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# HOW DOES VOCATIONAL SCHOOL IMPACT YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES IN CHINA

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## Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the impact of Chinese higher vocational education on young people's lives. It carries out a systematic literature review, which examines the current situation of higher vocational schools in China. An exploration emerges through different areas that over the two decades of the development of vocational education in the 21st century. The influences, outcomes and stigma associated with vocational education for the youth in China are analysed in details from four aspects that including Academic qualifications, Teaching quality, Job prospects and Social status. Thereof the findings, the German vocational education system is involved in the analysis as a mean of comparison with China's discourse as the development of vocational education is stimulated by the economic growth and domestic demand. The conclusions propose the importance of Chinese vocational colleges and it is feasible to create more chances for disadvantaged students to access higher education. By drawing on Bourdieu's theory and human capital theory, theorizing difference in Chinese education. Finally, potential contributions are provided for future research and policy formulation based on the findings of this review, identifying the social need for further research within a Chinese context. Higher vocational education will have the potential to build a productive workforce for the future. Challenges and concerns such as structure completion and social recognition remain to be resolved.

## Terms and Definitions

The terms “technical and vocational education and training (TVET)” was defined by UNESCO as “the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life” (UNESCO, 2005, P.7). This term is also referred to “Technical and vocational education (TVE)” in China, as well as vocational education and training (VET) in Germany (Li, 2012). Although the terms vary in different countries’ settings, this dissertation will use a more generic term of “vocational education”. As this dissertation will focus on the formal vocational education in higher education that delivered through a schooling system, higher vocational education (HVE) will be the main term.

The term "National College Entrance Examination (NCEE)" is an academic examination conducted in China every year, which was commonly known as “*Gaokao*”. It is taken by students at higher secondary education.

## Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT .....	4
1.1 Historical context.....	5
1.2 History and development of Vocational educational in China.....	6
1.3 Philosophical foundation.....	9
CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY .....	13
2.1 Research methodology -- A Systematic literature review .....	13
2.2 Research methods .....	15
CHAPTER 3 FINDINGS.....	19
3.1 Academic qualification .....	19
3.2 Teaching quality.....	26
3.3 Job prospects .....	32
3.4 Social status .....	38
3.5 Chapter overview.....	42
CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION .....	44
4.1 Conclusion .....	44
4.2 Theorizing difference in Chinese education .....	46
REFERENCES .....	51

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Since the beginning of the 21st century, China is experiencing tremendous economic and social changes. Two important backgrounds for China - the degree of high economic marketization after entering into the WTO and the expansion of the higher education sector, higher demand for more skilled graduates higher vocational education (HVE) sector has even, lay the foundation for the development of higher vocational education (Zhuang, 2018). In the pursuit of rapid industrialization and urbanization, the main growth of the Chinese economy has led to a human resource crisis. Although China has a large workforce, there is a limited pool of highly skilled labour (Cooke, 2005; Wu and Ye, 2018). Economic and industrial growth has led to a huge demand for more skilled workers in almost every occupational sector. This has put immense pressure on China's education and training system, especially vocational education (Guo and Lamb, 2010). The vocational education system is a major supplier of a skilled labour. It is facing the enormous challenge of expanding and changing to meet the rapidly growing demand for skilled workforce of industry (Woronov, 2015). However, based on the current higher education system that formed prefer the academic learning than the skill training in China, the development of skilled manpower-oriented HVE is facing challenges in various aspects.

The aim of this desk-based research project is to better understand the different ways in which vocational education in China impacts upon students. The overarching research question is: how does vocational school impact young people's lives in China? I will answer this by undertaking a systematic literature review, which will then discuss four key themes. These are outlined below.

This dissertation will open with, in Chapter 2, an overview of the Chinese education system and the vocational system. The research context will be

presented and the current situation of China's vocational education will be demonstrated. Use of systematic literature review, by contributing on current literature on the relative topic, this dissertation outline how this research contributes to the research question that how does vocational school impact young people's live in China. In chapter 3, the finding will analyse the ways in which aspects the higher vocational education influence young people's lives from four areas of life domains: 1) academic qualification; 2) teaching quality; 3) social status; 4) job prospects. In chapter 4, the dissertation concludes that the HVE is influenced by the traditional concept and subject social factors in terms of the national policies and the College entrance examination system. This dissertation will be ended by giving suggestion for further research.

## **1.1 Historical context**

A unified test named "Gaokao" for students in China, which means "National College Entrance Examination" (NCEE) decides whether students have a chance for higher education at the end of the higher secondary schools (HSS) (Sun and Yang, 2009). The main purpose of the NCEE was to raise the quality of education in schools by establishing high academic standards. This qualification examination has been commonly recognized as an effective administrative measurement of the education system, which has been developed partly from unifying cultural habituation in China (Feng, 1999). Furthermore, the NCEE has facilitated the academic standard in secondary education that is aimed at the level of academic achievement for HSS students.

Therefore, it is critical that NCEE is regarded as the only way for most Chinese students to get the opportunity for higher education, which could change their life by increasing their 'numeric capital'. Woronov (2015)

introduced the term "numeric capital", which means a regime of students' exam scores stand for social value, and replace the child and his/her labour with a number. This qualification examination has been commonly accepted as an effective administrative measurement of the education system, which has been developed partly from the Chinese unifying cultural habituation (Liu and Zhao, 2016). The government has promoted reforms, which imposed on exam content to make the transition from a knowledge-based to capability-based examination, to change the nature of NCEE to better reflect the differences in individual students' life (Zheng, 2008).

## **1.2 History and development of Vocational educational in China**

Vocational education in China has gone through a long course. Starting from the industrial and commercial education in the 1860s, the earliest vocational education has a history of more than 150 years in China (Wu and Ye, 2018). In the early stage, in spite of the demand for skilled-workers from various sectors of society aims to meet the needs of economic expansion, vocational education went through a process of rapid development. Since the reform began with the opening policy to the outside world in the later 1970s, the Chinese Communist Party have stimulated vocational education and clarified its role in the education system and the country's development (Gewurtz, 1978). Meanwhile, the need for fostering a new type of talents who have the ability of innovation and creativity and require knowledge and skills pushes the quality improvement process of vocational education (Li, 2013).

The higher vocational education refers to the post-secondary level skilled manpower-oriented education whose directly aims to serve economic development (Zhuang, 2018). The vocational college, which is developed on the basis of secondary education, is mostly built by provincial or municipal

