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Understanding Comparison of Vocational Education in China and Finland by Chinese Educators

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Abstract: Finnish PISA success leads to Chinese fascination towards this exotic educational and innovative utopia. Delegations from different parts of China fly to Finland, aiming to find out the secret behind the success of Finnish education. High quality overseas training program for delegations of educators facilitates Chinese educational leaders’ comparison of Finnish education system and reflection on their own ideas, values and practices; therefore boost the potential cooperation between these two countries. However, little is known about the meaningfulness of visiting educational leaders’ learning, delegations’ comparisons and reflections during or after attending the training program, and to which extent these findings are useful to their practice back in China.

This study aimed to explore how Chinese educators from Jiangxi province compared vocational education in China and Finland during their study visit. The investigation started with fifteen semi-structured interviews from the second week of their stay in Oulu, Finland. Analysing data was concerned with understanding of the social and cultural factors that produced educators’ way of comparisons. Furthermore, a critical analysis was adopted by the author to examine the assumptions and effects of their comparisons and how this training program provided by Finnish educational institutions served delegation’s way of comparison. To answer the above questions, interview data was presented in three parts: 1) current issues in Chinese vocational education; 2) comparisons made by the delegation; and 3) reflections and suggestions related to Chinese-Finnish collaboration on vocational education; and three gaps were drawn up from discussing with the data: 1) space between what delegation of educators learned and didn’t grasp during their visit; 2) space between advanced concepts and ideas and practical limitations; and 3) space for ethical leadership to solve real-life dilemmas.

When vocational education has been recently highlighted in Team Finland’s education export business opportunities to China, it can be assumed that it is essential for Finnish exporters to understand incoming Chinese delegations’ situation, considerations and needs. A future study on following up with this group of delegation after the author get back to China will be a good complement to the current study.

Keywords: vocational education, Chinese overseas training program, Finnish education export, comparative education, ethical leadership
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<td>CPC</td>
<td>Communist Party of China</td>
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<tr>
<td>FICEA</td>
<td>Finland-China Education Association</td>
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<td>HEIs</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>HVCs</td>
<td>Higher Vocational Colleges</td>
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<tr>
<td>HVE</td>
<td>Higher Vocational Education</td>
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<td>ILM</td>
<td>Internal Labour Markets</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoHRSS</td>
<td>Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of People’s Republic of China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operations and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLM</td>
<td>Occupational Labour Markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMK</td>
<td>ammattikorkeakoulu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUAS</td>
<td>Oulu University of Applied Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVC</td>
<td>Oulu Vocational College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PISA</td>
<td>Program for International Student Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAFEA</td>
<td>State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAS</td>
<td>University of Applied Sciences</td>
</tr>
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<td>UTA</td>
<td>University of Tampere</td>
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1 Introduction

1.1 Inspiration of this research

The inspiration of this study arose from observations and reflections after attending a Sino-fin educational forum at the end of September 2017 and later from an interpreter’s work opportunity offered by Project Director of Liilak, Oy (Liilak). The Sino-fin educational forum was a two and a half days’ China-Finland Principals (Basic Education) Forum organized by Finland-China Education Association (FICEA) and hosted in University of Lapland. As an audience of that forum, I noticed that: 1) the contents of the lectures were often misinterpreted by the interpreters, who were temporarily hired by FICEA and had limited understanding of educational situations and researches in these two countries; 2) as a forum, there were rare dialogues or exchanges of opinions between attendees from two countries, instead, there were more traditional top-down lectures; 3) questions raised by the Chinese primary school principals in the final question and answer session were often dodged by the host and generally explained with the different cultural backgrounds and especially the national situation of China; and 4) I thought it is important to know how much the principals learned from this forum, how they compare education in these two countries and whether the forum matches their expectations and cost. This forum lighted my interest in studying Chinese educators’ short term visits, study and observation in Finland as a form of Finnish education export, which in a way reflects my personal learning path here as a master’s degree student in Education and Globalisation program. Therefore, the reflection and curiosity generated from this forum and the interpretation opportunity offered by upcoming Jiangxi delegation’s training program in Finland opened this research gate for my master’s thesis.

Liilak is a local Finnish company, operated by Chinese living in Finland, which organized the training program for Jiangxi delegation from 30th October to 17th November, 2017. Liilak also organized one project for Jiangxi provincial government in September 2016 with a topic of ‘multidisciplinary environmental education’. The 21 days training was commissioned by Jiangxi Provincial Department of Education (Jiangxi sheng jiaoyuting) and implemented by the following educational organizations in Finland: University of Oulu Extension School TOPIK, Oulu University of Applied Sciences (OUAS), OUAS/Vocational Teacher Education,
Oulu Vocational College (OVC), Luovi Vocational College and Education Excellence Ltd. The training program consisted of daily lectures on the Finnish education system, especially vocational education and training and visits to vocational training institutes. The delegation team consisted of five principal/deputy-principal/Party leaders from secondary vocational schools, which are equivalent to vocational colleges in Finland, and fifteen principal/deputy-principal/Party leaders from Higher Vocational Colleges (HVCs) in Jiangxi province. Among the participants there were three females and seventeen males. The composition of educators leadership team and gender imbalance will be further explained in Chapter 2.4 when we discuss about research background and contexts.

1.2 Purpose and aims of the research

The number of Chinese delegations coming to Finland has increased rapidly and will keep increasing as we can predict from the supportive policy in China and the education export efforts in Finland. We will look into the Chinese and Finnish policy and strategies in Chapter 2.1. However, little effort has been made to evaluate those training programs in both countries. Even the exact number of Chinese delegations visiting Finland is hard to find. On the one hand, due to the fiscal and managerial (but not political) decentralisation of Chinese education, delegation tours to Finland are organized and sent out by different levels and types of educational administrations across China, targeting a wide range of education sectors from early childhood education to higher education. On the other hand, only regular Finnish universities accredited by authorities and the other four organisations under Chinese State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs (SAFEA) Overseas Training Program Contact and Cooperation System1 in Finland are eligible to arrange Chinese training programs, and it is difficult to find out from them how many delegations have attended the training programs in Finland. As required by Chinese government, when the overseas training organizer is a university, the sending organizer in China should entrust a local travel agency to arrange the trip for delegation (Hölttä, Pekkola & Cai, 2009). Both of the delegation tours I attended were actually carried out by companies, “in so doing the companies get visible economic benefits” (Hölttä et al., 2009, p. 35).

