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Lifelong Learning and Adult Education

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This chapter describes the evolution of lifelong learning and adult education in Macao and Hong Kong. It is concerned with all levels of education, though has particular emphasis on higher education. Detailing the reasons for the similarities and differences in the two territories, the chapter examines continuities and changes over time. Linkages are identified not only between Macao and Hong Kong, but also between those territories and other parts of the world.

Lifelong Learning, Adult Education and Related Fields

Lifelong learning is best understood as a process of individual learning across the life span, from cradle to grave. It thus includes learning in early childhood, and learning in retirement. It embraces not only education in formal settings, such as schools and universities, but also ‘lifewide’ learning in informal settings at home, at work and in the broader community (Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development [OECD] 1996). The concept of lifelong learning is related to various other fields, including adult education, continuing education, and further education (Knowles 1980, pp.24-39; Jarvis 1983, pp.29-53). Lifelong learning is commonly said to embrace the following five characteristics (Huang 1995, pp. 324-325):

- *openness*: available for all;
- *continuity*: emphasising linkages between various educational activities;
- *integration*: including all education activities in the life-span;
- *flexibility*: in objectives, methodologies, time, place, content and processes; and
- *appropriateness*: the content of education relates to the learner’s life and/or work.

Tuijnman (2002, p.7) observed that contemporary concepts in lifelong learning were preceded by rather similar ideas with different labels in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Examples were ‘permanent education’ advocated by the Council of Europe, and ‘recurrent education’ proposed by the OECD. These concepts were considered utilitarian and tied closely to the world of work (see also Tuijnman & Bengtsson 1994). The notion of recurrent education originated in Sweden in the 1960s, and was linked to human capital theory and ideas about rolling reform and social engineering. The overarching goal of recurrent education was the redistribution of educational

opportunities over the entire life span, in alternation with work and leisure, and as an alternative to the lengthening of education in the first part of life. Recurrent education was defined as a long-term strategy to achieve lifelong education. The ultimate goal was the development of a lifelong learning strategy to build the 'learning society' (Husén 1986).

UNESCO has also been an advocate of lifelong learning (Faure 1972), and has encouraged its inclusion in the policies of economically advanced countries. Tuijnman (2002, p.7) indicated that a framework for lifelong learning should foster the personal development of the individual, counter risks to social cohesion, develop civil society through promoting democratic traditions, and enhance labour market flexibility. In this sense, lifelong learning can have a strong instrumental value.

Much of this chapter will also embrace what many people call adult education. Huang (1995) noted that adult education might have three basic dimensions. First, the term refers to systematic, continuing learning undertaken by people who seek to enhance their knowledge, develop skills and/or change behaviours and values. Second, adult education represents all organised education curricula for adults, regardless of content, standards and methods, but in practice it tends to be distinguished from formal mainstream educational activities. Third, adult education can be considered as a programme, a process, a social movement and a discipline. Adult education can be defined as embracing organised part-time learning activities provided for adults who are no longer participating in full-time formal education. The purposes are to enhance knowledge, to develop hobbies, and/or to change attitudes and values.

Orientations

The thrusts of lifelong learning have been significantly shaped by the structures of societies. In both Macao and Hong Kong, two prominent factors are levels of economic development and the age structures of the populations. Economic development has brought major changes in the nature of education over time. The rapid development of sciences and obsolescence of knowledge has increased demand for learning. Both Macao and Hong Kong are ageing societies. According to official statistics, in 2000 8.0 per cent of the population of Macao was aged 65 or above, while the figure for Hong Kong was 11.6 per cent (Macao, Department of Statistics & Census 2001; Hong Kong, Census & Statistics Department 2001). In both territories these proportions were expected to rise during the coming years.

Developments in mainland China are another major influence on patterns in both Macao and Hong Kong. The impact of China joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001 may be particularly significant. Neither Macao nor Hong Kong has ever been able to view itself in isolation; but contemporary policy-makers must conceive of the territories being part of the global village within the framework of developments in China. Both Macao and Hong Kong have entered what Bell (1973) called the post-industrial knowledge society. Knowledge is the fundamental resource for such societies, especially theoretical knowledge. As Stehr (1994, p.10) pointed out, when these societies emerge they signal a fundamental shift in the structure of the economy because the primacy of manufacturing is replaced by knowledge. It is not knowledge per se that is significant to the knowledge society, but scientific – including social scientific – knowledge (Stehr 1994, pp.99-103). Such knowledge underpins the