Older Adult Education Policies in Taiwan and in China: A Comparative Study

While in some respects the nature of older adult education in Chinese-speaking community seems unique. It is noteworthy that although both Chinese in the mainland China and Taiwan share the same language and the same culture in certain aspects, the different political regimes make the educational development different, for example, older adult education. This is our initiative to conduct this study from the comparative perspective of older adult education in Taiwan and in China.

Taiwan is predicted to formally become an aging society in 2017, with the number of people aged 65 years and older accounting for 14% of the population. It is taking only 24 years for Taiwan to turn into an aging society; the transformation speed was really fast compare to other advanced Western countries. Due to the inevitable “aging society,” the Taiwan government is currently paying more attention to the welfare of senior citizens, and the Ministry of Education published “Older Adult Education White Paper” in 2006. This paper points out that it is very significant to come out with various educational senior curriculum and programs. In this context, The Ministry of Education has been establishing local senior learning centers in different counties and cities of Taiwan, there were 225 different active aging learning centers (AALCs) all over the country by the end of May, 2012. To create a better living environment for the increasing number of seniors, the Ministry of Education has already made a blueprint for the future development of the aging society by establishing the Centers.

In China, more than 30% of the population is expected to be age 60 or older in 2050. To face the challenging task of the increasing aging population, the government of China set up a Pensioner Affairs Bureau to look after the interests of the elderly. In this context, varieties of universities for the aged (U-3As) have been established, supported and funded by government in 1980s.

We feel that promotion of older adult learning can be one of the essential strategies to tackle the challenges posed by an ageing population in Taiwan and in China. This paper begins by identifying major similarities and differences...
Taiwan and Mainland China, having the same language and ethnicity, are facing the similar problem in the aging society. Nevertheless, the presentation of older adult education is distinct because of different forms of government. This study first describes the development of older adult education in the macro perspective and further analyzes comparisons between the two countries.

I. Evolution of older adult education policies in Taiwan and Mainland China

Taiwan is aging rapidly. The number of people aged 65 and over increase from 7% in 1993 to 14% in 2017. It is taking just an estimated 24 years for Taiwan to turn from graying to aging, compared to 50 to 100 years in other advanced Western countries. Since Taiwan government noticed the important issue of population aging, older adult education in Taiwan has been developed for thirty years. Regarding the older adult education activities, Young Women’s Christian Association first established Green Vine Club in 1978, aiming to develop the virtue of respecting the elderly. As the first policy concerning the elderly, Senior Citizens Welfare Act formulated by Taiwan government in 1980, was further revised and developed in 2007. The policies are based on various services to ensure the benefits of the elders, such as emphasizing the welfare benefit, pensions, and residence of the elders. In 1980’s, the governmental organizations and civil associations collaboratively established Evergreen Senior Citizens Center, which was considered as the beginning of the organizational older adult education in Taiwan. However, the learning contents in older adult education mostly focused on the interest and expressive needs of elders, but less on knowledgeable and cognitive courses.

In 1990’s, Ministry of Education formulated the older adult education protocols of Education Plans for Elders and committed the education bureaus of municipality governments to conducting the policies. In 2006, Ministry of Education published “Older Adult Education White Paper” emphasizing the standard of older adult education. In order to implement the policy of older adult education White Paper, in 2008 Ministry of Education committed Educational Gerontology Center of Chung-Cheng University to integrating local public and private sectors to set up active aging learning centers (AALCs) within three years. By the end of May 2012, 225 active aging learning centers were established. Generally speaking, in the evolution of older adult education policies, there were various sectors involving in older adult learning activities in Taiwan, including social administration, educational administration, higher education institutions, civil organizations, and religious groups.

Before 1990, the older adult education policies in Taiwan focused on enriching the life of the elderly and providing welfare services, i.e., the policies ensured elder’s social welfare and increased elders’ life satisfaction. After 1990, the government gradually noticed the importance of older adult learning, and the elderly’s learning right was emphasized. In the beginning of this century, Ministry of Education of Taiwan formulating older adult education white paper, thus participating in learning plays an important role to achieve the vision of successful aging life for the elderly. With such a policy, 225 active aging learning centers were established in schools, universities, communities, etc, to provide the elderly convenient and secure learning environments. Different from the past older adult education institutions, the learning contents in active aging learning centers focused on the necessary knowledge for the elders, covering the curriculum of knowledge, interests, expressions, and contributions.

