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ABSTRACT

After discussing the mediating effect of cultural tradition on perceived objective reality and the need for a model that constructs paths from cultural factors to social behavior, this document describes a path model developed as a result of an investigation of two human resource development policy paradigms that were enforced alternately between 1949 and 1979 in the Peoples Republic of China. The role of the Confucian educational tradition is explored as the persistent independent factor that acted as an incentive for participation in education during the years of the study. Next, study findings regarding changes in educational participation during literacy campaigns and in the literacy rate of the school-age population over 30-year period are analyzed. The moderate policy direction, identified as similar to the Confucian educational ideology, is shown to have resulted in higher literacy attainment than that attained under the radical policy that is seen as contradictive to the Confucian educational tradition. Last, the importance of further path models that would show the relationship between cultural tradition and social demand for education is discussed. (CLA)

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Literacy in China:  
Cultural Tradition and Educational Policy, A Proposal

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## Introduction

The theories that frame the educational policy research questions fall mostly within the disciplines of sociology, political economy, social anthropology, and organizational theory. The present paper proposes a model that incorporates components and basic principles of all four theories. The model was derived as part of an investigation into the variation in effects of two human resource development policy paradigms within one cultural context, the People's Republic of China.<sup>1</sup>

It may be true, to paraphrase Heyneman, that the only relevant questions for educational policy are "how to raise the availability of school quality inputs and how to distribute them more fairly."<sup>2</sup> The relevance alluded to is the goal of policy: higher and more fairly distributed educational attainment. Heyneman's succinct statement emphasizes that there is no responsible argument as to the desirability of these objectives, regardless of the social-milieu or other contextual difficulties of the task. This author will address the question of how the context of policy can be included in a policy model, so that the quality inputs can be more fairly distributed and reach educational consumers more effectively. The investigation referred to above, pointed out once again that external conditions can have grievous impact on internal applications and equity of distribution. Inefficiencies in policy application, such as inappropriate textbook selection or poor scheduling of classes, may result from poor matching with context rather than resource availability or implementation.

The model was developed as a result of an investigation into education in the People's Republic of China (PRC). From 1949-79, two opposing policies were alternately enforced, which created the rare opportunity to compare policy effects within one cultural realm. No single disciplinary theory, sociological, economic, political or socioanthropological, explained the pattern of attainment outcomes under the two educational policies. Though macro policy practices and socioeconomic conditions were traced, of educational consumers did not respond entirely as expected. Aggregate flows of students followed fairly predictably the market trends. This was consistent with the economic theory of rational consumption recently reemphasized by Foster.<sup>3</sup> However, marked, patterns of variation persisted. Issues described by consumers at the micro level appeared to offer explanations for the variation in the aggregate behavior patterns. The macro effects could not be understood without the introduction of a lens through which micro issues could enter the model. The path from national development patterns to educational attainment lead through the focal point of individual participation<sup>4</sup> in the social institutions.

The micro issues can be built into a macro model as part of the utility decision. Some economic path models describe the formation of social demand as aggregate utility decisions. Windham proposed in 1980 that micro educational decisions be used as a basis for macro educational planning.<sup>5</sup> Lyons, in his review of 25 years economic theories of education, cited social demand as a factors of interference that constitutes "such a basic and political problem that [they] have not been the subject of a frontal

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<sup>1</sup> Vilma Seeberg, *Literacy in China, The Effect of the National Development Context and Policy on Literacy Levels, 1949-79*. (Bochum: Brockmeyer Universitätsverlag, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Stephen P. Heyneman, "Commentary on Riddell," *Comparative Education Review*, 33, no.4. (November 1989): 502.

<sup>3</sup> Phillip Foster, "Commentary on Baker," *Comparative Education Review* 33, no. 4 (November 1989): 519-524.

<sup>4</sup> Though it is the individual that participates in schooling, in Chinese society, as in many other traditional cultural settings, the family is the decision making unit rather than the individual. It is the family not the individual alone that makes the investment in and receives the benefits of education. It would be appropriate, therefore, to speak of family participation rather than individual. However, this nomenclature would raise problems in understanding and in some further social analysis such as gender stratification. Therefore, the standard term individual will be adopted here.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas M. Windham, "Micro-educational Decisions as a Basis for Macro-educational Planning," in Hans N. Weiler, Ed., *Educational Planning and Social Change: Report on an International Institute for Educational Planning Seminar*. (Paris: UNESCO, 1980).

attack by economists of education."<sup>6</sup> Sociological and micro economic theories account for the utility decision as rational behavior based on objective market incentives. Organizational theory as interpreted by Windham proposes that the rational decision is based not on objective reality but on a perception of reality structured by received information.<sup>7</sup>

Closer scrutiny of the micro level lead this author to include a utility decision factor in the educational attainment path model for the PRC. In the cross-cultural context of the China investigation, it was immediately obvious that individual perception was colored by cultural traditions. The utility decision concept therefore was modified to include a cultural dimension as the source that mediates the impact of socioeconomic and political reality. In this model, cultural traditions are seen to act as an overlay over objective social reality in the process of constructing perceptions at the micro level. Beliefs and values that lend meaning to the perceived objective reality are a reflection of cultural tradition. Cultural tradition thus contributes to an explanation of the aggregate patterns of educational participation behavior and educational attainment. At the macro level, cultural tradition is a factor which mediates socioeconomic, political, and educational impact.

