Reconstruction of Education in Sichuan Province
Following the Great Wenchuan Earthquake Disaster of May 12, 2008

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On May 12, 2008 a huge magnitude 8.0 earthquake struck Wenchuan County in Sichuan Province, China, causing enormous losses to Sichuan Province’s education system. Some 13,768 school sustained extensive damage, and the direct economic loss exceeded 30 billion yuan; 5,335 children died or are missing, causing enormous psychological damage to teachers and students in the disaster area. All school education and educational and learning activities were discontinued, the normal education and learning system fell into a state of complete confusion, and the educational environment was destroyed.

Over the three years since the earthquake, the Chinese Government has undertaken efforts to overcome the earthquake damage and aid earthquake victims as well as disaster restoration measures by calling on the entire country, fully utilizing the advantages of the national system of achieving huge projects through concentrated effort to plan and implement a “pairing support” system under which one province or city provides assistance to a county that sustains severe damage in a disaster. Through such efforts, the task of achieving recovery within three years could be generally completed in the second year and fully completed within the third. Disaster restoration measures achieved spectacular results. Education in the disaster area underwent such enormous changes that it was as if the entire system had been replaced. Today the most beautiful buildings in the disaster area are schools, and the brightest sight is the smiles of the children.

The educational reconstruction that has been carried out in Sichuan Province following the earthquake is developmental reconstruction. Instead of simply duplicating the past, further upgrading and innovations have been implemented on existing foundations, achieving dramatic development. In undertaking educational reconstruction following the disaster, we adhered to a “life-first, people-orientated” philosophy at each stage—emergency relief at the time of the disaster, recommencement of education and classes, recovery/rebuilding, and full-scale reconstruction—in accordance with the gradual nature of educational reconstruction. In addition to reconstructing educational hardware in accordance to educational reconstruction laws, effort was poured into promoting the reconstruction of educational software as well achieving across-the-board and balanced sustainable development by combining education reconstruction and long-term development with the aim, while at the same time promoting the reconstruction of education and science in the Sichuan Province disaster area.

I. Reconstruction of Education: Hastening Recovery and Stabilizing Citizens' Emotions
1. Swift Recommencement of Education/Classes

Complete recommencement of education/classes was positioned as a task of the highest importance and urgency in reconstructing education following the disaster, and proactive efforts were made to fulfill the conditions required for recommencing education and classes. On the fifth day after the great earthquake, the Sichuan Province Education Department issued statements and provided guidance regarding efforts to recommence education/classes. Recommencement of classes was proactively promoted using five different formats throughout the Sichuan Province disaster area: recommencement of classes at local evacuation centers, recommencement of classes through adjustment of individual school curricula, recommencement of classes at other schools and in other counties or provinces, recommencement of classes with temporary supplemental classes, and recommencement of classes in remaining school buildings following safety appraisal. At the same time, priority was placed in recommencing classes for third-year high school students, third-year junior high school students, and students in evacuation centers or who had evacuated to other regions, with the task of resuming classes for students in the disaster area preparing for university or high school entrance examinations safely accomplished. By September 1, 2008, the goal of complete recommencement of education/classes so that “all students can study in a safe and clean environment” had been achieved.

2. Innovations in Education and Learning Management

The following measures were taken in response to problems such as poor educational environments (classes in tents or prefabricated classrooms, etc.), insufficient educational and learning resources, and inadequate management systems.

Firstly, management of prefabricated school buildings was strengthened and a special safety system for guiding prefabricated schools was constructed in a structured form. This included security systems, fire protection equipment/facilities management and fire protection safety operations management systems, boarding school safety management systems, food hygiene safety management systems, and drinking water management systems. Through these measures, the safety of the lives of teachers and students at prefabricated schools was effectively assured, and the normal order of education and learning at prefabricated schools was swiftly restored.

Secondly, class schedules were adjusted. In view of the requirement for student safety and health, with respect to time schedules, a format of intensive classes and decentralized classes was used, while at the same time a system combining long (40 minutes) and short (20 minutes) classes was also implemented, enabling the flexible adjustment of summer, winter, and weekend holidays.

Thirdly, innovations were made to educational methods. In order to respond to the special environment posed by education in a disaster area, teachers were encouraged to make their own teaching tools and improve educational systems and methods. For example, in the case of physical activity, instead of activities during long rest periods between classes taking place
outdoors, manual exercises were performed, and in the case of experimental education in such subjects as physics, biology, chemistry, and science, mainly demonstration experiments were carried out. Through these measures, the standard of education in the disaster area was maintained to ensure there was no drop in quality.

