addition, the theory can also guide us to pay more attention to evolution characteristics and endogenous differences in various regions and different areas of the education system (see Footnote 9).

¹⁵Zhou Xueguang, and Ai Yun, Institutional Change under the Multiple Logic: An Analytical Framework [J]. *Social Sciences in China*, 2010(4):132–150.

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