Heyneman made reference to the phenomena of cultural mediation of SES effects. "The predictive power of pupil SES is not identical in all countries.... It is true that the three standard sociological measures--parental occupation..., income, and educational attainment--may assume different values in different cultures. It is also fair to say that they are more universal than other measures."<sup>8</sup> Foster, in that same issue of the journal, also referred to influences beyond the "purely economic" to impact on decisions;<sup>9</sup> despite no clear market signals, "parents continue to send their children to school, and one suspects that ... primary schooling has become an intrinsic part of 'customary' behavior."<sup>10</sup> Windham emphasizes that non-productivity returns to education have been consistently underestimated.<sup>11</sup> Kaneko, accounting for enrollment expansion in postwar Japan, concluded that not only family income growth, but psychological factors, the anticipated benefit of education, and confidence in future economic growth, play an important role in determining demand.<sup>12</sup>

Investigating the mediation of cultural factors in schooling decisions and in affecting aggregate student flows through education is becoming acceptable research practice. The burgeoning work in the field of multicultural education is an illustration of this trend. However, progress on conceptual and methodological questions in framing and conducting research questions remains to be made.

Analysis of cultural tradition is usually done in the humanistic disciplines, by using ethnographic methodologies and cross-sectional attitude surveys, or by comparing differential behaviors and outcomes across cultural groupings. The results of the first three types of investigations cannot be used directly to predict aggregate social behavior patterns, as Foster warned in his commentary<sup>13</sup> on Baker's

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<sup>6</sup> Raymond Lyons, "Economics of Education." In L. Fernig and J. Bowen, Eds., *Twenty-five Years of Educational Practice and Theory 1955-1979*. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980) p. 302.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid..

For an example of a research design using the micro-utility decision as part of a macro-model of education in a South American setting, see Nancy Birdsall and Susan Hill Cochrane, "Education and Parental Decision Making: A Two-Generation Approach." In Lascelles Anderson and Douglas M. Windham, *Education and Development: Issues in the Analysis and Planning of Postcolonial Societies* (Lexington, Mass: D.C. Heath and Company, 1982), 175-210.

<sup>8</sup> Heyneman, op. cit., p. 502.

<sup>9</sup> Foster, op. cit, p. 520.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 522.

<sup>11</sup> Lascelles Anderson and Douglas Windham, "Introduction." In L. Anderson and D.M. Windham, Eds., *Education and Development* (Lexington, Mass: D.C. Heath and Co., Inc, 1982). pp. xi-xviii.

<sup>12</sup> Motohisa Kaneko, *Enrollment Expansion in Postwar Japan*. International Publication Series, 1. (Hiroshima: Research Institute for Higher Education, Hiroshima University, 1987).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 523.

anthropological approach to rural participation in education.<sup>14</sup> Cross-cultural comparison can give a general outline of divergent patterns, but is of limited predictive utility. Its limitation lies in the lack of definition of the processes by which cultural tradition affects social behavior. Without clearer descriptions of cultural traditions, it is not possible to construct a research design, to specify hypotheses, and conduct analyses that result in statistical predictions. Missing is a model that constructs paths from cultural factors to social behavior. Such a model could be tested like macroeconomic theories based on constructs of rational behavior.<sup>15</sup>

This paper conceptualizes a path model that includes cultural tradition as a factor in determining social demand for education. The model is shown in Figure 1 in the Appendix. The research which led to this model was an initial attempt to incorporate such a factor into an explanatory theory and to verify it by comparison with objective data. In an exemplary research design, this construct could be tested and refined by means of a value survey, drawn on a sample across age, gender, social class, region, and ethnic groups. Results of such a survey would lead to the identification of indicators and criteria and the construction of models for statistical testing. A similar process has led to the operationalization of social status variables, such as the concept of occupational status<sup>16</sup> and the occupational prestige scale.<sup>17</sup>

An exemplary research design would plan to measure social demand objectively and subjectively. An attitude survey would reveal opinions of the affected populations of the particular educational institution or program, again sampled across age, gender, social class and regional groups. The subjective data on social demand could be correlated with the subjective data on cultural values, holding all other variables constant, to find differential impact of cultural ideology on attitudes. Attitudes and behavior could be checked against each other, or behavior regressed on both cultural ideology and attitudes. The findings could be investigated for differences by age, gender, social class, region and types of schooling. These analyses would result in the construction of models of variables that could predict the impact of cultural tradition on socially structured behavior.

The model, in sum, is composed of hypotheses on paths which are based on cultural or socio-anthropological, sociological, and political-economic explanations of educational effectiveness. The model can be used to generate refined and powerful research questions that investigate objective behavior patterns for the purpose of deriving policy that leads to higher and more fairly distributed educational attainment. It would seem particularly applicable to use a policy model that includes culture for ideological reforms or in ethnically diverse school systems.

### Cultural Tradition as a Factor in Chinese Literacy

The investigation at hand did not have the advantage of a lengthy empirical research record on Chinese cultural value systems. Humanistic descriptions of the Chinese educational history and traditions were used to construct a simple cultural factor that included the cardinal ethical and epistemological precepts of the tradition, hereafter called the dominant popular educational ideology. This ideology was used 1) to assist in formulating hypotheses based on sociological and political-economic theories regarding effects on social demand, and 2) to construct hypotheses on independent ideological effects on aggregate educational behavior patterns.

Chinese cultural traditions on education consist of an interplay of both instrumental and intrinsic values, thus, social, economic, political, and educational structures all are addressed or included in the

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<sup>14</sup>Victoria J. Baker, "The Relevance Dimension in Rural Areas," *Comparative Education Review* 33, no.4 (November 1989): 507-518.

<sup>15</sup>Incentive motivation, for example.

<sup>16</sup>Ronald M. Pavalko, *Sociology of Occupations and Professions*. 2nd Ed. (Itasca, Ill.: F.E. Peacock Publications, Inc., 1988). Pavalko credits the early work of Hatt in 1947, known for the creation of the North-Hatt scale, of Emile Benoit-Smullyan in 1944 for the development and operationalization of the term *situs*, as well as subsequent work by Richard Morris and Ray Murphy in 1959.