3. Reconstruction of Local Curricula

In order to respond to the necessity for educational reconstruction following the disaster, the Sichuan Province Education Department organically integrated life education, safety education, mental health education, health education, fire prevention/disaster reduction education, and other educational areas into the three curriculum areas of “Lifestyle, Life, and Safety”, re-compiled local curricula educational materials. The reconstructed local curricula was based on student growth, emphasized student life and safety, and focused on improving the general qualifications of students. Not only does curriculum content reflect the national government’s general requirements regarding student qualifications, but also the expression of curriculum content is more relevant to students’ lifestyles. Good educational results have been achieved since the new educational materials have been used, and in addition to improving students’ all-round skills, good mental health and lifestyles are also being formed. In deepening reform of basic educational curricula and promoting capability education, positive results are being realized.

II. Mental Reconstruction: Specialized Intervention and Thorough Care for Those Affected by the Disaster

After the earthquake damage occurred, under the direction of the national government, Sichuan Province carried out specialist intervention, swiftly implementing large-scale and sustainable counseling and psychological crisis intervention in the disaster area, constructing mechanisms for psychological first-aid and sustaining effects, and taking care to enable many administrative workers involved in the education system in the disaster area as well as teachers and students to spend the period following the disaster in which they faced psychological risks as calmly as possible. Consequently, there have been absolutely no precedents for teachers or students exhibiting extreme behavior due to mental problems, and the stability of schools and society is being maintained.

1. Timely, Complete, and Scientific Implementation of Post-disaster Emergency Mental Intervention

Firstly, measures were taken to ensure that mental care was provided to all those in need of it. A mental care handbook was swiftly compiled and published, and some 350,000 copies were distributed free of charge to elementary and junior high schools in the disaster area, covering teachers and students in a broad area and swiftly spreading scientific knowledge about post-disaster self-metal care. Weekly mental guidance classes of one hour duration were
established, spreading psychological knowledge and enhancing teachers’ and students’ self-help and mutual assistance capabilities.

Secondly, all processes in mental health activities were firmly guaranteed. Mental care guidance groups were launched, various support efforts were coordinated, and mental care was implemented scientifically and systematically.

Thirdly, training was secured for all psychological counselors providing mental guidance who were eligible for training. The standard of mental care for teachers was raised by proactively planning and implementing training activities for providing mental care after various disasters.

2. Construction of Mechanisms for Sustaining the Effects of Mental Care

Firstly, a four-scale system of post-disaster mental maintenance was constructed, realizing the systemization of mental care. Accordingly, a four-scale system—province, city, county, and school—was formed. Specialist organizations were established and specialists were put in charge of mental health education and training, and education research groups at mental health education centers were launched accordingly. Psychological counseling rooms were established in large schools, while mental service stations to be shared by small schools were established in district units. At schools where buildings had been destroyed and/or teachers and/or students killed, mental service education and research groups were established, with a minimum of one to two experienced psychological counselors being assigned to each school; for other schools, joint education and research groups were established in district units.

Secondly, stable specialist teams were trained, creating teachers specializing in the provision of mental care. Over approximately five years, while gradually realizing our target of deploying one specialist mental health education teacher for every 1,500 students, we have been enforcing requirements that teachers also carry personal identification at work.

Thirdly, by strengthening construction of curricula for post-disaster mental health activities, we were able to firmly establish mental health care activities as a norm for the future while including mental health education in classroom activities. Fully utilizing content related to the local teaching materials “Lifestyle, Life, and Safety” for compulsory education in Sichuan Province, general knowledge about mental health was diffused and assistance provided to enable students to learn psychological adaptation methods as well as gain general mental health information, cultivating good mental grounding.

Fourthly, using specialized mental health-related software and television programs in school psychological counseling rooms, efforts were made to spread information about future mental care activities.

Fifthly, special research regarding post-disaster psychology was carried out, solidifying the scientific basis for future mental care. Topical research related to such subjects as life education and mental health education was proactively implemented, realizing the scientific and sustainable development of activities related to post-disaster mental reconstruction.
III. Reconstruction of Teachers: Human Care and Overall Improvements

Teachers are schools’ most important resources and provide a tremendous psychological driving force in school administration. Adhering to the view that teachers are also valuable assets, reconstruction of teachers following the disaster was given considerable attention.