1 http://otc.safea.gov.cn/dot/index.html
Xing and Dervin (2014) did one of the first pioneering studies on Chinese principals’ training in Finland by interviewing six participants, who attended the training program at the University of Tampere (UTA) in 2011. Through this study, the authors explored the effects of Finnish education training on Chinese principals through the lens of both leadership practices and professional development. This study also explained how the educational cross-cultural differences between these two countries prevented the application of learning practices from one context to the other. Dancing in fetters, as this study’s title shows, pictured us a group of Chinese principals who are trying every means to cultivate well-rounded students under an exam-crazed accountability culture. Xing, Dervin and Fan (2017) continued to explore the Chinese university leaders’ perceptions of Finnish Education after a three-week training program provided by UTA in 2015, by analysing six participants’ learning reports, interview data and minutes of summary sessions, when interviews were not conducted. This training program was part of a national training program launched by Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) and sponsored by Li Zhaoji Foundation and Hong Kong Pei Hua Education Foundation in 2012. It planned to send 1,000 university leaders from less developed regions in central, western and northeast China to receive further training abroad (MoE, 2012). The training program in UTA that year was designed for the visiting leaders to get familiar with the practices of Finnish University of Applied Sciences (UAS), however, the research was conducted in a broader sense that it revealed us participants’ perspective and reflections towards the whole Finnish education. Both of these two studies, equally important, provided tremendous and valuable feedback and suggestions to Finnish training providers in terms of offering quality training programs. Hölttä et al., (2009) demonstrated through their study how Finnish education system can have significant effects on internationalization through such quality training programs.

There are also a handful of observation and learning reports in Chinese written by individuals (Kang, 1997; Liu, 2012; Wu, 2017) after they visited Finland. The observation tours were often short and sometimes covered many other countries. Their views were often subjective, general and “sometimes misleading, lacking rigour, and their capacity to inform policy was limited” (Guo & Lamb, 2010, p. 56). Relatively speaking, the training programs were longer and contained more detailed observations and studies of Finnish education system and operations. Their reports provide more valuable insights for interested Chinese audiences. However, both of these two types of reports “focused on learning from overseas and reflected
the view that local policy could be informed by the features of more advanced or developed systems” (Ibid., p. 56) with less incorporation of comparative elements.

1.3 Research questions

The meaningfulness of visiting educational leaders’ learning inspired me to conduct my master’s thesis study with Jiangxi delegation’s training program in Oulu, Finland. At the same time I observed from their training schedules, that Finnish vocational education would be the focus of this program. Therefore, this study aimed to explore how Chinese educators compared vocational education in China and Finland during their study visit. The investigation started with fifteen semi-structured interviews from the second week of their stay in Oulu, Finland. Analysing data was concerned with understanding of the social and cultural factors that produced educators’ way of comparisons. Furthermore, a critical analysis was adopted by the author to examine the assumptions and effects of their comparisons and how this training program provided by Finnish educational institutions served delegation’s way of comparison. When vocational education has been recently highlighted in Team Finland’s education export business opportunities to China, it can be assumed that it is essential for Finnish exporters to understand incoming Chinese delegations’ situation, considerations and needs.

Somekh and Lewin (2011, p. 9) remind us that “education research is often seen as educational in its process as well as its effects”, hence the ethical implications and effects should always be kept in mind. The ethical issues will be further explained in Chapter 6 regarding to the author’s intention that the preliminary findings of this study can enable Finnish vocational education exporters to learn from the preliminary findings.

The qualitative study is guided by the following research questions:

- What are the current issues in vocational education in Jiangxi, China, which pushed the delegation of educators to attend the overseas training program?
- What aspects did Jiangxi delegation compare while observing and studying Finnish vocational education during the training program?
- How did this training program provided by Finnish education institutions serve the delegation’s needs and influenced their way for comparison?
2 Research Background, Contexts and Participant

“Paraphrasing the great philosopher Wittgenstein, Dilley suggests we focus less on what context ‘means’ and more on how it is ‘used’. Context can indeed be used to help frame the research problem” (Stephens, 2009, p. 14). Context helps to draw the time and space boundary of what is going to be investigated in the research. It provides a special setting in which certain phenomenon will be emerging and further explains why a scientific research is needed. Context should also be taken into consideration while applying findings from one research into another. In this chapter, I am going to describe the research context in the following aspects: Chinese delegate on overseas training program, Finnish education export, vocational education in China and Finland and important characteristics of participants in my research. Participants of this research are a group of vocational education leaders from Jiangxi province attending training program in Finland.

2.1 Chinese delegation overseas training program in Finland as a form of Finnish education export

“Learning Merits from the Foreign to Conquer the Foreign” (师夷长技以制夷), proposed by Lin Zexu and Wei Yuan in the late Qing Dynasty, has a significant influence and enlightenment in modern China. When Chinese seek to identify good examples worth learning and copying, they first need to decide to where exactly to go. In the 1950s, Chinese government sent officials and professionals to learn from Soviet Union (Hölttä et al., 2009, p. 33). However, the emphasis on training the educated elites [due to the incomplete policy borrowing from USSR] in order to build up the heavy industry had conflict with the egalitarianism promoted by the Communist Party back then, which in return forced Mao and his colleagues to search for alternatives to the 1950s Soviet model (Vickers & Zeng, 2017, p. 26). Vickers and Zeng (2017, p. 26) argued that “this rift inclined Chinese leaders to emphasise the indigenous origins of the Cultural Revolution, and the Great Leap Forward that preceded it”. In 1977, Deng Xiaoping urged to catch up with “the most advanced countries in the world” (Pepper’s study 1996, as cited in Vickers & Zeng, 2017, p. 14), which at the same time laid the base tone for China’s overall development after entering the economic reform era. Talent scarcity, mainly caused by the Cultural Revolution and irregular and inconsistent
educational activities, was one of the main challenges faced by national development; accordingly, overseas training was brought back as one of the fast and effective approaches to cultivate the talent for the country, along with encouraging Chinese students to study abroad. Moreover, overseas training population categories expanded from professional and technical personnel to administrative officials (Hölttä et al., 2009, p. 33). On 19 January 2017, State Council of China announced the official Thirteen Five Year (2016-2020) Plan on Education, in which states: strengthen the educational cooperation with foreign countries and streamline processes for Higher Education Institution (HEIs) teachers and academics to go abroad; encourage principals and backbone teachers at all levels, including: university and college level, senior and junior secondary school levels and primary school level, to attend the overseas training programs.