<sup>17</sup>Donald J. Treiman, *Occupational Prestige in Comparative Perspective*, 2nd Edition. (New York: Academic Press, 1988).

popular educational ideology. One suspects this may be a universal phenomenon, though it will differ across cultures in its content.

The model was operationalized by formulating duplicate hypotheses for each path. Objective measures were used to describe background factors; these findings were qualitatively evaluated in terms of their consistency with educational ideology. The findings on the objective measures and the cultural evaluation resulted in the construction of two hypotheses predicting patterns of structured behavior, the social demand factor.

To measure the factor social demand, objective data patterns of social behavior were taken and analyzed. Subjective attitude data were also recorded and used to compare to the objective behavior patterns. In this model the subjective data were treated as an indication of an interpretation of social reality that was constructed by cultural traditions. The variation in the complex social demand factor, consisting of both objective and subjective findings, was checked for consonance with the hypothesized effects.

The results of the longer study that lead to the present paper are reported elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> The study of basic education offered in the first three decades of the revolutionary Chinese state virtually demanded consideration of cultural tradition as a force of influence. During these years two fundamentally different development ideologies alternately dominated the policy process and altered the socioeconomic, political and schooling environment of the population. A comparison of the variations in social patterns by policy period pointed to the influence of persistent independent factor. Broad-based, in depth interviews and acquaintance with Chinese history and culture suggested testing the Confucian educational tradition as that persistent factor.<sup>19</sup> The study of Chinese social patterns during this time is uniquely appropriate to identify the impact of cultural factors due to their independence from political and socioeconomic factors.

In the next section a part of the investigation will illustrate the use of the path model of educational attainment. The path from cultural tradition to social demand culminating in educational attainment will be highlighted. Attention is given to report on the research methodology used. Suggestions will also be made for more fitting research designs to be pursued in the future. The final section will draw conclusions on the applicability of the proposed model.

#### **Dominant Educational Ideology and Educational Policy Practice**

The Confucian educational tradition served as the dominant educational ideology at the inception of the PRC. The path model posits that information on socioeconomic incentives for schooling forms the basis of the utility decision. Cultural values act as a screen for the incentive information and together structure the decision that results in participation behavior.

In the Confucian educational ideology, the following basic precepts are most highly valued: education secures socioeconomic mobility not only to a male child but to the family; education through acquisition of higher knowledge, largely defined as literary erudition, leads to moral virtuousness; and education is inherently hierarchical and structurally divided by meritocratic promotions. The presence or perceived presence of these elements would act as an incentive to participation in education. The absence or perceived absence of some or all of these precepts would make a decision to participate less likely. Patterns of such decision making result in the behavior patterns that form the social demand for education. Thus, on the cultural effect path, it was hypothesized that the policy practice which demonstrated greater continuity with the dominant educational ideology would result in greater social demand for education.

The first, and probably dominant, precept of the Confucian educational ideology is the instrumental value of education. In this precept the Confucian educational ideology is largely consistent

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<sup>18</sup>Seeberg, note 1.

<sup>19</sup>Both qualitative and quantitative indicators were used in order to check the postulated causal paths. The findings can be considered illustrative, but they do not reach the level of statistical proofs. Literacy levels, the output measure, are calculated in terms of both the official and popular Chinese definition of literacy and the Unesco definition of functional literacy.

Data sources include extensive formal and informal interviews in the PRC and among refugees in Hong Kong; PRC local, provincial, national journals and newspapers; PRC provincial and national statistical publications; and international secondary literature. Alternate time series data were created for all measures of schooling provided to correct for admitted bias in PRC data publications. All data that was included was verified in three sources.

with economic incentive and social status theories of educational participation. In the investigation of the socioeconomic path, little independent effect of the cultural factor is expected. A path in which the effect of cultural tradition is more easily demonstrated will be described and reported on here.

As mentioned above, in the PRC between 1949 and 1979, two fundamentally different political philosophies dominated politics. The two divergent policy directions will be called moderate and radical hereafter. Moderate leadership groups were in command during the years 1949-57, 63-65, 76-79; and radical factions during 1958-62, 66-75, each for a roughly equal amount of time. The essential philosophical differences emerged in the area of human resource development as a conflict regarding the goals of education. The moderates formulated educational policy to serve primarily the planned economic growth needs; the radicals instituted policies principally to raise the political awareness of the population to "class struggle." Both leadership groups saw their policies as leading to a better educated [yo wenhua] work force; however, on the concept of education and of educational processes they differed fundamentally.<sup>20</sup>

The moderate educational ideology maintained continuity both in substance and form with the Confucian educational ideology. Major similarities existed in the concepts of the normative, social, and selective functions of education. The elitist meritocratic linkage with society and the economy was similar to the first Confucian precept. Moderate policy makers' insistence on high standards in education was fairly consistent with the second Confucian precept of higher knowledge. The moderates' structural hierarchy of schools and extensive use of testing for promotion conformed to the third Confucian precept. Radical educational ideology, on the other hand, provided little substantive continuity with the Confucian cultural tradition. In severing the link between educational attainment and job assignment or promotion, the cardinal instrumental precept of Confucianism was violated. In radical insistence on practical knowledge, vocational training, and direct attacks on intellectualism, the second precept on higher knowledge and virtue was opposed. In its informal delivery structure<sup>21</sup> and preeminence of values education, however, radical education was very similar to the traditional ideology. The underlying normative difference between the Confucian and the radical educational policy concept must be described as a major ideological contradiction.