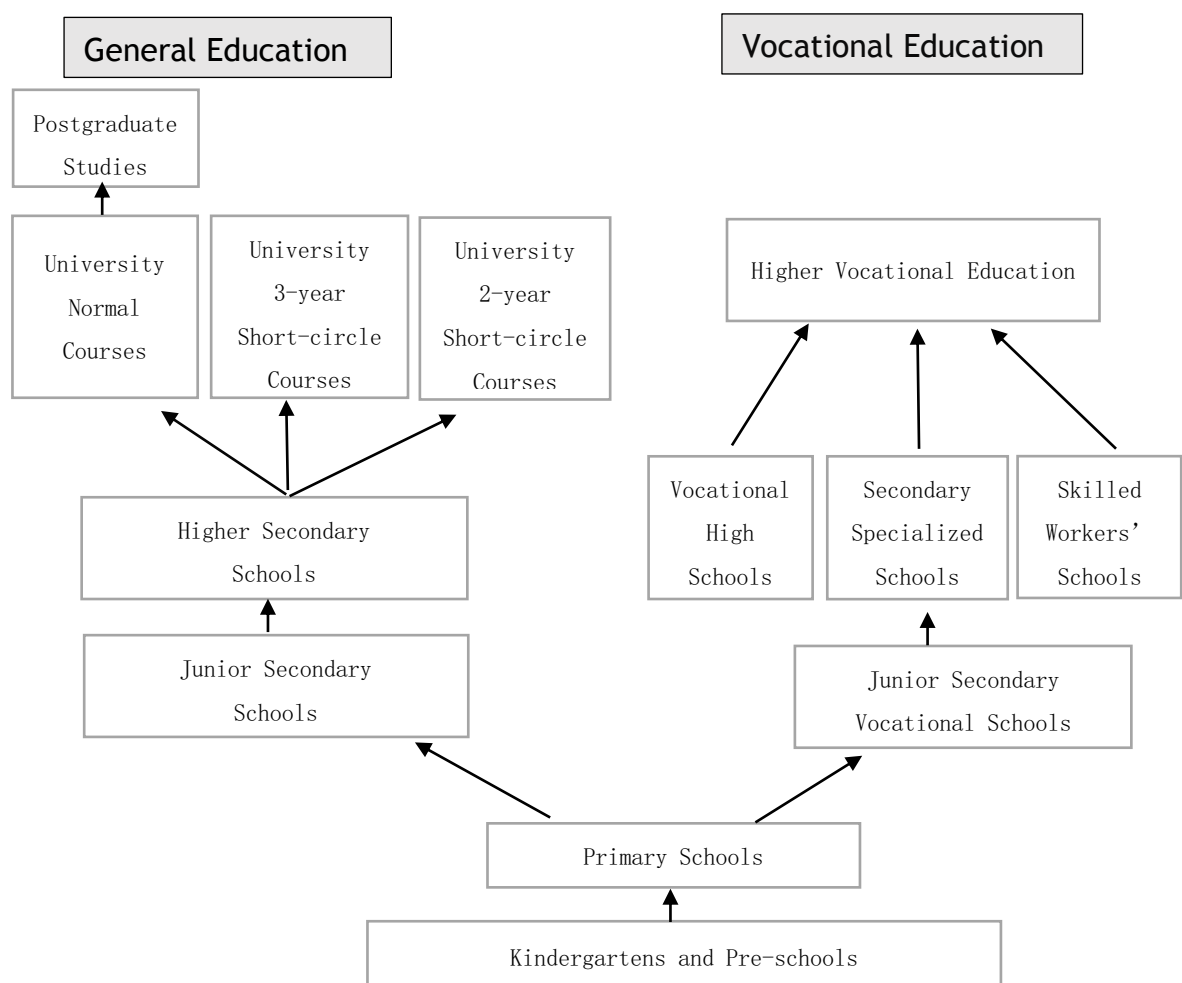


governments in cities where the economy developed fast in the 1980s in the city such as Shanghai and the province Hubei (Li, 2013). In the year of 1996, the Vocational Education Law of People's Republic of China was established and HVE was also legitimized with two other levels of vocational education that is junior vocational education and secondary vocational education (Zhuang, 2018). To improve the situation of graduate employment and to cater to the policy of cultivation goal, vocational colleges became more and more various and have made advances.

**Figure 1** displays the position of HVE in the overall Chinese education system. It can be seen explicit that at the earliest stage of education, general education and vocational education share the same first level education. After that, followed by a different type of education at junior secondary level, high school level, and tertiary level. The schooling of vocational normal colleges is three to four years, which enrol graduates from higher secondary schools and secondary vocational schools. The main aims are cultivating higher practical technical personnel that arranged accordingly courses in the areas of secretary, tourism, higher repairing technology and so on(Wu and Ye, 2018).

In order to make vocational education better accommodate the needs of economic restructuring and urbanization, the Chinese Communist Party has reformed vocational education from the 1980s on (British Council, 2013), oriented towards employment to meet the urgent demands of high-quality technical workers. In 1998, the significant law - the Higher Education Law officially involves HVE as an important part of tertiary education, which means HVE has had a position in legal terms for the first time since the founding of People's Republic of China (Zhuang, 2018). To accomplish the acceleration in training rural labour moving to urban areas, more and more skilled workers are cultivated in the modern manufacturing industries and

service industries (Ming and Ya, 2017). Enhancing the development and improvement on vocational education has long been the goal in Chinese education reformers. Vocational schools are regarded as the most appropriate way to address the country’s increasing economy through the provision of trained workers, particularly in the manufacturing and industrial segments (Zhuang, 2018). Without a well-educated and trained workforce, it could be possible that China undertakes a long and tortuous process in terms of the economic, social and national development. However, limited by national policies and objective factors, there is a distribution of competition and conflict between the two sub-sectors: general education and vocational education (Schmidtke and Chen, 2012). In the following section, I will outline the two streams of education - elite and vocational - and how these have come to be established in China.



**Figure 1.** The overall structure of China's education system

### **1.3 Philosophical foundation**

#### **1.3.1 The influence of Confucianism and elite education**

Chinese HVE has played an significant role in China's education system. In recent years, vocational education has preserved the equal status with general higher education in terms of the number of enrolled students, however, the social status is hard to reach a balanced level compared with the elite education system (Xiong, 2011). Strong bias against vocational education under the influence of Confucianism and elite characteristics of schools.

Under the strong influence of Confucianism, Chinese culture places a high value on education. Confucianism was founded by Confucius in approximate 2500 years ago with the aim that educating the "moral man", or *Junzi*. The conditions for being a *Junzi* is to observe established social rules and rituals, administrated by humanity, justice, and virtue, as well as to process a spirit of devotion to his country and filial piety to the elders (Munch and Risler, 1987). According to Confucius's paradigm, only through the education of classical philosophy, history and literature can people achieve this state through education. Such elite education is represented for the form of "Project 211" and "Project 985", which both for the purpose of strength particularly universities in the key disciplinary areas and the expectation of being in the forefront of global academia (British Council, 2013). Based on this fact, education is measured by its direct utility while vocational training is seen as a method of survival. Thus, China's traditional education system is established on Confucianism that rarely incorporates vocational education into the school education system (Nan, 1990). Due to the deep-rooted

Confucianism's bias against trading, the Chinese industrialization was never fully developed compared with the West (Huang, 2007). Zhao and Lu (2007) attribute the disadvantaged position of HVE to one of the Confucian ideas that 'those who do mental labour rule and those who do manual labour are ruled'. Deeply influenced by this traditional culture, the perception of higher education among the public has little transformation from an elite to a mass system. Due to the current Chinese tradition and the stereotype of society, an academic credential always has great benefits.

### 1.3.2 Outcomes of Vocation Education

The modern Chinese education system involves a nine-year compulsory education for primary and junior secondary schools, a three-year education for senior secondary schooling, and general higher education in the university (Guo and Lamb, 2010). The purpose of shifting of students from academic education to technical education was intended to alleviate skills shortages and decrease the fierce competition for NCEE. This has led to two very different strands of education in China with very different outcomes and experiences for China's youth. The aim of this dissertation is to examine the question -- How does vocational school impact young people's lives in China? It will do this by looking at three key areas of life domains:

1. Academic qualifications;
2. Teaching quality;
3. Job prospects;
4. Social status.

These themes have been arrived at through initial desk-based research and were used to organize the systematic literature review describe in Chapter 2. These four areas tell important stories about the impact, outcomes and stigma associated with vocational education for Chinese youth. Moreover,

they are key areas of research in other national contexts, such as Europe (European Training Foundation, 2002; Wu, 2003), Australia (Ewing, 2017; Guo and Lamb, 2010), Germany (Euler and Wieland, 2015; Wu, 2003; Guo and Lamb, 2010; Wang and Jiang, 2013). Although the basic theories involved in the trends of vocational education differ from every country, the main orientation of developing the skilled worker to meet the needs of the booming economy (Barabasch, 2009; Li, 2013; Li et al., 2019; Zhao and Coniam, 2009).

### 1.3.3 Introducing the German vocational education

To enhance my analysis, I will make comparisons to the German context because Germany operates a similar dualistic educational system where academic and vocational tracks run alongside one another.