Finland was not involved into the popular Chinese overseas training program destination countries list until recent years. Finnish students’ top performance in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducted by Organisation for Economic Co-operations and Development (OECD), together with the arising propaganda of Finnish education caught Chinese educators’ attention. Liu and Dervin (2017) studied the Chinese ‘folk’ comparative discourse on Finnish education by examining four popular mandarin books and vividly unfolded Chinese fascination towards this exotic educational and innovative utopia. Delegations from different parts of China flew to Finland and to find out the secret behind the success of Finnish education with the characteristics of “low intensity; egalitarian; intellectually liberating and student-centered, but nonetheless high-achieving” (Vickers & Zeng, 2017, p. 340). I was also attracted by this fascination and decided to get my master degree in Finland though didn’t know anything else about it but its top performance and equality in education.

The Finnish education export policy is another driver of the increase in delegation training program. Since 2010, the Country Brand Delegation of Finland “identified education one of the key assets of Finnish society” (Schatz, 2016, p. 394), Finland spares no effort to “offer Finnish educational know-how and learning solutions globally” through the national education export program - Education Finland². Regional efforts are also leaping out and

² http://www.eduexport.fi/web/futurelearningfinland
educational institutions, organisations and even individuals are getting into this new business area with different means and various goals. China has been identified as one of the most potential market areas for Finnish education exports, according to Business Finland and Team Finland\(^3\). Furthermore, Hölttä et al. (2009) suggested that training program for Chinese delegations should be seen not only as a business motive but also “a part of internationalisation, establishment of bilateral research, educational and diplomatic connections and creating personal and cultural contacts” (Ibid., p. 40).

### 2.2 Vocational education highlighted in China and as part of the education export strategy in Finland

In regard of vocational education in China, I would like to start by quoting Terry Woronov’s (2015) words from her great book *Class Work -- Vocational Schools and China's Urban Youth*:

> In July 2007, as I was preparing to leave for a year of fieldwork research in Nanjing, a friend in China, a professor at a major university, called. My friend reminded me that the Beijing Olympics were due to start in almost exactly a year (August 2008) and that the government was nervous about possible negative reporting and research about China... She then asked me to remind her what I was planning to study. There was a brief moment of silence. “Vocational schools? Really?” She laughed. “Well, you should be fine then. No one cares about them, so no one should pay much attention to you or your work.” (Ibid., p. 45)

It resonates with the feeling when I first learned that the visiting delegation is from vocational sphere. I almost forget the fact that we have a large portion of vocational school students, who are diverted from regular (or academic) education path either right after nine-year compulsive education or after senior secondary school. In China, vocational education is currently provided through separate secondary vocational schools (Vocational High Schools,

Specialized Secondary Schools and Skilled Workers’ Schools\(^4\)) and tertiary institutions (Higher Vocational Colleges). In reality, vocational Education is considered as a backup plan for students who “fail” two important exams: Senior Secondary School Entrance Exam (\textit{zhongkao}) at the end of ninth grade or University/College Entrance Exam (\textit{gaokao}) at the end of twelfth grade (see Figure 1). Furthermore, “population quality” (\textit{renkou suzhi}) has been highly emphasized and popularized since the late 1980s in China, in sync with the economic reforms and resonates with human capital theory of Western countries. Obviously, students in vocational education are seen as low quality by public. Therefore, less attention has been paid to and less resources have been allocated to vocational education compared with general education in such a meritocratic society.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{The contemporary organizational structure of education in China}
\hspace{1cm}Source: Guo & Lamb (2010, \ p. 19)
\hspace{1cm}Note: Blue-colored parts were added by researcher of this study.
\end{figure}

\(^4\) Skilled Worker’s Schools are under the administration of Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of People’s Republic of China (MoHRSS)
The invisible and less significant status of vocational education is even more startling if we take the portion of vocational students into consideration: MoE’s annually *National Statement of the education development in 2016* showed a 57.5:42.5 split between enrolments in the general and vocational tracks at senior secondary school level (MoE, 2017). Most students who are diverted into vocational tracks at senior secondary school level will enter job market directly and very few of them will enter Higher Vocational Colleges (HVCs). It is meanwhile important to note here that the proportion was achieved by aiming to hold down the national zhongkao pass rate to 50 per cent in every region, so as to restrict the number of students who are able to access regular senior secondary schools. Similar planning policy is used in setting the national gaokao cut off line to allocate the number of students in different levels and types of universities/colleges across China: HEIs providing four-year normal courses and offering bachelor’s degree programs, which are usually called Universities; HEIs providing two or three-year’s short-cycle courses with only (vocational education) diploma, which is usually called Higher Vocational Colleges. This is one of the last models of “planned economy” existing so far, which also helps to define the meaning and standard of “fail” in the important exams as mentioned above. Likewise, Vickers and Zeng (2017) argued that even under the urgent call of “created in China” to replace “made in China”, the challenge of changing national attitudes to vocational education would remain formidable and the well-rehearsed calls from different levels officials and academics appear to be far from sufficient to start the revolution in vocational education.

Nevertheless, vocational education has grown along with the expansion of general education yet lagged behind in development. The need for development has been stated in *Decision on Accelerating the Development of Modern Vocational Education* (State Council, 2014), announced on June 22, 2014, and then the *Thirteen Five Year (2016-2020) Plan on Education* (State Council, 2017) published on 19 January, 2017, in which government is calling for faster development of vocational education and enhancing international cooperation. Immediately, every provincial Department of Education and municipal Education Bureau started to implement the policies and decisions from the top to their own contexts. In response to “The Belt and Road” national strategies, Chinese vocational education has cooperated more widely and in depth with other countries and the cooperation will only be enhanced. In addition, vocational education is essential to the “Made in China 2025” plan in terms of
reforming the manufacturing sector and changing the reputation of “Made in China” products by training skilled technicians and enhancing international competitiveness. Looking abroad and finding proper solutions to improve vocational education was brought up to both national and provincial level of policy making and implementation agenda. Gradually, Finnish vocational education caught some Chinese educators’ attention thanks to its excellent results in PISA ranking.

Meanwhile, according to Education Finland website\(^5\), Finland believes that their expertise in high-quality vocational education can be transferred and localized to other countries so as to yield the best results. Team Finland contextualized it as one of the business opportunities in terms of its education export strategies to China:

Vocational education is the main highlight in China long term education plan, 50% of student will be going to senior middle vocational schools from junior middle schools. China is still in lack of vocational schools teaching competence, e.g. the vocational cyber safety schools, engineering schools. (Team Finland, 2017)

With these backgrounds, this study is focusing to explore how Chinese vocational educators compare Chinese and Finnish vocational education system practices during their stay in Finland. Therefore, it aims to provide more information to Finnish exporters in terms of vocational education in China and what are the real issues and needs of Chinese educators. It could also provide information for Chinese delegations and authorities who are planning visits to Finland for educational affairs in the future.