From this evaluation of the consistency between the Confucian educational ideology and the PRC policy concepts, suggested effects on social demand for education emerge. Based on the hypothesis that greater consistency will lead to greater appreciation of education, it is expected that educational participation would be greater during moderate than radical policy periods.

Next an objective measure of educational policy was analyzed to determine the reality of the policy goals as practiced. It was found that resource allocation did not conform to stated policy goals. Moderate educational policy, expected to be more elitist than the radical policy, allocated more resources to basic literacy education in general and to rural basic education than did radical policy, though remaining consistent with elitist trends in the distribution of funding. Radical policy decreased the inequality of distribution of funding between urban and rural areas in the process of cutting overall funding to all basic education. Policy as practiced by moderates was more consistent with the Confucian elitist tradition than the practice of radical policy makers. The impact of the practice of policy on social demand, mediated by the cultural ideological factor, holding other factors constant, was hypothesized to increase educational participation for basic education under moderate leadership over radical periods in both rural and urban areas.

Another path analysis that illustrates the impact of cultural tradition in the Chinese context is that between schooling quality and participation. A short summary of the findings will be provided here for illustration purposes.

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<sup>20</sup>These two fundamentally different approaches to education have parallels worldwide. In the West, the two similar approaches took the form of, one, neo-classical human capital theory, and, two, structuralist theories. Western human capital theory is closely associated with a manpower planning approach to education; there it is conceptually parallel to the Chinese moderate approach to education. Western structuralist analysis fostered an emphasis on the social engineering function of education, personified by the social reconstructionists, similar to the approach of Chinese radicals. Educational policy in most Western industrial countries since World War II has been driven by a combination of these two approaches.

<sup>21</sup>Minban [people managed] schools appeared to be a seamless transition from the traditional ssu-shu [classical primer schools] until campaigns for political correctness among intellectuals removed the old-style teachers starting in the mid-1950s.

Quality, availability, and cost of education were the three aspects of schooling investigated. Quality is the factor where the independent effect of cultural tradition is seen most clearly. One indicator of quality was teacher educational background. It was found that during moderate years expansion in numbers of teachers was accompanied by a slow raise in teacher educational background. During radical policy years expansion of the teacher corps brought in large numbers of poorly trained personnel and was accompanied by demotion of the most qualified teachers. The proportion of minban teachers [in people managed schools] tripled to above 60 percent of the teacher crops. These teachers were mostly senior primary school graduates who could not be expected to teach beyond junior primary school skills.

At this skill level primary school graduates could barely be considered functionally literate. During radical periods, the quality of teachers and, by inference, instruction decreased massively.

Rural residents bore the brunt of the decrease in teacher quality during radical years. Urban residents saw an improvement in quality during moderate years only. These findings would lead to an expectation that rural participants would show less enthusiasm for schooling than urban residents.

The Confucian educational ideology addresses the quality of education in the second precept. Thus it is expected that precept would mitigate the effect of quality of schooling on the demand for it. Confucian ideology stipulates that education is an acquisition of higher knowledge, knowledge of the classical texts, through which virtue is achieved. Education that offers less than functional literacy does not meet the traditional standard. Thus it would be expected that when the quality of schooling sinks below literacy achievement, holding all other factors constant, the demand for education would decrease markedly.

#### **Social Demand and the Confucian Educational Tradition**

The social demand factor in the model was investigated by analyzing participation and attitudes toward educational participation. Data for the latter were collected from a) first-person accounts available in the public media and b) extensive formal and informal interviews.

In the formation of social demand, the cultural factor plays an independent role. The author proposes that the Confucian educational ideology forms the standard of expectation against which the individual measures his or her perception of objective reality. The ideology provides the criteria for determining the utility of educational participation. The cultural tradition thus affects the formation of social demand through the educational policy, socioeconomic incentives and schooling factors.

The combination of Confucian educational ideology, findings on socio-economic incentives, educational policy and schooling characteristics, lead to a set of strong, unambivalent expectations on social demand patterns: Social demand will be greater for advanced education and poorer for "terminal," lower-track education. Thus, it was expected that demand for urban education during moderate periods would increase, and demand for rural education would decrease in direct proportion to the growth of the rural minban schooling; finally, demand for literacy education will be low.

The second and third precepts of the Confucian educational tradition related to schooling content and delivery, and would have effects on social demand independent of mediation by socioeconomic incentives. Consistency between schooling and tradition in these areas would lead to expectations of strong social demand. During moderate policy periods, preparatory and advanced education were consistent. Terminal, lower basic education, primary and literacy, did not satisfy either of these precepts.

The objective findings on participation patterns were mostly consistent with these expectations. Participation was computed by finding the proportion of the age group that completed a certain level of basic schooling.<sup>22</sup> As an example, the participation rate for primary completion is shown in Table 1 in the Appendix.

Participation in terminal primary education (rural minban in particular), on average, was lower than in formal preparatory education by a factor of 18. During moderate periods, demand for formal education was high, particularly in urban areas; during radical periods, the figures declined. However, during 6 of 15 years of radical control, schooling was discontinued, chaotic, or nonfunctional, so that participation practically was not measured and not meaningful.

There was low demand for extra-school literacy education in both urban and rural areas and throughout all policy periods. Extra-school literacy education did not meet minimum standards on Confucian precepts regarding higher knowledge, hierarchical promotion, or guarantee of socioeconomic

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<sup>22</sup>Enrollees minus early leavers equals completers.



mobility. It was of poor quality, short term and terminal, and not tied to socioeconomic benefits. Within the first season of the first literacy campaigns poor attendance by the villagers was noted in the media.