Germany's vocational education system is regarded as an economic miracle since it saved a large number of unemployed youth and was renowned for its comparatively low rate of youth unemployment and mounts of highly skilled workers (Ertl, 2000). Germany as same as China has engaged in the process of globalization, which make great contributions on the world's economies and are beneficial from this process among the entire world (Barabasch et al., 2009). In the circumstance of that time, Germany becomes a good model for China to borrow its experience and learn from the "dual system" in vocational education (Barabasch et al., 2009). Since 1980, there were many cooperation projects between these two countries, which was supportive for Chinese economic and social development and in line with the vocation needs of students as well (Wang and Jiang, 2013). Thereby, the unemployment rate can be reduced as well as build a stabilized labour marked in China (Wang and Jiang, 2013). Moreover, it accelerates the realization of the nation's modernization. It could be seen the similar economic characteristic between China and Germany is the determinant that the

German vocational education was being brought into introducing and as a comparison in this dissertation.

## CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research methodology -- A Systematic literature review

In literature reviews, according to appraising the relevant intellectual territory, researchers identify the research question that will be further developed. Unlike traditional reviews, the systematic literature review combines research in a systematic, transparent and repeatable way, which leads to a collective insight into the theory of comprehensive development based on existing research (Reim et al., 2015). Tranfield et al. (2003) argued that traditional reviews were not regarded as a genuine investigatory discipline due to lacking thorough research. A systematic review involves a process of gathering information from an overwhelming amount of evidence of published articles or newspaper database associated with the topic. By using concrete and systematic methods to identify, filter, and critically correlation analysis of primary research and thus produce a valid and reliable outcome (Grant and Booth, 2009). It is a type of literature review that draws on a systematic method and consists of articles as secondary data that have been written (Herman, 2008). The validity of this method lies in the way it brings together a comprehensive summation and discussion of the existing literature towards the research question of this dissertation (O'Brien and McGuckin, 2016).

The political and social climate surrounding the young people of vocational institutions in China has the potential of bias both within the researcher and within the research subject. As a result of the potential factors concerning the research of higher vocational education, a systematic literature review would seem to be a worthwhile method. With the nature of this review, it could make sure the objective and transparent in its searching and selecting literature in a systematic literature review (Curtis et al., 2014).

Although, some researchers (O'Brien and Mc Guckin, 2016) suggested that the limitation of systematic literature reviews may include that the published articles have the risk of assessment with biases, low quality, or out of date, Tranfield et al. (2013) argued that the purpose of employing a systematic approach to the selection and to search is to minimize the bias. The reason is it undertakes other opinions in collecting studies from a holistic analysis and comparison. It is also rigorous because these comments are not biased by researchers. In addition, Reim et al. (2015) believed that using systematic review ensured that the bias was limited, and the legitimacy of the data analysis was facilitated. All of these benefits brought about reliable results, forming the basis for conclusions. Therefore, by determining the presence of all possible studies as feasible and making a fully implement of utilizing inclusion and exclusion criteria for data extraction, the bias could be minimized. Grant and Booth (2009) also argued that the application of this methodology could be restricted as it was not for seeking answers to more complicated search questions. Thus, as a passive participant rather an initiative one in this systematic literature review, it creates more objectivity and help to decrease the bias that related to higher vocational education.

Essentially, this minimization of reviewer bias preserves the scientific rigour of an objective positivist epistemology. On the other hand, it constructs and recognizes the knowledge and understanding are systematically selected and generated from the data of a systematic review of literature, which is interpretivist (Patton, 2015). Therefore, this systematic literature review is proposed in here that is appropriate to explore the impact of HVE for young people in China, which in accordance with the constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, as well as minimizing researcher bias to maintain objectivism.



## 2.2 Research methods

In the process of collecting source of data, defined published research by searching an electronic database accessible through the university digital library system. Journal databases such as *Ebsco*, *SAGA journals*, *Springer Link* will be used to illustrate the background and current situation of the topic. Subject specific professional websites will be adopted to gather statistic data of the population of students' entry academic university versus the vocational university.

### 2.2.1 Research term

During the searching process, all the resources are depended on the research term. Researchers have to determine the formulation of the research question by distilling the requirements to be verified. Therefore it is important to develop the suitable synonyms so as to enrich related materials and to what extent can credibility be obtained to support claims in the research (Herman, 2008). A search strategy can make sure the knowledge base are highly sensitive to be extracted so that as many relevant researches as possible can be retrieved. It will provide a broad and systematic way to combine search text words, which can be searched in titles and abstracts, as well as keywords that may have been indexed by the database (O'Brien and Mc Guckin, 2016). In order to avoid the shortage of too specific searches that may result in incomplete search results, in terms of research bias as well, it is necessary to search synonymous keywords.

Keywords were identified from the research question: How does vocational school impact young people's lives in China? The keywords were defined as 'vocational school', 'young people's lives', 'China'. Along with the synonyms, these keywords were created partial retrievals to make sure that

all terms are valid. The following **table 1** indicates the range of search terms were used on the digital library network:

**Table 1:** Database search terms

Vocational school	Young people	China
Vocational schools Vocational education Vocational institution/s Higher vocational education Career and technical education HVE	Youth Student/s Learner/s Graduate/s	China's Chinese

### 2.2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

When conducting a systematic literature review, to determine the extent to what has been studied and what not do by studying existing research in the specific field, the inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria need to be specific to project in selecting article (Parris and Peachey, 2013). The inclusion criteria as following are applied to refine the search. Articles are directly related to the topic; peer-reviewed articles, books, publications and reports, government documents were included. The results have no limitation of the year of publication due to the background information demonstrate the development of Chinses HVE. For the exclusion criteria, the research excludes Book Reviews, Newspaper Articles, and Dissertation categories.

The process of assessing the findings from systematic literature review helps researchers to identify and consider the relation between them, and how the interrelations are used to elucidate the topic in the specific field

(Hammersley, 2001). From the relevant articles that systematic retrieve using the search terms, four themes are concluded which are repeatedly mentioned and suitable to the national conditions in China. Combined with the particular character in China, which is the traditional philosophy mentioned as the Confucianism, the theme of “Academic qualification” is evolved from the inherent education idea (Schimidtke and Chen; 2012; Xiong, 2011; Woronov, 2015; Wu and Ye, 2018). No matter in what types of education, teaching quality is at the primary place that should be taken into consideration. Guo and Lamb (2010), Shi (2013), Wu and Ye (2018) pointed out Chinese HVE is experiencing the process of transition from quantity to equity to quality. Johnston et al. (2016), Kuang (2014), Smith (2018), Zhang (2009) emphasized that teachers play a crucial role in vocational education due to the teaching quality relies on their capacity for practical skills. The “Teaching quality” then is developed as the second theme.

Considering the perspective of the students themselves, the majority of students in vocational schools have suffered from discrimination in comparisons with those in general academic schools. Ling (2015, p.109) mentioned students in vocational schools are stereotyped by society, which is regarded as “a passive recipient of failed competitors”. Liu and Zhao (2016) identified how Chinese adolescent perceived discrimination. In a study conducted by Woronov (2015), he found students who cannot achieve a high score in schooling examination usually are labelled as academic and moral “failures”. The students of vocational school are inclined to be influenced by their socioeconomic status, sociocultural background and perspectives on their future life (Wang, 2018). Therefore, the theme of “Social statues” is emerged to narrate the stigmatization of young people in HVE. A prominent distinction between general academic education and HVE is the former serves as academic-oriented while the latter is employment-oriented (Durden and

Yan, 2006; Guo and Lamb, 2010; Wang and Jiang, 2013; Woronov, 2015). In articles from Fu (2009), Hodges and Burchell (2003), Po et al. (2015), Velde (2009), and Zhang (2009), the employment is a dominant aspect for graduates after they graduated to make their career trajectory. Thus, “Job prospects” is set as the third main theme in this dissertation.

Although this dissertation undertook a literature review that was systematic a guided, the author did not use tables and keep a record of the results in a highly coded way. In future, this would be done to enhance reliability and transparency.