1. Swift Replenishment of Teacher Numbers in the Disaster Area

After firmly confirming the extent of the teacher shortage at schools in the disaster area as well as the needs for teachers required when actually resuming education and classes, the Sichuan Province Education Department considered plans for teacher allocation in the disaster area, setting the number of students per class, and establishing school grades and classes; calculated the deficient number of teachers; formulated short-term and medium-to-long-term plans aimed at the reconstruction of teacher ranks; and swiftly dispatched more than 7,780 supplementary teachers to the disaster area (of which 5,242 were invited teachers, 1,509 were special-duty teachers invited through the implementation of the “Plan for Special Duty School Teachers at the Compulsory Education Level in Agricultural Communities”; and over 1,030 were assigned to schools in the disaster area as support from areas both within and outside Sichuan Province). In this way, the needs for recommencement of education and classes as well as normal education and educational/learning activities in the disaster area were sufficiently met.

2. Planning and Implementation of Training for School Principals and Teachers in the Disaster Area

Plans such as the “Plan for Assisting Training of Elementary and Junior High School Teachers in the Earthquake Disaster Area”, “Plan for Mental Rehabilitation Education Training for Junior High School Teachers in the Earthquake Disaster Area”, and “Training Project for Enhancing the Administrative Skills of Elementary School and Junior High School Principals in the Sichuan Province Earthquake Disaster Area” were implemented and training was provided for all school teachers in the disaster area, with 4,119 elementary school and junior high school principals undergoing training.

3. Strengthening of Human Care for Teachers in the Disaster Area

Firstly, all-around treatment of teachers in the disaster area was improved. Processes for damage compensation and restitution for workplace injury for teachers in the disaster area were implemented appropriately and on-time and full payment of salaries for teachers in the disaster area was guaranteed, appropriately improving the economic treatment of many teachers in the earthquake disaster area.

Secondly, condolence visits to teachers in the earthquake disaster area were carried out appropriately, with visits made to elementary school and junior high school teachers deep within the earthquake disaster area.
Thirdly, job title review policies were adjusted when appropriate. Adjustments were made to job title review policies for elementary school and junior high school teachers in the earthquake disaster area, with job title evaluations carried out for elementary school and junior high school teachers in areas sustaining especially serious damage and policy support provided accordingly.

Fourthly, reward/incentive activities were proactively implemented. The reward/incentive system was improved and exceptional teachers who had undertaken efforts to assist earthquake victims or recovery from the damage in the earthquake disaster area were rewarded and provided with incentives in various forms.

IV. Reconstruction of Schools: Scientific Planning and Rational Allocation

1. Scientific Planning

Under the general framework of the “Wenchuan Earthquake Disaster Recovery and Reconstruction Ordinance”, the Sichuan Province Education Department issued documents on May 30 and at appropriate times submitted guidance opinions regarding plans for school recovery and reconstruction following the disaster. These opinions take into account such factors as integration of school reconstruction into overall plans for disaster area reconstruction, population changes, economic development, and the direction and trends of flows of people, goods, and information while implementing uniform planning and consideration of reconstruction and development. Furthermore, there is a need for efforts to be made to scientifically demonstrate danger avoidance and disaster prevention on school sites as well as establish schools with distinctive features, emphasizing local and ethnic characteristics, while respecting school history and traditions. There is also a need to strengthen the provision of services to local communities and enhance capacity for transmitting local culture, as well as ensure that reconstructed schools can also be used as public emergency evacuation centers.

2. Rational Allocation

In accordance with the principle of contributing to the improvement of educational quality and the efficacy and benefits of school administration as well as the optimization of educational structure, “establishing location, scale, and function” was emphasized and the composition and structure of schools overall adjusted so as to enable optimal integration of school resources. For example, in an urban area with a population of 300,000 residents, one special support school was constructed in accordance with regulations. In each town or village, splendid central kindergartens have been constructed, and as a general rule normal high schools and junior vocational schools in agricultural areas are being built on land owned by the County People’s Government. Junior high schools were built in central towns and villages, while elementary schools were positioned intensively and kindergartens and special support schools were constructed in accordance with actual needs. In the case of completely reconstructed integrated junior high and senior high schools, as a general rule the high school, junior high school, and elementary school must be constructed separately. The number of
nine-year integrated schools is being increased, appropriately leaving educational bases in counties in mountainous areas, while the construction of boarding schools is being promoted, expanding the scale of boarding schools and the relative number of boarders.