One pattern of social demand shows a greater importance of economic market requirements than cultural influences. Social demand for terminal junior secondary schooling had formed in the urban areas in the early 1960s under moderate policy. Supply of junior secondary graduates had risen to the extent that employment in the modern sector required this certification. This social pattern on the surface is inconsistent with Confucian educational ideology, which would depress demand for terminal education below higher education. Yet, an argument can be made that the social and economic disincentive for urban youths not to graduate from junior secondary school made completion of this certificate consistent with the instrumental Confucian precept that education secure socioeconomic mobility.

The subjective description of social demand patterns was found through an examination of people's statements on their beliefs and expectations of education. The types of belief statements were categorized and their variation over the policy time periods explored. Conclusions were drawn regarding the correspondence with the hypothesized results and compared to the objective indicator.

Ideally, attitude surveys of representative samples distinguishing time periods and geographical locations would reveal subjective factors in social demand. In the absence of such data, personal statements, both those collected by the author and those represented in public media, were used. Some examples of attitude statements will be given here as illustration.

From the first extra school literacy campaign in 1951, the villagers' perception of it as an unwarranted investment in time and resources, such as lamp oil, was reported. Literacy education was popular for a brief period for youths who could compete for promotion to formal primary school. Positive attitudes on upper primary and more advanced education built throughout the moderate 1950s, faded during the Cultural Revolution, and revived, with fervor, in the 1980s.

Rural primary schooling maintained the respect of villagers through the 1950s before expansion lowered quality. Then costs of minban schooling surpassed perceived benefits, and raising teachers' salaries became problematic. In 1979, villagers still echoed the old dream--they wanted their children to leave the village, to have a future, to earn a salary, and the local schools were not seen as preparation for that path.<sup>23</sup> Several studies conducted in villages in the early 1980s confirmed that primary retention rates were going down, repetition rates were increasing.<sup>24</sup> A prominent factor mentioned by students was their belief that promotion to middle school from an ordinary rural primary school was unlikely and that learning a handicraft might offer a more promising future than attending school.<sup>25</sup> Villagers' values regarding education in 1979 appeared to be very instrumental.<sup>26</sup> Those peasants families, who had enough older labor power to afford the education of a younger son, might attempt to graduate a son from junior secondary school. Those, who had no older children, would attempt to get one child through primary, but earlier withdrawals were common.<sup>27</sup>

Urban residents in the late 1970s saw that a junior secondary degree was a minimum requirement to obtain a job, but also cited the "backdoor" barter system as a guarantee for employment.

Combined the objective and subjective data on demand for education show a strong consistency with the Confucian educational ideology. Chinese villagers rejected education when it did not secure socioeconomic mobility, lead to higher knowledge and virtuousness, or promoted students to advanced

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<sup>23</sup>Cabxi Primary School Administrative Group, Shanghan County, Fujian Province, "Puji Nongcun Xiaoxue Jiacyu Yao Shying Xinde Jingji Xingshi" [The Popularization of Rural Education Should Accord With The New Economic Situation], *Jiaoyu Yanjiu*, 2 (1982): 56-57; Author's interviews, 1979-80.

<sup>24</sup> Ming Kecheng, "Rending Nongcun Jingji Xingshi, Banhao Nongcun Jiaoyu" [Have A Better Understanding of the Economic Situation In Rural Areas and Do a Good Job on Rural Education], *Jiaoyu Yanjiu* 6 (1981): 16-17; Cabxi Primary School, op.cit..

<sup>25</sup>Cabxi Primary School, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup>Mosher reported that after peanut cropping was contracted to families in the Canton delta, on the days that the soil needed preparation for seed, cultivation, and harvesting, the classrooms stood empty. Children were in the fields with the parents. Steven W. Mosher, *Broken Earth: The Rural Chinese*. (New York: MacMillan Inc., 1983).

<sup>27</sup>Mosher, op. cit.; Interviews 1979-80.

levels. Chinese urban residents supported education as part of the mechanism to secure employment, irrespective of moral "knowledge," or promotion to higher levels, because without it demotion on the socioeconomic ladder was guaranteed.

These findings on social demand show the strong interaction of cultural tradition with social and economic incentive rationales. They also show a strong independent effect of cultural tradition. These findings moreover represent a refinement of the commonly held notion that the Confucian educational tradition leads to a strong and universal commitment to education. The Confucian educational ideology was shown to be related to demand for basic education as an initial stage towards advanced education. Confucian educational ideology also was shown to depress demand for basic education that is terminal education unless mitigated by strong minimum standards of employment.

As this paper attempts to show, there are cultural sources of interferences with the manipulation of education. In spite of revolutionary ideology and central planning, the demand for education continued to be structured by strong Confucian cultural values.<sup>28</sup>

The patterns of social demand were sufficiently strong and consistent with hypothesized relationships to the other factors in the model to establish the vitality of private utility decision making that incorporates cultural as well as economic and schooling factors in a path model leading to educational attainment.

To corroborate the findings on social demand for education, the major results of the analysis of educational attainment over the thirty years will be briefly addressed next.

#### **Educational Attainment, the Outcome Measure of the Path Model**

The analysis of participation in schooling contributed along with an evaluation of levels of achievement offered by schools resulted in substantive findings for levels of education attained. Close scrutiny and reevaluation of official PRC figures for school entrants and graduates generated a baseline time series of data on proportions and numbers of children and adults achieving at some level of literacy in schools and literacy programs.

Literacy is defined *functional literacy* as used by Unesco.<sup>29</sup> The Chinese term that is translated as literacy [yo wenhua] literally translates as "have culture" and in meaning is closer to "being educated" than being literate. This conceptual overlap is reflected in the definition for illiteracy used in the 1982 census, as not having received primary schooling.

Functional literacy was not generally achievable in short-term literacy programs and campaigns. It was achievable in middle to high quality four or six-year primary schooling.