### 2.3 Chinese literature on vocational education reform and studies of vocational education in Finland

Professor Shi Weiping, the first doctoral supervisor of vocational and technical education in China, makes a lot of contribution to Chinese literatures in terms of calling for vocational education reform in China. In the paper, *International Comparative of Higher Vocational Education: Social Function and Social Status*, he concludes that Higher Vocational Education (HVE) in China should distinguish themselves with regular university education and find a new way out. Pragmatism, skillful and employability should be HVE’s main characteristics,\(^5\)

http://www.eduexport.fi/vocational-education-and-training
so as to improve HVE’s social status. He also argues that the function of HVE currently should rely on achieving the economic goals of the society, hence HVE should be primarily planned with economic development. He further suggests to expand HVE functions so as to reach more people but he also admit the challenges from curriculum design, teachers’ credentials etc. Therefore he points out the multi-investment strategy and calls for the active sponsorship from companies and industries since they are the direct beneficiaries of HVE (Shi, 2010). However, in another paper, *Comparative Study of Vocational Education System in the World*, Shi and Xu (2004) point out that, in terms of responsibility, Chinese companies normally have small size and high staff turnover, therefore, they are hardly attracted by vocational education in a long period (Ibid., p. 21).

In recent years, exploring the mission and diversion of vocational education under the current background of economic and social transformation in China becomes a new topic for Shi and his colleagues (Lin & Shi, 2015; Shi, 2014). On meso and micro level, they point out that leaders in vocational schools start to reflect what kind of people they want to cultivate through vocational education and how. They conclude that vocational education schools should clarify their talent training objectives, and must put people first other than continuing with the traditional concepts which are influenced by instrumentalism (Lin & Shi, 2015, p.90). In this study, they further highlight four vocational education research themes in China: 1) build the national vocational qualifications framework; 2) build the smooth transition between secondary vocational schools and HVCs; 3) promote the balanced development of vocational education and regional economy; and 4) develop the Bachelor level vocational education (Ibid., p. 91).

There have been some document-analysis based studies in Chinese literatures, exploring vocational education in Finland in recent years. Chen (2017) studies the Internationalisation of Finnish Vocational Education and Training with stakeholder theory and aims to find some inspiration from Finnish government, enterprises and schools. Even there is necessary support from industries and schools, Finnish government is leading the path to its Internationalisation from policies and administrations. Han and Zhang (2016) research on Finnish vocational education development from historical and present situation, as well as its tendency. Finnish initial school-based model of vocational education (Virolainen & Persson Thunqvist, 2017) is different from dual system model in many other European countries, like Germany,
Switzerland and Denmark. It is currently facing the challenges from the transitions to the real work life. “New occupations keep emerging and old ones disappear”, stated in their document Reform of vocational upper secondary education as of 1 January 2018 published by Ministry of Education and Culture (exact date of documentation is unavailable). Han and Zhang (2016) further look at the strategies taken by government in aspects of: 1) strength the connection between regular and vocational track; 2) enhance workplace learning; 3) pour in financial support from the state; and 4) improve the status of vocational education (Ibid., p.67). Liu and Zhou (2013) published a fabulous paper of quality management mandatory and voluntary mechanisms in Finnish vocational education. However, similar to observation and learning reports mentioned in Chapter 1.2, these research studies in general haven’t incorporated much comparative elements and hardly provide practical suggestions for reforms in China. We will also notice a space between research and practice when we get to Chapter 5, the findings part of this study.

2.4 Some characteristics of the delegation from Jiangxi province

This part consists of a short introduction of the province where the educators’ delegation come from in this study and some characteristics of this educational leadership team. It might also provide readers a general picture of leadership team in Chinese educational institutions.

2.4.1 Geographical inequality and mobility of the students in Jiangxi province

China has a long history of uneven regional distribution of resources and population due to its vast territory and special geographical features. Especially since the economic reform in 1978, the development inside China has grown much more uneven. According to National Statistical System and Classification Standards (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018), all the 26 provinces and 5 municipalities directly under the central government are categorized into eastern coastal, central inland, western and northeastern areas (See Table 1). The division reflects the society and economic development situation in each area. Among those, eastern coastal regions develop the fastest and western areas include provinces with large amount population of ethnic minorities, which develop the slowest. Central and northeastern regions are primarily relying on agriculture and develop much slower compared with coastal area (Liu, 2015).
Jiangxi is a rather poor inland province compared to its neighboring provinces. In 2016, GDP per capita of Jiangxi ranked 22 out of 31, which was below national GDP per capita. The state’s decentralisation policy in education allowed regional differentiation in investing and supporting education to be operated in a way that resulted in less resources in less privileged areas like inland and western areas. In addition, since Jiangxi is located in extreme proximity to some other richer provinces of China like Guangdong, Zhejiang, Fujian, it caused severe “brain drain” in Jiangxi. Graduates tend to look for job opportunities in coastal provinces.

Table 1 Categories of provinces and municipality directly under the central government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Provinces and Municipalities Directly Under the Central Government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Coastal</td>
<td>Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Shandong, Guangdong, Hainan,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Inland</td>
<td>Shanxi, Anhui, Jiangxi, Henan, Hubei, Hunan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>Inner Mongolia, Guangxi, Chongqing, Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, Tibet, Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, Xinjiang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeastern</td>
<td>Liaoning, Heilongjiang, Jilin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Blue: Eastern Coastal  
Green: Central Inland  
Purple: Western  
Magenta: Northeastern
2.4.2 The important role of Party members inside school leadership team

Understanding the characteristics and power relationship among (deputy) Secretaries of CPC Committee and (deputy) Principals of Schools can help us better understand how they look at Vocational Education in these two countries and what aspects they are comparing. Considering all the educators in the delegation are school/college (will use school to represent both from the next) leaders, and given that the structure of leadership is very special in China, especially very different with Finland, it is important to explain certain characteristics to the readers. One special situation is that Communist Party of China (CPC) Committee’s position should be included in almost every school leadership team. Take the HEIs for example, the leadership team is normally consisted of two sub-teams: CPC Committee team and Administration team. CPC Committee team is formed by Party Secretary, deputy Party Secretary and Secretary of Commission for Discipline Inspection; Administration team is formed by Principal, deputy Principal and Principal’s Assistant. There are normally 12 members in one leadership team, among those, 3-5 members come from CPC Committee and 7-9 members come from Administration team. Sometimes, one person can hold two deputy positions from each sub-team at the same time. CPC Committee is assuring of ideology correctness of the whole school.