3. Complete Provision of Functions

Experimental laboratories (laboratory buildings), sporting grounds, multi-purpose facilities such as music rooms and art rooms, computer rooms, boarding school dormitories, living facilities (at Beichuan High School, not only brightly lit, spacious classrooms and clean, uncluttered dormitories but also experimental laboratories, a library, and sporting grounds have all been newly constructed, and all are high-level facilities) were constructed and positioned in accordance with standards. Barrier-free facilities and equipment (special paths, special sanitary equipment, and rehabilitation facilities) have been installed for physically disabled people at schools in the disaster area that sustained extensive damage. Disparities between cities and agricultural villages, between regions, and between schools in terms of school administration environment and allocation of resources have clearly been reduced and a trend towards equalization observed, realizing historical leaps forward.

V. System Construction: Mechanism Improvement and Orderly Reconstruction

Guided by the “Wenchuan Earthquake Disaster Recovery and Reconstruction Ordinance”, the Sichuan Province Education Department swiftly activated emergency response mechanisms for education, systemizing various tasks including overcoming the earthquake damage and aiding earthquake victims as well as education reconstruction and providing powerful organization and systematic security for post-disaster reconstruction of education while at the same time improving systems for information transmission, pairing support, school safety, and reconstruction supervision and management.

1. Timely Activation of Emergency Response Mechanisms for Education and Provision of an Information Transmission System

On the day that the earthquake occurred, the Sichuan Province Education Department immediately set up a “Leading Group for Activities to Overcome the Earthquake Damage and Aid Earthquake Victims” with the department director acting as group leader to provide unified guidance for overcoming earthquake damage/aiding earthquake victims, disease prevention/treatment activities, and other activities related to the safe recommencement of classes in elementary and junior high schools throughout the provincial education system. Information related to schools in the disaster area was swiftly collected and the process and status of overcoming earthquake damage/aiding earthquake victims and recovery/reconstruction was introduced through the holding of regular news conferences and briefings, exclusive television reports, and special programs on Sichuan Province Education Television, conveying the reality of aid for earthquake victims and the reconstruction process.
2. Pairing Support and the Construction/Formulation of a Specific Area Support System

Firstly, a system of one-on-one support was implemented in specific areas. Concrete measures and methods were decided based on the actual needs of each area, and a system proactively implemented in which specific areas in 13 locations throughout the province that that sustained minor or no damage each provided support to a severely affected town or village in 13 severely affected counties. Specialists from education administrative departments and education research institutions in areas throughout the province that that sustained minor or no damage whose expertise lay in such fields as university/vocational school education management, education research, and mental health education were selected and dispatched to municipal counties in the disaster area where they served on a temporary basis, providing educational support in specific areas of the disaster area.

Secondly, effective implementation of national pairing support mechanisms was secured. The Sichuan Province Education Department issued documents and contacted and communicated with those providing support with regard to the determination of affected areas and schools requiring support. Support provision plans were jointly considered and clear rules for items such as the implementation of related procedures. Responsible bodies were clarified and information was exchanged smoothly between those providing and those requiring support.

3. Strengthening of School Safety Systems

Safe educational activity classes were implemented and systems were put in place for improving school safety and security, preventing and treating disease, sanitation and epidemic prevention, food safety, and drinking water safety, ensuring the safety of teachers and students.

4. Improvement of Mechanisms for Supervising and Managing Reconstruction

A “Leading Group for Supervising and Managing Funds and Supplies for Overcoming the Earthquake Damage and Aiding Earthquake Victims” was set up to accept funds and supplies for overcoming the earthquake damage and aiding earthquake victims within the provincial education system and supervise/consider payment, logistics, usage, and management. “Opinions Concerning the Implementation of the Plan for School Recovery and Reconstruction Following the Great Wenchuan Earthquake Disaster” were implemented, and local governments implemented a unified system for planning/construction, management, bid invitation, procurement, supervision/administration, and acceptance inspections for school construction projects.