Between 1951 and 1957, during the first moderate period, 55 percent of all primary entrants achieved functional literacy. During the radical years, between 1958 and 1962, and the Cultural Revolution, from 1966-75, less than 1 percent of either rural or urban primary entrants achieved functional literacy. During the moderate recovery periods, between 1963 and 1966, 28 percent of entrants barely reached functional literacy; and between 1976 and 1979, the rates recovered to 1950s strength, with 57 percent of primary school entrants attaining functional literacy.<sup>30</sup>

This school literacy rate can be translated into a literacy rate for the school-age population (ages 7-14).<sup>31</sup> For 1951-57, the functional literacy rate among school-age youths stood at 32 percent. During the radical years 1958-62 and the Cultural Revolution of 1966-75, it fell to 8.4 percent, and during the few

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<sup>28</sup>For an introduction to the impact of cultural tradition on female schooling, see Lo, Billie LC "Primary Education: A Two-Track System For Dual Tasks." In Ruth Hayhoe, Ed., *Contemporary Chinese Education* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1984), pp. 47-64.

<sup>29</sup>Unesco, *Resolution A/RES/1677 (xvi). Revised Recommendation Concerning the International Standardization of Education Statistics* (Paris: Unesco, 1978); *Statistics of Educational Attainment and Literacy* (Paris: Unesco, 1983).

<sup>30</sup>Seeberg, Table 6.6.

<sup>31</sup>For this datum, the official PRC enrollment rates are used. It must be cautioned that these official rates are inflated particularly during crisis years of 1958-62, 1966-72. However, to maintain some consistency, the author felt it necessary to use the official figures. An alternative enrollment rate time series was also constructed, according to which the corresponding school-age literacy rates are 25.9, 0.6, 15.7, 39.4. Ibid., p. 260. Table 6.6.

moderate leadership years between, 1963-66, it rose to 37.2 percent. During the recovery in 1976-79, the school-age population functional literacy rate rose to 47.6 percent.<sup>32</sup>

The above school-age functional literacy rate of 47.6 percent contrasts sharply with the 1982 census figure of 91.4 percent.<sup>33</sup> This discrepancy illustrates the importance of the accounting for factors that limit in-school literacy achievement, i.e., the retention rate and quality of schooling. Thus a more accurate and criteria referenced assessment of literacy in the school-age population of the PRC can be derived.

Though much corroboration for the low literacy levels among the Chinese population exists,<sup>34</sup> only one type of substantiation will be presented here. Expert opinion generally recognizes that PRC primary school leavers who drop out prior to grade four are at risk for losing literacy; only primary school graduates are fairly assured of retaining functional literacy. The only independent primary retention survey conducted in the PRC was done in 1979 by a World Bank mission. After grade three, two-thirds of the entrants remained; after grade five, then the terminal grade, 55.3 percent of entrants graduated.<sup>35</sup> According to these data, only 55.3 percent of primary school students in 1979 were assured of having achieved functional literacy. An educational attainment profile was plotted on official enrollment and graduation rates. A graph shows the relevant age-group (the birth cohorts of 1941-67) rates for "no schooling," primary "incompletion" and completion (shown in Figure 2 in the Appendix). The large shaded area of the graph illustrates the magnitude of the "grey" area in literacy achievement. These data suffice to explain the above discrepancy between the criteria-referenced and the census literacy rate.

Over the 30 years investigated, school-age literacy improved by only 15 percentage points from 31 percent in 1949-57 to 46 percent in 1979. At this level of analysis, it is clear that, despite expenditure of much effort in education, and much conflict in educational policy and the educational system over the appropriate policy, literacy in the school-age population, and consequently among the general population, remained rather low over the 30 years under investigation.

### Conclusion

The findings on PRC education show that moderate policy resulted in higher literacy attainment than radical policy, and that the latter was associated with severe decreases in literacy attainment. Universally, formal primary schooling contributed the most to the increase in literacy. Extra-school literacy education, usually conducted in the mass campaign format did not contribute to increasing functional literacy levels.

Three effects of the Confucian educational tradition on literacy were isolated. The first is a policy effect: the decentralization of funding for basic education, especially enforced by radical policy, so damaged schooling quality and literacy achievement that the population, particularly the villagers, voted with their feet and their pocket books against schools. The second is an independent cultural effect: the low achievement aims and lack of promotability in literacy campaigns so contradicted Confucian educational precepts of knowledge, that the population expressed little hesitation in rejecting participation. Both findings illustrate the processes by which tradition negatively affected increases in functional literacy; again to the greatest disadvantage of the rural population. The third finding is a socioeconomic effect: Because the instrumental value in Confucian educational ideology is largely consistent with economic incentive and social status theories, little independent effect could be isolated for the cultural factor in the socioeconomic path. However, for the urban population, the socioeconomic pressure to complete junior secondary education was so high, that the Confucian precept on the intrinsic value of education (the moral value of higher literary erudition) receded into the background.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 258, Table 6.5.

<sup>33</sup> State Statistical Bureau, PRC, Population Census Office, Department of Population Statistics, *Zhongguo 1982 Nian Renkou Pucha 10% Chouyang Ziliao* [10 Percent Sampling Tabulation on the 1982 Population Census of the People's Republic of China]. (Beijing: Chinese Statistical Press, 1983) p. 317.

<sup>34</sup>See Seeberg, pp. 260-268.

<sup>35</sup>The World Bank, *China: Socialist Economic Development Annex G: Education Sector*. (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1981), p. 77.

The PRC policy analysis shows that both policy paradigms failed to address the formation of social demand for basic education. Neither policy paradigm adequately addressed the question of socioeconomic incentives or cultural predispositions regarding educational participation. This oversight contributed substantially to the poor record in raising literacy levels.