Mainland China became an aging society in 1999 and is now the country with the most aging population of the world, about 1/5 of the international elderly population. The aging population in Mainland China was growing rapidly which only took a short time for the elderly population above 65-year-old to increase from 7% to 14%. In other words, it merely took 27 years to change from the aging society to the aged society (Chen, 2006). Aging population became a critical issue in Mainland China, but the regulations for older adult education was not formulated until 1996. A series of policies therefore have been formulated by the governmental sectors to show the emphasis of the elderly. For example, Ministry of Education of Mainland China promulgated Enhancing Education in the 21st Century in 1999, containing community education and lifelong education systems in the elderly education; establishing and completing the social system in 2000. Besides, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and General Office of the State Council further proclaimed Decisions of Reinforcing the Elderly Work in the same year, and all levels of government implement the policies of the elderly education. These policies aims to protect the right of learning, to enrich the life and to development the service for the elderly (Yang & Chen, 2007).

In regard to the older adult education institutions in Mainland China, third age universities are commonly known. In 1983, the first third age university was established in Shandong, and this institution aims to offer the elderly the opportunities of self-development and self-service. By the end of 2008, there were about forty thousand third age universities with more than five million elderly participating in the learning activities in Mainland China. In 1990, Open Universities for the elderly were founded in Beijing and Shanghai, thus the elderly could flexibly arrange the time to receive education and conduct their learning activities through televisions, broadcast media (Chen, 2006). Other
friendly elders’ activities were held in communities of many cities, which demonstrated the widest form of elder education.

Regarding the evolution of older adult education policies in Mainland China, the policy in 1990 proposed the right of continuing learning for the elders. On the other hand, the number of older adult education institutions is increasing in Mainland China, from non-formal educational institutions to informal learning in communities. Nonetheless, they are promoted by the government from policies to practice.

Reviewing the evolution of older adult education policies in Taiwan, the following problems appear in the promotion process. 1. The promotion systems are diversed but lack of integrated mechanism that may cause waste in resource (Minister of Education, 2006). 2. Ministry of the Interior has promoted older adult education for years while the subsidies for older adult education have been established as norm. It is just the beginning for Ministry of Education to provide learning opportunities for the elderly. When the subsidies are not definitely guaranteed by the Ministry of Education, the policies could hardly be permanently implemented (Wei & Huang, 2011). 3. To attain the goals of active aging, the related learning contents should be covered in the older adult education activities. Nevertheless, the past learning activities were simply regarded as the welfare for the elderly that the learning contents focus on leisure and entertainment activities. Consequently, the cognition- and knowledge-oriented elder learners are not attracted.

In the developmental process of older adult education in Mainland China, the following problems are discovered. 1. The policies do not appear definite orientation on the development of older adult education. 2. The relevant policies pay more attention to the development of third age universities, but not to the older adult education in communities (Wang & Tan, 2011). 3. The older adult educational activities are mainly led by government, so the connections with civil resources are limited.

II. Comparisons of older adult education policies between Taiwan and Mainland China

According to the evolution of older adult education policies and contents in Taiwan and Mainland China, the following comparisons are analyzed.

(I) Similarities
1. Both the older adult education policies in Taiwan and Mainland China aim to assist the elderly to have a better life quality and to increase the life satisfaction.
2. The regulations for curriculum framework and teachers’ qualifications have not been indicated in the policies. In spite that older adult education in Taiwan and Mainland China has been greatly promoted in the past two decades, there is no definite regulation for the important elements in the older adult education activities, such as learning contents for the elderly and the qualifications of the teachers.
3. Participants in older adult education prefer learning in institutional settings. Older adult education institutions are the major learning places for the elderly in Taiwan and Mainland China. The reason may be that Chinese people commonly consider the learning activities being held in specific educational institutions.