## CHAPTER 3 FINDINGS

This chapter is an overview of the four themes and the findings. It begins by looking at the literature on academic qualification to discuss the incomplete HVE system that results in the unclear position in Chinese higher education, and the factor of lower academic outcomes (Min and Nan, 2017; Wu and Ye, 2018; Zhuang, 2018). It also mentions Germany's "dual system" that determined by the dual nature of vocational and academic nature of HVE (Li, 2013), in order to provide the improved suggestion for Chinese HVE system. From here, it moves on to teaching quality arguing that the standards and quality vary in different schools (Ling, 2015). The current situation of vocational schools with a large demand but an insufficient proportion of teachers equipped with professional skills has negative effects on teaching quality (Kuang, 2014; Meng et al., 2014). Teachers have to suffer excessive workload and huge pressure. The third theme of job prospects analyses how difficult it is for students who graduate from vocational colleges (Vente, 2004). Finally, the part of social status emphasis on the effects of NECC on the HVE (Li, 2015; Zheng, 2008). One of the education's function is to complete social mobility. However, the low social status of vocational schools prevents students to have the opportunity to access to a better life (Fu and Yang, 2009). Likewise, students from the family that parents are lack of knowledge restrict the opportunity (Zhang et al., 2015).

### 3.1 Academic qualification

Wu and Ye (2018) pointed out the trend of education developing reflects that the internal law of education development is a process of transition from quantity to equity to quality. As of 2009, vocational education had sustained this equal status with general undergraduate education in terms of enrollment and the number of students, as well as the quantity of institutions,

making it an important force for popularizing higher education. Though HVE has a significant expansion in quantity during a thirty years development, the overall quality has not kept pace with its quantity development (Shi, 2013). To be more specific, the HVE still faces the challenge of being perceived as the less academic of the qualifications in China (Guo and Lamb, 2010).

### 3.1.1 Incomplete vocational education system

China's modern educational system has been established, covering six years of elementary school, three years of middle school, three years of high school, and two-four years of college or university (Su, 2002). Compulsory education is an education that uniformly implemented throughout all school-age children, as a public welfare undertaking that the state must guarantee. Laws were passed to guarantee nine years of compulsory education and took effect in 1984 (Zheng, 2008). It set up requirements and targets for accomplishing universal education tailored and guaranteed the basic right of school-age children to access to at least nine years of education. With the main characteristics of continuity, unity, and universality, its aims for a certain number of years for children of school-age in accordance with the law (Su, 2002). The booming industry and growing factory system facilitate the development of vocational education system in producing skillful workers and managers (Wu and Ye, 2108). Recognizing the importance of vocational education for economic development, the Chinese government has formulated a number of policies for a new type of higher education, "vocational universities," which began to appear in China since 1980s, with vocationalism and localism as dual indicators of their specific features and identities (Ding and Levin, 2007). Chinese HVE is considered a pre-baccalaureate level of study. However, it does not have a relatively

independent and complete vocational education system and corresponding HVE degree system.

**Table 2** illustrates the current vocational education system. It involves three levels: elementary level, secondary level and post-secondary level. The vocational schools are mostly made of junior secondary vocational schools, which mainly recruit primary school graduates At the elementary level. These junior secondary vocational schools usually provide three-four years of basic courses plus one year of skill training. The vocational education at the secondary level is carried out at the higher secondary school level, which includes vocational high schools, secondary specialized schools, and skilled workers' schools. These recruits' graduates from general junior secondary school or junior secondary vocational schools and the length of study is usually two-four years. The program structure of vocational education at higher lever is delivered mainly through vocational colleges and other higher institutions (Wu and Ye, 2010). The majority of HVE schools are established in urban cities to meet the demand of industrialization (Stewart, 2015). As a centralized higher education system, the Chinese central government have control over building, developing, and reforming HVE (Ding and Levin, 2007). Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education serves as the main ministerial administration and instructive objective to guide HVE development nationwide (Zhuang, 2018). No policy defines whether HVE as an independent sector in the education system (Xiong, 2011).

**Table 2:** The structure of current vocational education system

Levels	Providers	Lengths	Recruitment
Elementary Level	Junior Secondary Vocational Schools	3-4 year	Primary school graduates
Secondary Level	Vocational High Schools, Secondary Specialized Schools, Skilled Workers' Schools	2-4 year	Graduates from general junior secondary school or junior secondary vocational schools
Post-secondary Level	vocational Colleges	2-4 year	Graduates from (vocational) high schools

It is difficult to create the model for vocational universities that embodies the Project 211 and Project 985- that is, the “key universities” in China that are home to the highest achieving students. This is because the aims of vocational and technical universities are too “special” to be modelled upon for other (traditionally academic) institutions, and other colleges are not in a situation to learn from them (Shi, 2013). Secondly, in China at present the differences between the goals of secondary and HVE are very unclear. In practice, many of the specializations in higher vocational institutions are similar to those of vocational high schools. Therefore, there is no clear advancement in terms of knowledge or classification. This has led to many confusions in the objectives and curriculum of these vocational specialties at secondary and post-secondary education, resulting in a situation where the secondary level is not lower, while the post-secondary level is not higher.

### 3.1.2 Lower academic outcomes

Although the enrollment of vocational higher education requires students to take the high-stakes college entrance examinations, the entry scores are



much lower than regular higher education admissions (Wu and Ye, 2010). The reasons for this have been discussed in chapter 1. Vocational education is regarded as a stigmatized alternative to academic university and vocational school students have significant differences compared with students from the common university. In addition, society discriminates against vocational schools, and most Chinese regard these young people as academic and moral failures (Ling, 2015). The students from vocational schools are labelled by society as "problem students" who thus deserve to be in the vocational school. Secondly, low-entry scores increase the potential of the stigma of vocational education. For example, in Woronov's (2015) ethnography, he focused on millions of young Chinese who did not pass the examination for NECC after ninth grade and eventually entered in one of China's many and highly various vocational schools. In China's examination-oriented education system, the test scores represent more than just a quantitative result in the extent of achievement in education, but translate also to social value for youth, what Woronov calls 'numeric capital'. Students who cannot achieve a high score usually will be represented as academic and moral "failures". Such young people are positioned on the margins of society because they do not get achievement in a formal learning setting and their grade becomes symbolic of their societal position.

The high-stakes exam system referred to above, places half of China's secondary school students in vocational education (Woronov, 2015). However, popular thinking asserts that vocational school is a forced-choice for students whose academic performance is not good, which then leads to the low social status of the vocational schools (Wang and Guo, 2018). Though these policies were introduced to promote the enrollment of vocational students, it created stereotypes against students in HVE. There is no independent HVE entrance exam that can highlight its requirement for skills and, more problematically,

entry becomes a default of failure to attain a place at the more traditional universities rather than an active choice (Stewart, 2015; Zhang, 2009). The academic function of vocational schools, therefore, is likely to be compromised. Without the proper certificate of vocational qualifications and the mixture vocational and academic education in the current vocational education system, it is arduous to raise public awareness of the academic value and importance of vocational education.

HVE plays a vital role in social and economic development since it is related to the country's future economic reforms (Wang et al., 2018). The basic function of vocational education is to cultivate the high-skilled personnel needed on the front lines of production, construction, services, and management. As vocational education emphasized practice-oriented training, China's HVE focuses upon promoting students in practical and professional skills.

### 3.1.3 Comparisons with Germany

The Western vocational education models have a deep influence in the developing of China higher vocational education, especially in Germany. China HVE carries a mission to achieve a balance between the supply of higher education graduates and the demands of the labour market (Zhou, 2019). At present, there is no degree in higher vocational education. After completing their studies, students in higher vocational colleges can only obtain an academic degree rather than a bachelor degree. This situation does not conform to the trend of international higher education development, which is that offering associated degree below the Bachelor of Science level.

Germany's dual system demonstrate strengths in sorting students into distinct vocational or academic tracks at an early stage. A metaphor that compare Germany's vocational education as a "sorting machine" that brings

students into different career and academic tracks when they are young, and provides job-specific training in the workplace and schools for people on the professional track (Barabasch et al., 2009). Those who choose vocational track may enter into vocational training in full-time schools or within the framework of the dual system. The dual system usually lasts for three years (Euler and Wieland, 2015). At the end of the training, students must take a range of exams to prove sufficient professional knowledge and abilities that apply to national standards. Passing the exam, they will receive certain professional certificates (Munch and Risler, 1987). Germany's system begins to supply systematic vocational training to students at an early stage. Therefore, the proportion of young people in Germany is higher than that in China. Additionally, Germany's dual system can recruit trainees and train skilled workers in a short time (Li, 2013).