“China may have poured billions into making its universities more globally competitive, but its idea of a quality education is guided more than ever by the Communist Party” (“China Steps Up Ideology,” 2017). In the past few years, Chinese government has tried many ways to deepen the education of socialist ideology and to increase propaganda efforts and it has been extended to schools and classrooms. Central Committee General Office and State Council General Office (2015) issued the “Opinion concerning Further Strengthening and Improving Propaganda and Ideology Work in Higher Education Under New Circumstances”, which aimed at imposing strict political discipline and control in China’s academia. By doing so, Secretary of CPC Committee is highly empowered by CPC in order to win the battlefield in ideological work. The “Opinion” stresses that Party leadership must be strengthened over higher education propaganda and ideology work and the “Opinion” continues that:

[…] higher education Party Committees must strengthen their political responsibility and leadership responsibility, Party Committee secretaries and heads of schools must stand in the first line of ideological work with clear banners flying, fully give rein to
the leading core role of higher education Party Committees, persist in and perfect head of school responsibility systems under the leadership of Party Committees [...] (Ibid., 2015, R. Creemers, Trans.)

2.4.3 Situation of women leaders in Chinese educational institutions

There are very limited researches discussing about female leadership in China, and it also applies to educational institutions (Wang & Shirmohammadi, 2016). Wang, Yu and Yue (2014) drew the personas of female leadership in the top administrative leadership team of 38 Project 985 universities through the research of their CVs in 2013, and summarized the features as “being aged, high academic and education background, low leadership percentage, more deputy position, more party leadership and dominated by internal promotion”. If we take a deeper look into their study:

- There were 448 members in top leadership team in Project 985 Universities in 2013; among those, there were only 45 women, which was less than 10%.
- The normal size of top leadership team of each school was about 10-13 members, among those, there were only 1-2 women. In 8 top leadership teams, there wasn’t any woman.
- Among 42 women top leaders, the average age was 54.62. The average age of women who were holding the chief position (Principal or Secretary of Party Committee) was 62, whereas according to “A study of Principals in 1792 Chinese Universities” conducted by Renmin University of China in 2007, the average age of chief principals in China was 52. This study also found that the percentage of female principals is only 4.5%.
- Among 42 women leaders, only 5 of them held chief positions and the rest held deputy positions.

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6 Project 985 (Chinese: 985工程; pinyin: 985 gōng chéng) is a project that was first announced by CPC General secretary and Chinese President Jiang Zemin at the 100th anniversary of Peking University on May 4, 1998 to promote the development and reputation of the Chinese higher education system by founding world-class universities in the 21st century and eponymous after the date of the announcement, May 1998, or 98/5, according to the Chinese date format. There are 39 universities sponsored by Project 985. Due to the specialties of National University of Defense Technology, this university wasn’t included into this study.

7 Three women leaders’ information wasn’t disclosed in public; hence they were not included in some of the findings.
There is one more data which equally deserves our attention: according to China Education Yearbook of 2015 (MoE, 2017), there are 2,271,084 teachers and staff in higher education institutions across China; among those, 1,073,900 (47.29%) are women. If we compare the percentage of women staff in general with the percentage of women in top administrative leadership team in the study discussed above, it won’t be difficult to find out that women leadership in higher education sectors in China lags a lot compare to men. With this background in mind, we won’t be very surprised to find the apparent gender imbalance within this delegation team from Jiangxi province. As I have mentioned in Chapter 1.1, among the participants there were three females and seventeen males.
3 Main Theories and Concepts in Comparative Education

To compare is one of the most basic behavior of human beings. We construct the meaning of things from comparing one to another without even realizing it. We compare present with the past to draw the picture of future. We compare with what they have heard or seen. With the process of globalisation, almost every corner of the globe is included into comparison. Furthermore, the easy mobility makes every traveler become an active agency for comparison. Today internet creates a space for people who are capable of writing their comparative findings immediately and presently. In his paper *Africa in Theory*, Mbembe (2017) further points out an emerging group of practices are “those that are able to locate themselves in nodes that attract other texts, and forms of discourses that have the potential to be forwarded, redistributed, quoted, and translated in other languages and texts, including video and audio” (Ibid., p. 217). This is stated when Mbembe describes the process of the displacement or the death of theory in modern society. It is very challenging in front of this kind of theory displacement but it is also a reminder that, as a responsible researcher, we should build our knowledge on the top of the existing theories. This chapter will discuss some important theories and concepts in related to comparative education, which can also help us explore the comparisons made by participants in this research.

3.1 Actors and purposes in comparative education

Bray (2007) categorizes the people who undertake comparative studies of education into five groups: parents, practitioners, policy makers, international agencies and academics. Parents normally make the comparison of schools which will serve them and their children’s needs most. Under the current globalisation background, when mobility becomes “normal” for some parents, comparing different systems of education also becomes one part of parents’ focus. However, the purpose is very practical and confined to their own benefits. Practitioners, including school principals and teachers, compare so as to improve the operation and efficiency of their own institutions and classes, which is also very practical. Policy makers in each country observe and evaluate education systems and practices elsewhere in order to identify the ‘borrowable’ models which can be applied to their own contexts with or without adaption. Comparisons here are expected and often used to justify their own social, economic
and political agenda of the future or past decisions. International agencies, like the World Bank and OECD, make the comparisons by developing different types of ranking system so as to show the differences among education systems, which can support their advices to national governments or others. Academics make the comparisons in order to understand different education phenomenon, systems and processes. More importantly, understand the reasons behind different settings and the impacts which may cause to the whole social development. However, it is hard to separate academics with international agencies or ever policy makers. It depends on whom the academics are working with or for.

In this study, the participants undertake two important roles. Firstly, they are school leaders, hence they make comparisons of what they have learned during the training program with their own institutions and practices. Secondly, they are delegated by Provincial Department of Education and have the obligation to report back so as to support future policy making and improvement in their province. Therefore, they also make the comparisons by examining Finnish education systems in order to identify good references for their own settings. Meanwhile, me, a beginner level academic, using the ‘academic paradigm’ to explore the comparisons made by the delegation.