(II) Differences
1. The leaders of older adult education institutions are different. In Taiwan, older adult education was first conducted by civil organizations and then supported by social affair bureau of the government. There are various sectors collaboratively promote and implement the policies nowadays. On the other hand, the government leads and regulates the older adult education activities and policies in Mainland China. Such differences lie on the distinct political regimes.
2. The policy perspectives in Taiwan have been changed from welfare into empowerment of the elderly, while older adult education is still regarded as the welfare of the elderly in Mainland China. Such differences might be the policy-makers’ consideration. According to the needs of the elderly in Mainland China, the welfare is started, and then the learning and empowerment are gradually taken into account.
3. The older adult education policies of Taiwan in this century attempts to achieved the goal of successful aging, while those policies in Mainland China are still proceeding in the framwork of lifelong learning. The objectives of educational policies in Taiwan are definite and more concrete, while the objectives of the elderly participating in lifelong learning are not interpreted in Mainland China. The ideals of theoretical reasearch on older adult education in Mainland China should be integrated into the promotion of practice so as to make the objectices more explicit.
4. In recent years, researchers in Taiwan have actively participated in both the policy formulation and the promotion of older adult education practice so that 225 active aging learning centers have been established. The innovative curriculum and learning activities are designed based on the ideas of theorical foundation, and they have been realised in these centers. The reason is that there are academic sectors of older adult education in Taiwan, and the researchers are willing to contribute the specialties to this domain. Consequently, the development of older adult education in Taiwan can better meet the needs of the citizens.
III. Reflection on comparative education method

Comparative analysis is the tool to explain various social phenomenons between two different countries (Green, 2002). One of the most significant contributions of comparative analysis was to make clear of the political aspects toward elder education in two different countries (Broadfoot, 2002). Since there are identical language, history, and similar cultural backgrounds between the two nations, it is considerably easier to comprehend the formulation of older adult education policies. Nevertheless, comparative research in this study is limited because of different political systems. Particularly, the government of Mainland China guides from the policy formulation to the implementation of older adult education activities, so that the relative data, such as curricula and number of participants, are unaccessible. This is the difficulty in proceeding the study. We suggest that further research can compare specific older adult education organizations in the micro perspective so as to better understand the contexte, the development, and the barriers of older adult education between two nations.

References


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University Continuing Education in Canada and the United Kingdom: A Comparison

University Continuing Education (UCE) has a long history as a field of professional endeavour and incubator of educational innovation. Its importance has been enhanced in recent years by socio-economic and technological changes and the emphasis on broader and more inclusive approaches of adult education and lifelong learning (Duke, 2001; Crowther & Sutherland, 2007). Indeed, many national governments are now encouraging their universities and other institutions of higher education to develop continuing education and lifelong learning to address three fundamental objectives of education: economic growth, personal development, and social cohesion. In particular, universities are increasingly expected to broaden their provision to include educational opportunities for an ever more diverse group of learners, especially those from “disadvantaged” or under-represented groups.

Several recent studies have examined how the changing systems of higher education are affecting university governance, funding, resources, planning, and community relations (Bourgeois, Duke, Guyot, & Merrill, 1999; Dunkin & Lindsay, 2001; Mark, Pouget, & Thomas, 2004; Mauch, 2005). They report that the policy and organisational contexts of higher education are changing rapidly and redefining the character and role of universities. Trends towards the corporatisation of universities, enhanced public interest in university accountability and greater awareness of their outreach and engagement activities have all fostered greater demand for access to the many forms of UCE and lifelong learning.

However, a shared “globalised” policy environment has generated radically different organizational and strategic responses. For example, most of the larger Canadian universities still have a central unit or division specifically dedicated to organising and administering their provision of adult and continuing education. In the UK, by contrast, a strong emphasis on “lifelong learning” since the mid-1990s has ironically been accompanied by the decline of separate university units dedicated to such provision (Jones, Moseley & Thomas, 2010). Yet, regardless of jurisdiction, UCE is still promoted as a bridge between universities and the communities they serve. It is seen as contributing to universities’ outreach and community engagement activities and extending the knowledge and research created at a university to audiences that would otherwise not benefit from it.

Despite these changing contexts, UCE has attracted too little scholarly attention of late. With a few notable exceptions (Knust & Hanft, 2009; Osborne