The implementation of the system is determined by the dual nature of vocational and academic nature of higher vocational education. The vocational nature of HVE determines that the recognition of students' academic achievements is different from that of ordinary education (Guo and Lamb, 2010). For students who have completed their studies, in addition to issuing academic certificates, they should also pass the corresponding vocational examination and issue vocational qualification certificates (Li et al., 2019). However,

Due to the huge differences in development among various areas in China, it is unreachable to regulate a specific proportion of the whole country (Barabasch et al., 2009). Social development has brought more diversity, and people's needs have become more diversified under the market economy. It is also essential that from official announcements to public consciousness, it emphasizes that vocational education must be employment-oriented (Wang and Jiang, 2013). Simply stating that "vocational education is employment

education”, however, will potentially lead to the misconception of vocational education as as equivalent to job training.

#### 3.1.4 Summary of section

This discussion has discussed the role of academic qualification in the process of higher education development. In terms of vocational education, though it obtained the achievement in the aspect of enrolment proportion, the quality is subjected by the incomplete education system and the different emphasis on skill training and academic cultivating. The current education system is on the basis of exam orientation, which follows the long history of Chinese traditional culture, it is obvious that the public is more preferred academic credentials than vocational skills. On the other hand, determined by the dual nature of vocational and academic characteristics of higher vocational education, the accurate orientation and the personnel training goal of running colleges does not have a clear definition compared with the normal academic university.

### 3.2 Teaching quality

The primary purpose of higher vocational education is to cultivate for the society high-calibre professionals and technical skills with excellent competence to resolve practical problems (Schulte, 2013). Currently, although the educational philosophy within vocational schools is being gradually changed to focus on professional skills, the quality of practical teaching is still not good enough, and training of students with cumulative knowledge is still in process. A considerable number of graduates are unable to work independently in practical positions within quite a long period after being engaged in a job position (Wu and Ye, 2018). It may be the case that

their practical learning at school did not meet the standard, since fewer opportunities allow them to get into contact with practical problems. Therefore, once they move into employment, they are unable to adapt quickly to their roles. Teachers play a crucial role in vocational education and thus the teaching quality depends on their capacity for practical skills (Zhang, 2009). During the transition process of China's vocational education system, as it shifts the emphasis from growing in quantity to improving in quality, more attention should be paid to teaching and teaching workforce issues, in terms of the number, deployment, and capacity for vocational teachers. The aim ought to be optimizing faculty deployment and increasing the overall capacity of teachers.

### 3.2.1 Insufficient teachers supply

In general schooling, teacher qualifications have a significant impact on student learning (Rockoff, 2004). These qualifications include, but are not limited to, teaching experience, teacher educational background, and teacher certification (Zhang, 2009). However, the teacher qualifications that matter in general schooling may be different from those that matter for vocational schooling. One reason is that the technical features of vocational schooling are thought to require a specialized serious teacher qualification.

Owing to the incomplete system of vocational education teachers in China, and the low entry standards, the standard of teachers is variable and it is difficult to guarantee the quality of teachers. Firstly, the requirement of the teachers' degree in vocational colleges is not as high as the teachers who are employed in academic universities (Wu and Ye, 2018). Young teachers in most vocational-technical schools account for a larger proportion, most of whom are students who have just graduated from universities thus are short of specific working experiences in the forefront of business, so their

manipulative ability is generally far from enough (Zhang, 2009). In terms of the healthy development of schools, the most rational human resource structure should have as the highest proportion of teachers with lots of experience. The existing structure to a certain extent affects the efficiency of vocational education. The relatively weak teaching force of these teachers is inevitable in practical teaching, and their theoretical teaching is often associated with practice (Meng et al., 2014). Secondly, due to a great volume of vocational school teachers come from the academic education system or other disciplines with few practice experiences in enterprises, the technical knowledge of teachers is insufficient to meet the needs (Kuang, 2014).

### 3.2.2 Teachers from other channels

Although the normal colleges are the major source in providing the teachers for vocational education, the technical teachers from other channels, especially from the front line, are still insufficient (Johnston et al., 2016), as well as the limited proportion of part-time teachers. It is undeniable that if teachers have previously acquired professional experience in the fields or professional companies where they taught, they have a considerable positive influence on student teaching (Meng et al., 2014). In recent years, a large proportion of part-time teachers were invited in universities particularly in developed countries. According to this method, it facilitates a close connection between colleges and economic and industrial circles, as well as maintains the flexibility of teachers, and increases efficiency in school management (Kuang, 2014). It is a popular tendency to invite a large number of part-time teachers in order to share human resources between vocational schools and other institutions is a tendency, which can economize part of expenditure. Furthermore, in order to keep synchronized development of technology with the forefront of the production, employing teachers from

technicians at the forefront of the production to introduce and impart information and methods of their experiences in occupation. Seen in this way, it allows part-time teachers hired from related enterprises or experts with professional skills in a certain area to fulfil the basic requirement of skills training.

Teachers who have worked in a business role are assumed by researchers as one of the main vocational teacher qualifications that have a significant impact on vocational student learning (Zhang, 2009). The reason is that vocational teachers who have real-world business experience are more capable of conveying the most recent and real vocational knowledge and experiences to their students. On the other hand, there are some relevant policy published by the government to determine which teachers have received both teaching certification and professional certification (called “dual certification”) in 2002. The Chinese government uses the dual certification measure to distribute resources and hold schools accountable (Johnston et al., 2016). The “dual certification” refers to the teachers who cannot only teach theoretical knowledge, but also can teach skills and practice, as well as the diploma and relevant professional certificates at the same time (Wu and Ye, 2018). Specifically, the significance of “dual certification” is to avoid the classroom teaching content are disconnected with practical activities among the HVE students, which improves the practical ability of students. Moreover, HVE focuses on the cultivation of the technical application-oriented personnel and practical ability. These basic characteristics of vocational education determine that teachers in HVE institutions in China should not only have a good theoretical foundation, but also have certain engineering technology practice background or enterprise experience (Guo and Lamb, 2010).

Although the determining standard is whether teachers hold a

professional qualification certificate or skill level certificate for the specialty in which they teach, the proportion of teachers with both professional and teaching credentials is considerably lower in higher vocational education; thus it is difficult to meet the need to integrate vocational education theory and practice (Kuang, 2014). Additionally, Johnston et al. (2016) claimed in spite of the fact that such certifications are accredited by teachers attending short-term training programs and then passing assessments, these training programs do not necessarily give skills and expertise that are better acquired through practical business experience. Therefore, the teacher seems to have a limited positive impact on student learning.

The issue of the overall shortage of teachers who are in accordance with the special standard may be caused by the rapid development of vocational education. There is not enough time to adjust teacher reserves and training regards the high growth in higher vocational education. Secondly, vocational education, vocational teachers, and their profession do not appreciate high status in society, which directly results in insufficient quantities of teachers (Kuang, 2014). In addition, because the rapid growth of China's economy has greatly expanded the opportunities for companies to obtain higher wages, there were a few workers with business experience were willing to become teachers (Guo and Lamb 2010). Under the pressure of shortage of teachers, teachers with vocational skills or enterprise experience have excessive workloads. The skills training courses require teachers to carry out targeted individual guidance, but the normal situation is that a few professional teachers in a vocational school take charge in many classes due to the high demand of teachers with professional skills (Ling, 2015). The inevitable result of the excessive student and insufficient teachers increase the workload of teachers thus affects the quality of teaching.