3.2 Main aspects in comparative education

Bray and Thomas’s (1995, as cited in Bray, Adamson and Mason, 2007) framework (see Figure 2) has been extensively cited and it also provides a multi-dimensional structure for this study to sort, summarize and further discuss the data. With regard to Geographic/Locational level, countries, provinces as well as participants’ schools level were taken into consideration. There were not a lot of comparisons made with reference to Nonlocational Demographic Groups. Overall, this study focuses on vocational education, in which the students are about 16-24 years old or even younger in Chinese context. Most comparisons in this study were made from the aspects of education and of society. Two aspects which are not directly pointed out in this dimension are culture and values. The teaching and learning practice relates highly to the contents of cultural and social values, which can be found in almost every discipline. Especially in the form of overseas training program, participants are observing and learning in a different country, society and education system. They also get chance to visit local farmers and interact with local people, and go around the city almost every day. The observation,
(even it is very short term, less than three weeks) is undertaken in a context that is unfamiliar to the participants, hence, comparisons of culture and how the values shape the society are inevitable. Considering all this, I made some adjustments on the third dimension of the framework and in the end I decided to discuss from: 1) culture and values, 2) education system (correspond to Educational Finance, Management Structures and Political Changes in Bray & Thomas’s framework), 3) curriculum and content (in response to Curriculum and Teaching methods), and 4) linkage to work life (in response to Labour Market).

Figure 2 A Framework for Comparative Education Analyses

Sources: Bray & Thomas’s (1995) study, as cited in Bray et al., 2007

3.2.1 Cultures and values

Mason (2007) points out the challenges researcher face when comparing education across cultures. He first leads us to two definitions of culture that are very popular among social scientists: Williams (1985) defines culture as “a particular way of life”; whereas Bocock (1992) thinks that culture is “the set of practices by which meanings are produced and exchanged within a group” (as cited in Mason, 2007, p. 172-173). “Practices” in the second definition rely on language as well as other materialistic objects. People within a particular culture construct the terms or symbols, which give a different meaning to people who share that culture and another meaning to people who do not share it. In short, the second definition
understands culture in terms of what it does while the first one defines what it is. Mason (2007) further lays stress on “National Culture” and cites Hall’s (1994) statement that national culture as a discourse means – “a way of constructing means which influences and organized both our actions and our conceptions of ourselves” (Ibid., p. 174). The current process of globalisation is also highly emphasized when understanding “National Culture”.

After clarifying the definitions, Mason (2007) points out that the most important consideration when comparing education across cultures is: “what is the cultural context that produces the educational institutions and practices under study” (Ibid., p. 180). To answer this, a wider context which is associated with increasing globalisation is suggested in this Chapter. In addition to that, how researchers could make sure that “the temporal slice that they have selected is indeed representative of cultural patterns in the longer term” is also brought into focus (Ibid., p. 193). In terms of the other considerations that how researchers can gain knowledge they need about that contexts: critical theory is suggested; researchers’ own ethic and values are reminded; and more importantly, researchers should remember that comparative research is more of a field than a discipline. Tobin et al. (1989) remind us to bear in mind that researchers need to do more than “privilege those contexts that insiders in each culture see as being important” (as cited in Mason, 2007, p. 195). In the end of this chapter, Mason (2007) concludes that it is the emancipatory cognitive interest that leads comparison across cultures to the end of educational equity.

Lee (2007) discusses the varied methodological emphases in comparatives of values across different countries. Comparative researchers are encouraged to inquiry themselves that what we should examine when we compare values education:

- What are the preferred values in society?
- What are the interactions between personal values and society values?
- Why are particular values emphasised (and very often understood in terms cultural tradition and social changes)?
- What explanation tools can be adopted to understand these scenarios in terms of theorization?
- How are these values disseminated in the education system?
• Is there a gap in policy (in terms of values espoused by policy makers) and implementation (in terms of values held by individuals, such as students and teachers, and the school)? (Ibid., p. 210)

It should be noted that “values education” is different to the “the value of education”. The second concept is mainly discussed from the economic point of view, especially when “rates of return” was introduced into educational research. It is also to be noted that culture and values are often confused when people discuss about their relationship with education. They are interrelated with each other but different. As we have discussed above that culture is a collection of practices and interactions within a group that make the society. Values could be divided into personal perspective and collective perspective. In education, Nucci (1989) argues that personal perspective values aim to cultivate students’ moral and character development through values education, whereas Cheng (1997), Lee (1997) and Beck (1998) argue that collective perspective values tend to focus on more on religions and ideologies (as cited in Lee, 2007, p. 197). The definition and differences between culture and values will guide us to discuss about the findings in the last chapter.

3.2.2 Education systems

Bray and Jiang (2007) state that there are so many comparative works to make the comparisons of education systems on locational levels and they felt justified to use the word “system” and took it as a self-evident concept, particularly gave prominence to nation-state level; but few “explored the conceptual boundaries of those national education systems or investigated the extent to which other systems coexisted within and across national boundaries” (Ibid., p. 124). They further point out that some languages like Chinese, have different words which can be translated as “system” (Ibid., p. 125):

• jiaoyu zhidu covers all kinds of educational institutions, including both the schooling system and the government institutions that administer schooling, and stresses the institutional aspect;
• jiaoyu tizhi means the system through which educational institutions are organized and controlled;
• jiaoyu xitong means an arrangement in which various component parts are linked together; and
• Jiaoyu tixi is similar to jiaoyu xitong but stress the structural rather than the institutional aspect.

In Bray and Jiang’s study, they choose jiaoyu xitong in response to what “system” means in English context. By citing Archer’s (1979) study in her book Social Origins of Educational Systems, they define state education system as:

A nationwide and differentiated collection of institutions devoted to formal education, whose overall control and supervision is at least partly governmental, and whose component parts and processes are related to one another (Ibid., p. 126).

However, in this study, combining with the Chinese phases corresponding to “system” listed above, I decided to adopt three dimensions in terms of comparing education systems:

• jiaoyu zhidu – Policy and Regulations, which underpin and direct the values and norms of the society.
• jiaoyu tizhi – Administration and Finance, which is determined by zhidu and representing the implementation of zhidu. Assigning and recruiting teaching and administrative staff is another important part of tizhi in China. tizhi nei (inside system) means people who are organized and controlled by tizhi, whereas tizhi wai (outside system) refers to people who work in educational institutions but not part of the tizhi.
• jiaoyu tixi – Structure, as well as student quality which is defined and constrained by the structure.

The title of Sadler’s (1900) oft-cited address was: “How far can we learn anything of practical value from the study of foreign systems of education?” However, before answering “how far” we should also know why humans are so attentive to compare education systems across countries. Bray and Jiang (2007) answer it by explaining to us that since the beginning of 19th century, education gradually serves as a tool to improve the national strength. However, Wielemans (1997) and Mitter (2004) argue that some scholars think the current trend of globalisation is eroding the nation’s role (as cited in Bray & Jiang, 2007) in education, to which I disagree. Taking OECD’s PISA for example, it’s actually reinforcing the impact of nation-states in providing national education systems.
Being influenced by “societal” approach, many comparative researchers stress on examining education systems in the contexts of labour market, politics and cultures. It resonates with Sadler’s concern that how far we can practically borrow from another system. Simply copying education system from one nation to another is doomed to fail. However, Raffe et al. (1999) also remind researchers to draw some attention to the structural similarities of system (as cited in Bray & Jiang, 2007). To draw a line between similarities and differences, comparative education researchers should have a broad view of education systems and the societies they are surrounded.