VI. Scientific Research: Guidance of Service Reconstruction and Implementation

A few days after the earthquake occurred, the President of the National Institute of Education Sciences, Professor Yuan Zhenguoj, personally visited the disaster area as head of a support team, and together with the Sichuan Province Education Department and Sichuan
Province Institute of Education Sciences carefully considered and formulated plans for supporting education reconstruction activities following the Wenchuan earthquake disaster. This took the form of a Central Education and Science Research Institute’s special work fund project, which was established with the theme of "Research on Reconstruction of Education in Sichuan Province Following the Great Wenchuan Earthquake Disaster of May 12, 2008" and for which I acted as the senior scientist. In order to establish a research team, the taskforce team assembled the strengths of universities, vocational schools, and scientific research institutions both within and outside Sichuan Province as well as education administrative departments and schools in the disaster area. Research was carried out from six perspectives—“mental reconstruction”, “teacher reconstruction”, “education/learning reconstruction”, “school culture reconstruction”, “construction of systems for education reconstruction following the disaster”, and “review of valuable experiences that could be called a heritage known as disaster aid”—with the aim of “contributing to decision-making related to educational reconstruction, guiding the implementation of education, seeking laws for education within reconstruction, and summarizing experiences related to reconstruction”. While supporting overall reconstruction efforts, research has been producing results with both educational and practical value.

Seven specialist books have been published, of proposals related to 23 survey research reports or policies were provided highly valuable insight for formulating decisions and documents regarding educational reconstruction, and these proposals were utilized effectively. Policies, document sets, and materials on specific themes that were born out of the research results were submitted as empirical materials by the Sichuan Province Education Department to Yushu County in Qinghai Province and Zhugqu County in Gansu Province, and these materials are being used as important reference information for educational reconstruction in disaster areas in these two locations.

Currently, reconstruction of education in the disaster area is already approaching the time of complete recovery, and there are many new problems that require research. From experience gained in relation to disaster relief overseas, we know that trauma caused by huge disasters remains for a long time. We are faced with the question of how to implement mental guidance and mental health education for teachers and students in the disaster area both appropriately and in a sustainable manner, as well as the question of how to strengthen the formulation of teacher ranks as well as raise the quality of education and learning in the disaster area. We aim to improve to the maximum the operational environment for school, while at the same time focusing on such issues as pouring effort into improving educational quality and management standards as far as possible and enhancing the sustainable development potential of schools in the disaster area. Within the “Sichuan Province Medium-to-long-term Educational Reform and Development Plan Outline (2010-2020)”, we have proposed a “Plan for Improving Elementary and Junior High School Education in the Earthquake Disaster Area” with the aim of resolving these problems.

Both China and Japan are countries that experience frequent earthquakes and have
accumulated a wealth of uniquely distinctive experiences with regard to risk avoidance and overcoming disaster damage. This symposium will contribute to the strengthening of cooperative systems between our two countries, providing a forum for exchange and sharing expertise, experience, and research results regarding the reconstruction of education following disasters, and will provide wonderful opportunities for study and learning. The symposium also has wonderful educational and referential value for the promotion of educational reconstruction following the earthquake disaster in Sichuan Province.

I firmly believe that education in Sichuan Province’s disaster area will surely have a better and brighter future.

Thank you for your kind attention.
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After the Wenchuan Earthquake occurred on 12 May 2008, as Deputy Director-General in charge of disaster recovery in the Sichuan Province Education Department, took leadership for organization and reconstruction operations of the post-disaster Sichuan education system. Mainly was in charge of a series of duties such as the evacuation of students from the disaster stricken areas, the planning of their return to school and the restart of classes and the delivery of that plan, the planning, delivery and implementation of counseling and mental health education for students in the disaster area, as well as the reconstruction of schools affected by the disaster. Also presided over the Central Education and Science Research Institute’s special work fund project titled: “Research on Reconstruction of Education in Sichuan Province Following the Great Wenchuan Earthquake Disaster of May 12, 2008”. The results of the research were chosen as the FY2010 Sichuan Provincial Government’s Excellent Political Affairs Survey Research Report and also received the first prize in the Sichuan Province Education Department’s 14th Educational Scientific Research Results as well as third prize in the 4th National Educational Scientific Research Results.

Important works such as ‘Steadfastly Maintaining the Reconstruction of Science, Promoting the Education of Sichuan Province’ have been presented in publications such as Educational Research and The World of Educational Science. His literary work “Research on Reconstruction of Education in Sichuan Province Following the Great Wenchuan Earthquake Disaster of May 12, 2008” was published by Educational Science Publishing House in January 2011.