### 3.2.3 Teachers' attitude towards students

Chinese traditional culture seems to have a negative influence on the teaching quality of higher vocational education. The Confucian classics served as an important aspect of culture that reverses learning the public, and are embedded in the respect of students for their teachers and teachers' love for students (Wang and Torrisi-Steele, 2016). Students in vocational school, however, were regarded as "second-class education" which at a disadvantage in education (Schmidtke and Chen, 2012). With the society stereotype, the students are taken for granted to be treated as academically and morally poor student by teachers who take less responsibility. Meanwhile, for the part-time teachers who account for the most proportion in majority vocational schools, the relationship between teachers and schools are determined by the contractual institution. The disadvantage of part-time teachers is also argued by Woronv (2015) that in spite of the short-term contracts, part-time teachers may not take both teaching and working as other full-time jobs into account. They draw attention away from whether students actually learned anything while delivering lessons. The teachers are often complicit in producing a "time-pass" culture in vocational schools by providing under-prepared lectures, arranging few homework assignments, which regards them as low-achieving students (Ling, 2015). Described by Woronv (2015) in his research, students in vocational schools generally seemed to regard the technical class as a chance for them to do irrelative staffs such as sleeping, texting, play phone games and so on. The ways that the teachers presented "love" for their students violates the principle of traditional Chinese educators' virtues of patience, loyalty, and diligence.

Due to issues such as limited weak teaching workforce, in vocational schools, practice teaching staff are not paid due attention, which results in such a situation that teachers are not willing to give correct guidance on

practice teaching. The quality of practice teaching seems not likely to get deserved guarantee without perfect teachers in a school and without the stability of teaching staff since the teacher is the imperative in teaching.

#### 3.2.4 Summary of section

This discussion has demonstrated that the teachers available for different schools vary in standards and quality. Result of the shortage of teachers hold the “dual certification”, teachers working in vocational schools generally constitutes of part-time teachers who are the experts or enterprises with professional skills hired from the related areas. The Confucius classics and part-time teachers based on contract create discrimination and slight culture for students in vocational schools. The insufficient proportion of teachers in vocational schools exacerbates the pressure on teachers, as well as the excessive workload, make the negative effects on teaching quality in higher vocational education.

### 3.3 Job prospects

Employment is an important indicator that symbolized national development and economic prosperity (Velde, 2009). China has opened up to the world economy by producing significant market reforms since the 1980s, which promoted profound changes to China's educational system. It is confronted with unprecedented pressures to provide skilled personnel to satisfy the demands of rapid growth (Vente, 2004).

Continuing growth in the supply of highly skilled labour has exerted great pressure on China's labour market (Li, 2013). It has caused universal concern regarding the livelihood issues of employment difficulties and low-income graduates (Po et al., 2015). The MyCOS Research Institute's 2018 China

College Graduates' Employment Annual Report (2017) demonstrated that approximately 7.36 million students graduated from colleges in China in 2017. 34% of 2017 college graduates were employed at low levels jobs with low incomes that were associated with their discipline, while 3.4% were not in those circumstances voluntarily. Low-payment and limited development space were the main reasons for the unsatisfactory employment situation for 2017 graduates (MyCOS Research, 2017). Such a situation forms a great deal of pressure on social stability.

While China's HVE has achieved progress in terms of size, level and quantity since the 1980s, its development has satisfied economic and social demands for professionals at the level of HVE (Ming and Ya, 2017). The Chinese government is now focusing on the transformation from the rate of employment of graduates to the quality of the job. The traditional model of higher education fits for acquiring knowledge rather than facilitating the skills required by the context of a highly competitive economy (British Council, 2013). In order to respond to the demand of labour market, it should be changed to meet the need of rebalancing between the provision of graduates and the demand from the labour market (Sweet, 2013). However, HVE still confronts with the challenges in the perspectives of the social phenomenon of credential inflation, parental expectations in their occupational trajectories, and the relationship between school and corporative companies.

### 3.3.1 The social phenomenon of credential inflation

The social prestige and appreciation endowed to scholar-officials within Confucianism has had a negative effect on higher vocational education in the Chinese context. Confucian humanism formed the selection system of civil service examination in contemporary China serves as cultural continuity, shaping the concept of stakeholders towards higher education (Xiong, 2011).

This typically prejudices against HVE pathways as a "last-resort option" (Durden and Yang, 2006, p.630). It is generally recognized that a degree represents as the primary precondition for a better future (Guo and Lamb, 2010). For Chinese people, the views on careers did not match with a mass higher education system. The difference between mass education and elite higher education leads to different students' vocations. Comparing with elite higher education that develops a minority with the potential to be future leaders of society, the mission of mass higher education is to train for a variety of specific jobs (Xiong, 2011).

For students in vocational colleges, it emphasizes the professional skill that applying in the following labour market, while the general education that focuses on academic learning to cultivate the talent for students in academic universities. Deeply influenced by Confusion culture, graduates with high credentials are preferred to be hired by employers only because students in vocational colleges hold diplomas rather than a degree (Xiong, 2011). The basic bachelor's education meets the need of those who need a piece of paper to find a decent job. This situation reflects limited respectability and low social acceptability of higher vocational education.

### 3.3.2 Parents' expectations

Parents play an essential role in the factors that influence students' career development and aspirations. At an personal occupation trajectory, parents' support is one of the important aspects that contributes to successful development. The resources that are provided by parents are helpful for children to draw upon to cope with the stresses and challenges faced when they are studying in schools and looking for a job (Zhang et al., 2015). A traditional perceive of Chinese families that higher education is positive with more status than HVE. They make their efforts to support their children to

achieve academic success and their active participation in education make a much more financial contribution towards it. Families may know little about HVE, or the abilities that graduates can acquire.

Higher education was considered positively because it provided a valuable qualification, supported graduates to gain employment and provide prestige for the family. In contrast, HVE was perceived negatively, the qualification was somewhat worthless in finding a job (Velde, 2009). Blustein et al. (2002) comment that families from high SES background are more likely to not only be supportive and actively motivate their children to explore in relation to career paths, but also helpful in helping with career planning. In contrast, those from low SES background typically have access to minimum instrumental help from parents in terms of career exploration or obtaining information about career-related opportunities.

Studies have suggested that SES levels were comparatively low in the families of vocational students than those of regular universities students in China (Fu and Yang, 2009). Traditionally, China is a country that attaches any importance to the concept and the value of family. Parents have a great influence on children's education and career development (Wang et al., 2013). However, families differ in the extent of how much support they can offer regarding helping children's career. Students of vocational schools rarely get material and financial support for educational and career development or mental supports such as parents' praise and positive encouragement from their parents (Zhang et al., 2015). With less parental support in terms of the aspect of financial or material, and sufficient career aspirations, successful employment seems to be difficult for students of vocational colleges.

### 3.3.3 The relationship between school and corporative companies

The curriculum and teaching methods of vocational colleges are required to conform to technical training which in accordance with the enhancement of students' capability and readiness for employment. However, the reform in the educational requirement could not make prominent progress due to the replication of theoretically orient courses tradition among vocational colleges (Xiong, 2011). Based on the traditional pedagogy of HVE that includes the composition of three parts of foundational courses, major courses, and practical training courses. This academic curriculum model likes to result in the disconnection between theoretical learning and practical skills training (Ming and Nan, 2017). As vocational education majors correlate with corresponding vocational positions, only integrating both theoretical learning and practical learning into one course can the schooling be make full use of employment.

Moreover, lacking an effective school-enterprise cooperation model, there is a limited relationship between the recruitment and employment of students and the companies that recruit them (Wu, 2003; Ming and Nan, 2017). Even though some of the enterprises accept senior students as interns for vocational training in the companies, it seems to be another question whether these companies would like to employ them after they graduate (Wu and Ye, 2018). Moreover, the matching ratio between the major students studied and the jobs they were employed was short of the expectation. This is caused by the demand of the market is essential to distribute the proportion of trainees in different jobs. There is a gap in the transaction between students graduated from college and they ready for work (Li, 2013). Young (2000) recommended that the modular course is deficient in preparing students for multiple work tasks, so it is necessary to involve a combined vocational course shared by schools and companies. Hodges and Burchell's (2003) research indicated employers want "work-ready" graduates who have already possessed

previous work experience. However, Chinese graduates traditionally have little work experience because they immediately went through the process of learning from college to work. Comparing with the German model of vocational education, it pays more attention to the vocational-oriented and employers are directly involved in curriculum design and schooling affairs. This makes sure a seamless transition from school education to employment through vocational education system (Durden and Yan, 2006). Barabasch et al. (2009) contend that Germany owns the advantages that the close connection between the vocational schools and the market. Employers and vocational schools are also closely related to the provision of pre-employment and formal traineeship schemes. The opportunities of employment for their graduates are guaranteed by their training companies or others in a related field.