3.2.3 Curriculum and contents

The concept of curriculum and contents is very complicated and dynamic. But it is so important that it easily gets attentions from a broad range of stakeholders. Most of the comparisons of curriculum and contents are implemented for utilitarian purpose. It is related to what is the goal of education, what is taught in school, what skills students acquire especially in the context of vocational education and so on. Adamson and Morris (2007, p. 266) point out that “the various conceptions of curriculum are shaped by social ideologies that are underpinned by normative views and beliefs about the desired role of schooling in society, the nature of knowledge and learning, and the roles of teachers and learners”. They further categorize the social ideologies in six parts:

- **Academic rationalism.** To enhance learner’s intellectual capabilities and cognitive skills, and to teach them how to learn.
- **Social and economic efficiency.** To provide for the current and future human capital needs of a society.
- **Social reconstructionism.** The curriculum serves as an agent for social reform, changes and criticism.
- **Orthodoxy.** To induct learners into a particular religious or political orthodoxy.
- **Progressivism.** To provide learners with opportunities for enhancing their personal and intellectual development.
- **Cognitive pluralism.** To provide a wide range of competencies and attitudes (Ibid., p. 267).
In the current globalized and diverse society, curriculum could probably be influenced by more than one ideologies even they seem to be exclusive to each other. Particularly, when we are talking about vocational education curriculum, which is preparing students ready to work, Social and economic efficiency should no doubt be included. That’s also why the curriculum and content often contain tensions and the reforms of them tends to be extremely slow, especially compared with the rapid development of the society. Comparisons of curriculum and content are normally done within evaluative, interpretative or critical perspectives (Adamson & Morris, 2007, p. 271). Evaluative perspective is normally adopted to support the suggestions of curriculum reform; interpretive perspective is primarily used to understand how curriculum reflect societies’ cultures, while critical perspective is mainly relying on theoretical framework such as postcolonial, feminist, or equity.

Since practical working competence is indeed needed in vocational education, on-the-job training and the cooperation with companies are essential when making the comparison of vocational education curriculum and content. Especially the connection between schools and industries, to a large extent determines the quality of vocational education. Besides, teachers are the main force to implement curriculum and deliver the content and learning experience in both theoretical and practical parts. Teachers and teaching methods therefore deserve researchers’ attention when comparing vocational education curriculum implementation.

3.2.4 Linkage to work life

Saar, Unt and Kogan (2008) state that there are two institutions greatly influencing the linkage between school and work life: education system and labour market (cited the study of Kerckhoff, 2000; Müller, 2005). Among all the dimensions of education system, the vocational education particularity shapes the characteristics and structure of labour market. It is further stated by Saar et al. that, in terms of “providing standardized and specific vocational qualifications of immediate and clear labour market value to prospective employers” (Ibid., p. 32), the more successful education systems are in doing so, the more employers will use education as signals to recruit human resources, other than relying on relationship or experience. In this regard, Marsden (1990) divides labour market into internal labour markets (ILM) and occupational labour markets (OLM) (as cited in Saar et al., 2008). OLM rely on the tracks of vocational education and training whereas in ILM, recruiting and training
workforce is still undertaken by individual companies. Further it has been argued that stricter labour market regulations have positive effects on both employer’s decision making of hiring workers and students’ transitions from school to work life. However, studies also find out rigid employment protection have a negative effect on school-leavers’ labour market outcomes. In regard of this, Saar et al. point out that if vocational education and training teaches specific skills and incorporate a strong work-based learning, it will offset the negative effects from employment protection and prevent youth unemployment. On contrary, Scherer (2005) points out that low employment protection seems to benefit school-leavers’ first entry but it comes along with a higher career instability (as cited in Saar et al., 2008).

Likewise, we shouldn’t forget to define the extent of the labour market when we compare. Is it proper that we only look at the labour market in the reginal and local economy? Should we extend to national economy even global economy? Is there a standard regulating the specific labour market we are looking at? Who made the standard and shall we follow the existing standard? To what extent of the labour market we decide to linkage our vocation education and training with? All the questions should be kept in mind by the vocational education leaderships.

3.3 Ethical leadership in comparative education

Given that participants in this research are leaders who hold high position in their own schools, some of them are even top leaders (yibashou), and “difficulty with decision-making” often came out in our conversations, “ethical leadership” is therefore adopted here to study vocational education situation in China and potential cooperation with Finland. In their book Ethical leadership and decision making in education: Applying theoretical perspectives to complex dilemmas, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2010, p. 3) start with citing Foster’s (1986) important statement that “each administrative decision carries with it a restructuring of human life: that is why administration as its heart is the resolution of moral dilemmas”. The current society is full of complexities and diversities, no matter at the local and national level, or at the global level. Educators are making the decisions almost every minute. There is a confluence of factors that may influence the decision making. Some decisions are made subconsciously with pre-conception, experiences and common values shared within the community. Some decisions have to be made in a paradoxical and ethically polarized
situation. In this situation, how to make the wise decision is very important. Besides, the ethical guidance for wise decision making is also a useful instrument for educators to reflect on those decisions made subconsciously.

In their book, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2010) introduce four paradigms for ethical decisions making: “the ethics of justice, critique, care and profession” (Ibid., p. 6). Combining two or more paradigms to solve real-life dilemmas is further suggested by authors, which in fact encourages educational leaders’ to go beyond themselves so as to understand the others and think differently and broadly.

Ethic of justice focuses on law and rights that are normally defined by nations, in which governments are committed to certain fundamental principles. Take China for example, there are Four Cardinal Principles: the principle of upholding the socialist path; the principle of upholding the people's democratic dictatorship; the principle of upholding the leadership of the CPC, and the principle of upholding Mao Zedong Thought and Marxism-Leninism. Educational leaders can and should refer to laws and public policies which are guided by those principles for ethical guidance in their real-life decision making (Beck & Murphy’s study, 1994b, as cited in Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2010).