The model constructed in this paper was derived to fill in unforeseen holes in explanatory theories. The research design used is not ideal. The model has yet to be researched and tested on entirely empirical data and procedures. The methodological challenges that would be posed by statistical procedures have not been met. However, the methodological advances and critique of sociological and economic models commonly used in international policy studies seem to apply to this model as well.

Continual reconceptualization of the relationship between the social context, the schools, and the students and their families, and the process called education appears in order. The present climate of tempered enthusiasm regarding the interaction of education with the broader socioeconomic milieu motivated this author to present this proposal. Recent investigations in educational planning and modeling such as that by Snyder and Nagel have continued to caution that expectations of education "must be tempered by the reality of the complexity of the cultural, social, and economic context."<sup>36</sup>

At the level of policy theory, the present research discussion leads to the conclusion that educational policy needs to address the formation of social demand. The study further shows that cultural tradition is a factor that must be included in a policy model.

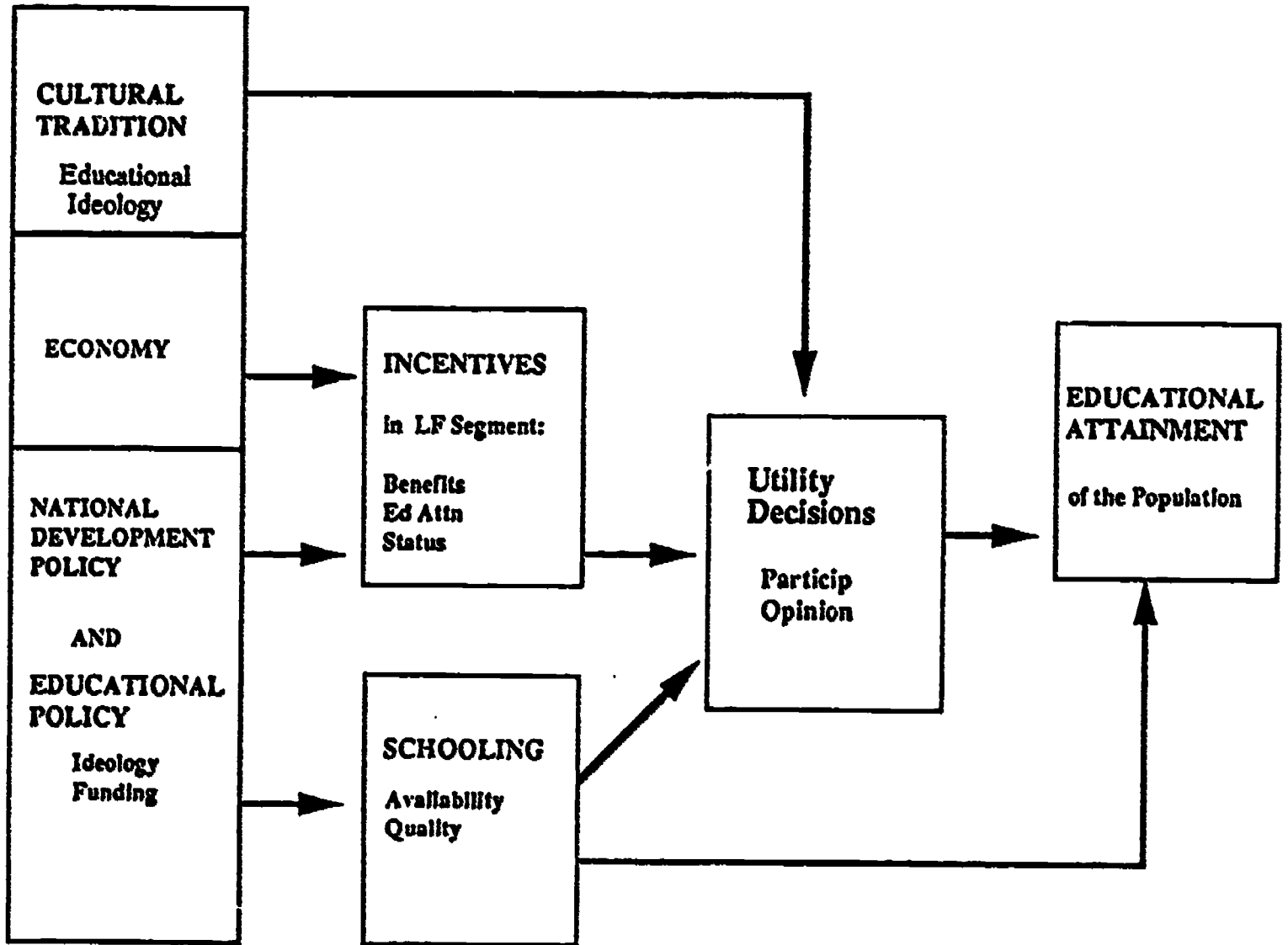
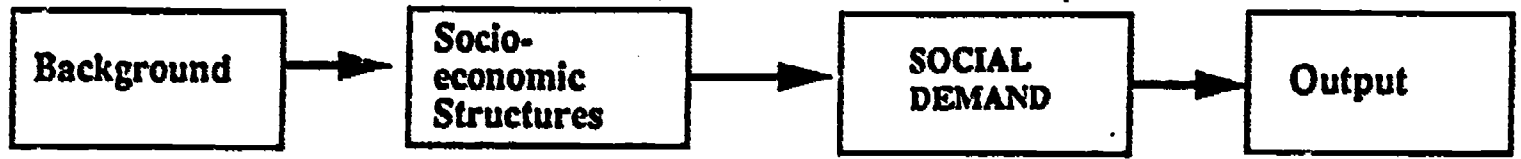
Another finding of this study regarding social demand is that central planning does not avoid problems of adjustment between market signals, cultural tradition, and social demand. Even when the micro-utility decision is restricted to minimal consequences on life chances, patterns of social demand for education not only form but gather force of macro-social magnitude. Despite the near omnipresence of state social control, in the PRC private decisions to participate in an educational activity were not only made but also had a macro effect.