There is another issue of vocational qualification. The vocational education does not guarantee occupational qualification certificates in vocational subjects after students complete their vocational training, instead of a diploma (Guo and Lamb, 2010). Though students of vocational universities could graduate with a diploma, without a relative vocational certification, it is difficult to find a decent job under the competitive job markets. The course learning is valued less than the professional certification required to enter into the workplace. Meanwhile, the government lacks regulatory support to establish standardized vocational qualification criteria. Absent of which, employers in the labour market may not be professionally qualified. Therefore, certified vocational schools' graduates are not eligible for the benefits that should be associated with higher vocational school credentials. To this extent, this situation assists depress the return of the labour market to HVE (Wang and Guo, 2018).

The challenges faced by Chinese education originate from and the social and economic development, and are exacerbated by this situation. Therefore, they are beyond the level of the education system. By promoting higher vocational education, it is advocated that Chinese people need to change their opinion on careers from a Confucian view of valuing bureaucrat to the view of skilled workers.

#### 3.3.4 Summary of section

This discussion has analysed that the graduates of vocational schools with low-degree are difficult to find a decent job. Chinese people are more appreciate individuals who have a high degree in the job market. Confucian ideology shaped the stakeholders towards higher education by forming the examination system as the function of elite selecting. High credentials represent an individual competency rather than practical work capability. The parents' aspiration and socioeconomic status are other considerations that affect students' occupational trajectories. As less financial support or parental support and sufficient career aspirations, successful employment of vocational college students seems difficult. In addition, the limited relationship between the recruitment and employment of students and the companies leads to the detachment of the transaction. That is the role is translating from students to employees.

### 3.4 Social status

In the Chinese education system, though vocational education has maintained the equal status with general higher education in terms of the number of enrolled students, the social status is hard to reach a balanced level compared with the academic education (Schmidtke and Chen, 2012).



Such low social status of HVE is directly impacted by the government policy, the Chinese special examination—NECC, while the identity of students' in vocational colleges is also an indirect factor.

#### 3.4.1 The pressures from traditional culture and NECC

An exceptionally high social status of formal education in China is a historical reflection of Chinese traditional culture. Negatively influenced by the Confucianism, vocational education is usually considered as "second-class education". The society stereotypes against vocational schools as an alternative to academic university, which has considerable differences between these two schoolings (Ling, 2015). This kind of deep-rooted traditional ideology results in the public thinks that students with low academic performance deserve to go to vocational schools. The concept of Confucians motivates individual to pursue the value of the personnel themselves so that creating a better life according to access to better education resources. It is believed that educated people can make significant income superiority in China; particularly the higher education can raise profits in a market economy situation (Chen and Min 2001). However, this condition also makes it reasonable to regard the students who are unsuccessful as losers.

In addition to the fact that higher education is able to create economic benefits to individuals and families, the cultural tradition and historical heritage can also influence people's educational choices that expand the Chinese people's aspirations and demands for a higher level of education. The imperial examination system has continued over a thousand years in ancient China, which has had a long-lasting and influential effect on the perceptions of Chinese people on education. The Confucius thoughts on education and the opportunities produced by the imperial exams, were inspiring and

encouraging Chinese people to believe in the value of learning, diligence and becoming literate and educated. To do so, they have the opportunity to move upward in the social class (Wu and Ye, 2018). In this condition, it means education gradually becomes the key to the social movement. Moreover, Schulte (2013, p.236) claim, “vocational education was conceptualized as a dead-end in terms of social mobility”.

Another aspect, the National Higher Education Entrance Examination, as introduced in Chapter 1, is a selection mechanism on the basis of meritocratic criteria in current Chinese higher education. Because of limited resources to access into the first level of higher education, students in China have to go through a competitive process liked a “fierce battle”. NCEE is a determinative examination that decides whether students have the right to access or not and which kind of university they can enrol in (Guo and Lamb, 2010). To this extent, students will encounter different choices of elite education or HVE according to different scores they achieved in this exam, which affected a distinctly different life chance. Therefore, HVE is regarded as an alternative choice to access higher education. Education cannot be measured by its straightforward utility, while vocational education is dismissed as merely a means of survival. HVE suffers from the unequal treatment with a dilemma in Chinese higher education system, which the student could not achieve a high score in the exam are represented as academic or moral “failure” in a disadvantaged position (Ling, 2015). On the other hand, the development of HVE is conducted by China’s education policy which triggered by national guidelines. The Communist Party of China requires equal sharing of academic and vocational education at the post-secondary level to ease the shortage of skilled workers in the process of rapid industrialization. Particularly, by introducing vocational curriculum into the courses of academic schools, post-secondary academic schools were transformed into vocational schools. New

vocational schools were following established to further increase the enrollment rate of the existing vocational schools (Wang and Guo, 2018).

Comparing the vocational education between China and Germany, there are some differences in the position-setting. Students in Chinese higher secondary school need to decide where to go in the education system or to enter the labour market and this decision depends much on their performance in the NCEE. Whereas for the majority of the students in Germany schools, vocational education is a transition stage that just preparation for vocational schools or training, so they do not need to face another decision concerning the direction of schooling after leaving school (Li, 2013).

#### 3.4.2 Parental influence

A study investigated by Hansen and Woronov (2013) pointed out that the commonality among the vocational schools that the background of students' families were the "working class" families or the families from a low level of urban household. Such students constitute shaped and reinforced the common image of vocational education as a low-status form of education. This situation was not only found in rural areas but also in urban areas. In the rural vocational school, almost all of the students come from families held rural household registrations. Their parents were employed as farmers or worked in small-scale business who did not access to higher education and could not to be regarded as "intellectuals". When occurs in urban schools, there are two types of groups distinguish residents whether they held city residence permits. One is the natives of the city with rural household registration, while the other is the rural migrant workers (Woronov, 2015). For students in rural vocational colleges, most of their parents come from these two categories still remain in low social class. The purpose of migrating from rural to urban is to follow better employment opportunities so that create a better

educational condition for their future generations (Liu and Xing, 2016). However, the vocational colleges under such low-status seems could not provide a chance for them to accomplish the upward mobility of social class.

Whether local and central authorities' current support and promotion of HVE, anyone who cares about Chinese education may realize the truth that educated people - in urban or rural areas - will try their best to avoid sending their children to a vocational school. Wang and Guo (2018) also claim that having less educated parents is associated with much more vocational education participation. Students from disadvantaged family background, in terms of lower levels of parental education, are more likely to attend HVE in China.

#### 3.4.3 Summary of section

This section has examined that the low social status of vocational schools prevents students to have the opportunity to access to a better life. Driven by national guidelines, higher education is divided into two part of academic education and vocational education followed by China's education policy. In this context, the position-setting did not reach a balanced state which means the vocational education is placed in an underprivileged position than the academic education. On the other hand, the fact that most of the students in vocational schools come from the family whose parents with less educated and power. It could not offer the students the opportunity to achieve the upward mobility of social class.

### 3.5 Chapter overview

This chapter endeavours to cover the four aspects comprehensively to illustrate the status quo and issues towards the HVE, and in what extent it influences Chinese young peoples' lives in terms of the study condition as well

as job prospects. The Confucianism plays an important role in China's education, which has solidified the Chinese perspective in forming a hierarchy in general education and vocational education. This deep-rooted traditional thought attributes the disadvantaged state of HVE. Lower academic qualification, poorer teaching quality, ongoing stigmatization, poorer job prospects are all the negative problems that are faced by HVE at present. The following chapter will draw on two theory that gives a more theorized explanation and detailed understanding of the HVE.

## CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Conclusion

As a part of higher education system, the expansion of higher vocational education is feasible to create more chances for disadvantaged groups to access to higher education. It allows distribute opportunities other than redistribute existing chances for participation in higher education (Ling, 2015).

In findings, the first section has discussed the role of academic qualification in the process of higher education development. In terms of vocational education, though it obtained the achievement in the aspect of enrolment proportion, the quality is subjected by the incomplete education system and the different emphasis on skill training and academic cultivating. The current education system is on the basis of exam orientation, which follows the long history of Chinese traditional culture, it is obvious that the public is more preferred academic credentials than vocational skills. On the other hand, determined by the dual nature of vocational and academic characteristics of higher vocational education, the accurate orientation and the personnel-training goal of running colleges do not have a clear definition compared with the normal academic university. Secondly, the discussion has demonstrated that the teachers available for different schools vary in standards and quality. As a result of the shortage of teachers who hold the “dual certification”, teachers working in vocational colleges are generally part-time teachers. This is caused by those experts or enterprisers with professional skills usually hire from the related areas of industry. The Confucius classics and part-time teachers based on contract create discrimination and slight culture for students in vocational schools. The insufficient proportion of teachers in vocational schools exacerbates the pressure off teachers, as well as the excessive workload, which has negative

effects on teaching quality in higher vocational education. In the third section, it has analysed that the graduates of vocational schools with low-degree find it difficult to find a well-paid and high status job. Chinese people are more appreciative of individuals who have a higher status in the job market. Confucian ideology shaped the stakeholders towards higher education by forming the examination system as the function of elite selecting. High credentials represent an individual competency rather than practical work capability. The parents' aspiration and socioeconomic status are other considerations that affect students' occupational trajectories. As less financial support or parental support and sufficient career aspirations, successful employment of vocational college students seems difficult. In addition, the limited relationship between the recruitment and employment of students and the companies leads to the detachment of the transaction. That is the role is translating from students to employees. Finally, it has examined that the low social status of vocational schools prevents students to have the opportunity to access to a better life. Driven by national guidelines, higher education is divided into two part of academic education and vocational education followed by China's education policy. In this context, the position-setting did not reach a balanced state which means the vocational education is placed in a disadvantaged position than the academic education. On the other hand, the fact that most of the students in vocational schools come from the family whose parents with less educated and power. It could not offer the students the opportunity to achieve the upward mobility of social class.

## 4.2 Theorizing difference in Chinese education

### 4.2.1 Social reproduction

From Bourdieu's perspective, education has become the main institutional basis for the reproduction of social class structure. According to Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, the social structure could be reproduced, such as the reproduction of economic capital and cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Focusing on the reproduction of cultural capital, it depends on domestic habitus and school education (Bourdieu, 1986). Social mobility, as an effective carrier, enables cultural resources to achieve indirect transmission between generations. The reproduction mechanism in the evolution of social stratification is accompanied by the inner drive of each stakeholder and class to realize continue the expansion of individuals' advantages (Grenfell, 2008). The theory of cultural capital reproduction has established a systematic and comprehensive sociological interpretation model, which provides a sociological analytical framework for educational equity research. It is reflected in the intergenerational transmission hypothesis of family culture capital and the school's middle-class cultural preference hypothesis.

The lack of inherent advantages from cultural capital is the reason of the difference in academic achievement between vocational and academic higher education students in different social classes. In an ethnography of 12 American families that researched by Lareau (2011), it revealed the relationship between social class and parental involvement in education which affirmed that the social class was a critical determinant of educational and work achievements. For poor families, the cultural perspective of family parenting is not consistent with institutional standards (Li, 2015). In China, vocational students face great challenges and pressures than students with



high SES background, since they can acquire less information about career-related opportunities, as well as studying parental support in families from low socioeconomic status (Zhang et al., 2015). Additionally, it is difficult for these parents to engage continue through the high school, college, and even work experience of their children, proving valuable resources for achievement.

Students who graduated from “key universities” in China (as mentioned in Chapter 1, the universities in “Program 211” and “Program 985”) draw on high-level certification to increase the ‘social benefits of education’. This definition of functionalism overlooks the role of the educational system in the reproduction of social structures through the inheritance of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

#### 4.2.2 Human capital theory

Human capital theory was formally named in the 1960s and established as a part of economic theory (Robeyns, 2006; Schultz, 1961; Sweetland, 1996; Violas, 1981). When considering education in relevant to human capital theory, it is served the skill and knowledge acquired through education as the investment in a labour productive work (Schultz, 1961). Sweetland (1996, p.357) affirmed education emerges as the prime investment of human capital and the various profits to the economy derive from education, and it “provides an empirical framework that begins to measure the relationships between economic and education”.

Vocational education has been taken great emphasis on by counties because of the perspective on the nation’s manpower requirement (Wu, 2003). Hora and Blackburn Cohen (2018, p.389) described “the notion of college as a pipeline, as one of the links in a talent supply chain”. In the processing of globalization, the development of the economy is followed by the production

and the application of knowledge. It is the knowledge and skills, rather than the labour-power or capital, become the most central force (Robeyns, 2006). Vocational education promotes the capabilities of human capital, by equipping the labour force with necessary skills and capabilities, which plays a significant role (Guo and Lamb, 2010). Applying with the economic growth, it is particularly important that cultivation the human resource to fulfil the needs of front-line workers with flexible capabilities in the knowledge-based economy. It also “helps workers to renew or adapt previously accumulated skills and enable them to fully contribute to the improvement of productivity or innovation (Turcotte al., 2003, p.11).

Robeyns (2006, p.69) criticized that understanding education as a human capital approach has negative effects because of its characteristic of “economistic, fragmentized and exclusively instrumentalistic”. This model does not recognize the intrinsic importance of education. Once the education is conceptualized as an economic investment, it overlooks the intrinsic value of education instead of focusing on the benefits of improving productivity, which is creating more wage. Individuals who accept more education are less likely to face unemployment.

Through the Bourdieu’s theory and human capital theory, it is a clear comprehension of the issues towards higher vocational education. The contexture factors of the educational structure have aggravated the social bias against both blue-collar work and vocational colleges. The Chinese culture norms that favour a traditional general university over a vocational college and white-collar jobs over manual labour works trace back to the Confucianism as well as the holistic class structure (Hora and Blackburn Cohen, 2018). The context in which people are positioned establish, conceptualize and reflect the forms of culture capital as well (Bourdieu, 1986). On the other hand, the context of the structure of the labour market in China implicated

the shortage of skilled workers requires reflection on things other than the education (Grubb and Lazerson, 2005). It means, from human capital theory perspective, whether people accept HVE depends on the efficiency of the allocation of the labour market. The more effective the labour market is, the more obvious the difference in income between whether people receive HVE or not. It can be seen that the development of HVE is greatly affected by the external society, especially the labour market.

Chinese government makes efforts to cope with the global academic environment in the context of economic and academic trends. It has indeed acknowledged four critical roles of HVE in China's economic growth: 1) supporting industrial structure adjustment by outputting millions of skilled manpower; 2) mitigating unemployment in the society, especially among young adults; 3) pushing forward urbanization and development of rural areas; 4) bettering the structure of the education system and promoting the process of higher education massification (Liu, 2015). The potential that transforming mainstream education into vocational education should be make emphasis on, under the context of a deep influence of Chinese traditional thought that overemphasizes the academic learning. Not only could this improve the education with students in disadvantage, but also it could positively facilitate their lives in raising the public awareness and recognition of vocational education. Furthermore, it could have a positive impact on the responsibility and teaching quality of teachers working with students in vocational schools.

This dissertation introduce the German vocational education systems in the themes of Academic qualification and Teaching quality. Though German successful practice could make contributions to the reform of the Chinese counterpart, it should take the current situation of labour markets and

China's economic development into consideration. Rather than only calling for the best practical application from other countries, a structural innovation is necessary which integrates the realities of Chinese educational and institutional practice in the Chinese context. In this sense, more efforts should also be made on vocational education reform as an important component of China's reformed schooling, which is meaningful to the students and advantageous to society.

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