The major point of this report is to show that the effort to predict the impact of cultural traditions on the demand for education, however difficult, is feasible and seems promising. The cost of inadequately addressing the formation of social demand is shown to lead to a loss in raising educational levels--an irresponsible policy conclusion.

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<sup>36</sup>Wes Snyder and Joane Nagel, "Indicators of Quality in Botswana Primary Education," *Improving the Efficiency of Educational Systems (IEES) Communiqué*. Florida State University Learning Systems Institute. (November 1988): 12. See also James Cobbe, "A Resource Allocation Model for Education in Indonesia: Issues and Candidate Indicators," paper for the Educational Policy and Planning Project, Ministry of Education of Indonesia and IEES, *Improving the Efficiency of Educational Systems (IEES) Communiqué*, No. 41. Florida State University Learning Systems Institute. (November 1988).

Appendix



Abbreviations: LF = Labor Force; Ed Attn = Educational Attainment; Status = Social and Political Status; Particip = Educational Participation; Opinion = Expressed Opinion on Education.

Figure 1. Development and Educational Attainment Path Model for P.R. China, 1949-79

Table 1. Participation Rate, Primary Completion, National, 1949-79. (Percent)

Annual Average Participation Rate %		
Moderate	1949-57	50.5
Radical	1958-75	13.3
	58-62	9.5
	63-66	16.7
	67-70	2.8
	71-75	28.8
Moderate	76-79	111.6
All Years	49-79	58.5

Source. Vilma Seeberg, *Literacy in China, the Effect of the National Development Context and Policy on Literacy Levels, 1949-1979* (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1990), p. 217, Table 5.5.

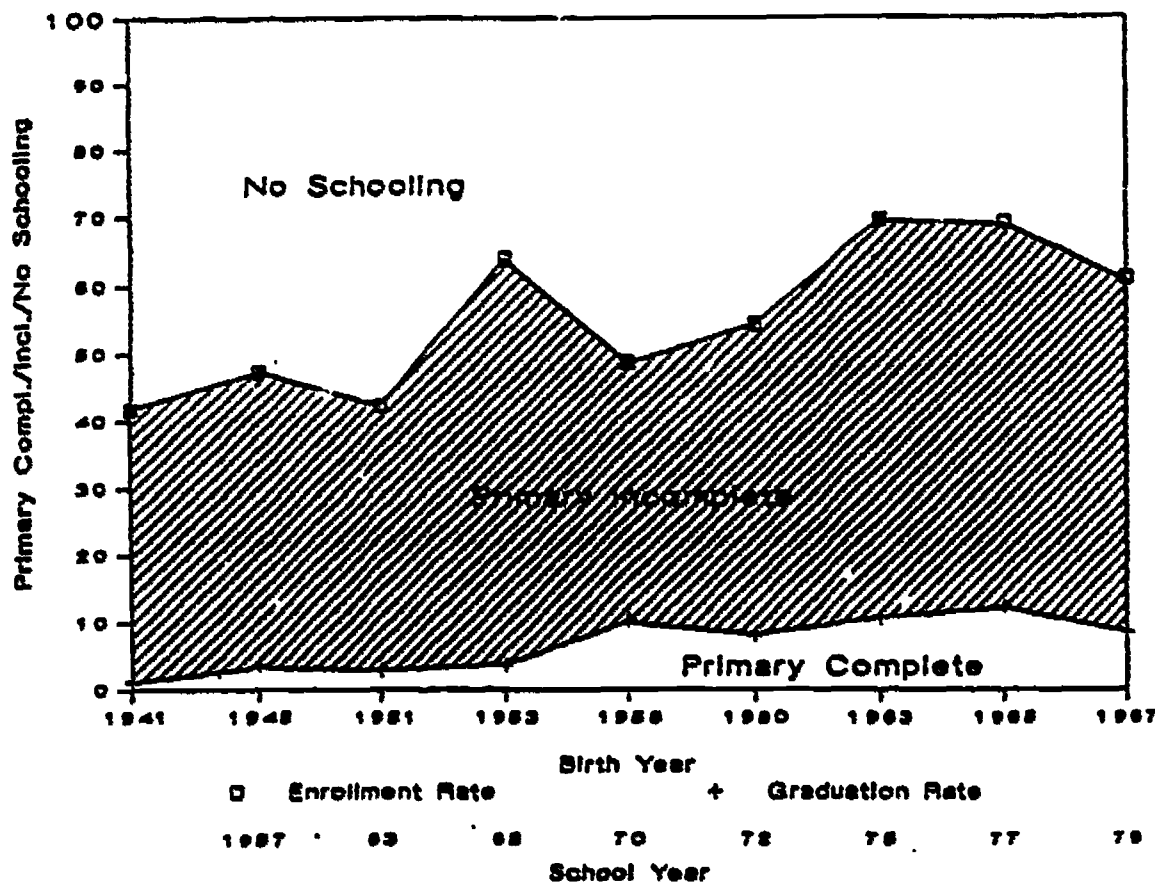


Figure 2. Educational Attainment Profiles, PRC, Birth Cohort 1941-67

Source. Vilma Seeberg, *Literacy in China, the Effect of the National Development Context and Policy on Literacy Levels, 1949-1979* (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1990), p. 270, Figure 6.1.