However, not all the researchers are convinced that laws and the process to make laws are just and fair, hence ethic of critique is raised up by many of them. Supporters of ethic of critiques aim to awaken us from our taken-for-granted values and force us to rethink many important concepts such as democracy, privilege and power. Ethic of critique stands up on critical theory and approaches the society from the perspectives of social class and inequalities. An example would be Bourdieu’s study, that schools reproduce social and cultural inequalities. Critical pedagogy is also adopted into ethic of critique. Giroux (1991) reminds us that ethic is a “social discourse grounded in struggles that refuse to accept needless human suffering and exploitation” (as cited in Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2010, p. 14). He further advocates to create “language of possibility” in schools to fend off reproducing the society. Ethic of critique is fundamentally calling for the awareness and actions towards the inequality in the society and schools.
Martin (1993) argues that “there is a hierarchy of value that places the productive processes of society and their associated traits above society’s reproductive processes and the associated traits of care and nurturance” (as cited in Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2010, p. 16). Ethic of care was called upon when researchers started to notice this hierarchy and aim to create a new educational hierarchy and place “care” on the top rather than merely focusing on students’ achievement by treating them as “pawns in a nation of demanding and uncaring adults” (Ibid., p. 16). What also interested me is that ethic of care was brought up by some feminist scholars when they were challenging the dominant hierarchy of value, which was considered to be often patriarchal (Ibid., p. 16). As a Chinese reading this part, my first impression was that Chinese educators must do a good job in terms of the ethic of care, because care could be linked into ren (仁), a deeply rooted Confucius concept to educators, meaning “human-heartedness or love” (study of Gao & Watkins 2001; Jin & Cortazzi 1998, as cited in Watkins, 2007, p. 311). However, Beck (1994) further emphasizes that “it is essential for educational leaders to move away from a top-down, hierarchical model for making moral and other decisions and, instead, to turn to a leadership style that emphasizes relationships and connections” (as cited in Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2010, p. 18). In reality and in general, China still keeps its top to bottom relationships with a strict hierarchy.

Shapiro & Stefkovich (2010) lay more stress on ethic of profession since it is a relatively new paradigm developed by themselves. They point out that professional ethics is “a dynamic process requiring administrators to develop their own personal and professional codes” (Ibid., p. 22). In the process of developing it, educational leaders should “make the well-being of students the fundamental value of all decision making and actions” (Ibid., p. 25). They should also go beyond the ethics of justice, critique and care, and inquiry themselves:

What should be the profession expect me to do? What does the community expect me to do? And what should I do based on the best interests of the students, who may be diverse in their composition and their needs? (Ibid., p. 27)

“The best interests of the students” is a very challenging and vague concept to me, as to many other researchers. Rights, responsibility, and respect were suggested in the book to guide the educational leaders in terms of achieving it. A vivid diagrammatic representation of the ethic of the profession (shown in Figure 3) was made by the authors of the book. Those factors in
the figure interact and overlap with each other, and act on the process of developing ethic of profession.

![Diagram showing the interaction and overlap of different codes and standards related to ethics and professional judgment.](image)

**Figure 3** A diagrammatic representation of the ethic of the profession

*Source: Shapiro and Stefkovich (2010, p. 26)*

Discussing about ethical leadership here doesn’t aim to compare how it is in China and Finland. Educational leaders are the key actors in making comparison during the training program and they will also be the key actors responsible for action for change and reforms after they are back to China. Understanding their ethical dilemma in making comparison and deciding which could be borrowed from Finland and which couldn’t, helps to answer the research questions of this study and shed lights on further steps of cooperation between China and Finland.
4 Methodology

Picciano (2004) in his *Educational Research Primer* defined that qualitative research relies on “meanings, concepts, context, descriptions and settings” (p. 32) in order to “describe and interpret” a certain researched phenomenon in its natural settings. Researchers who use qualitative methods are often called naturalists (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Qualitative researchers believe, the more natural it is, the more they know what research participants know (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). But things often go beyond those natural settings. Qualitative data relies on participants as well as researcher’s interpretation. In addition, it also relies on the interactions between the researcher and participants. Hence, objectivity from both the participants and the researchers themselves is often challenged in qualitative research (Fairbrother, 2007). However, unlike quantitative researches, qualitative research is not aiming to seek general explanatory laws but focusing on a deeply contextualized settings with certain time and space boundaries, in which they expect to capture the “interpretive and empathetic” (Ibid., p. 43) understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of participants or so-called research subjects. Furthermore, qualitative research looks to capture the meanings and values which were given by research subjects to their own particular settings. Given the adherence to the research subjects’ perspectives and values, the approaches to collect data are usually characterized by “openness, flexibility and a lack of structure” (Ibid., p. 43). Additionally, the analysis of the data is indicated as “inductive and exploratory” (Ibid., p. 43) and the exploratory and descriptive characteristics extend to report and present the research findings. It should also be noted that “the discovery, formulation and testing of ‘grounded’ theoretical explanations” are adopted in the whole process of data collection and analysis in qualitative research (Ibid., p. 44).

This qualitative study aims to explore how Chinese educators compare Chinese and Finnish vocational education practices during their training program in Finland. Therefore, I chose to interview the delegation so as to collect data about their background and the comparisons they made during their stay in Finland. Analysing data is concerned with understanding the social and cultural factors that produced the aspects based on which they made the comparison. Furthermore, a critical analysis will then be adopted to examine the assumptions and effects of their comparison and how this training program provided by Finnish education institutions
served delegation’s way of compare. Qualitative research in any case is a scientific research and as such, proper method must be carefully selected and the data should be collected in an as natural as possible way and must be analyzed as robust as possible.

4.1 Case study as the qualitative research strategy of this study

Stake (2005) argues that case study is a choice of what to be studied. Yet, I agree more with Creswell’s (2013, p. 97) statement that case study is more than a choice, but a methodology, a strategy of inquiry, a qualitative approach, in which researcher “explores a real-life, […] a case […] over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case themes”. I got to know Jiangxi delegation’s training program right after the Sino-fin educational forum at the end of September 2017, which I have stated at the beginning of this study. Writing my master’s thesis research from the coming delegation’s training program in order to answer the last point of my reflection [that it is important to know how much principals learned from this forum, how they compare education in these two countries and whether the forum matches their expectations and cost] corresponds to the definition of instrumental case, which explains the intent of conducting this case study, according to Creswell (2013, p. 98).

Creswell (2013, p. 98-99) further explains that case study is featured with: the identification of a specific case, an in-depth understanding of the case, a description of the case and the themes that the found while studying the case. In this study, the case was a specific case bounded by time and place (21 days training in Finland, in which 17 days happened in Oulu when research closely joined the delegation’s activities). The researcher’s observation and extensive interviewing of the participants through the whole program provided much first-hand information in order to make an in-depth understanding of the case. In the final analysis and interpretive phase, the researcher will describe the settings of the specific case and explain the lessons learned from the case.

Stephens (2009, p. 47) states that, in terms of international settings of the research, case study provides an opportunity in maximizing the cultural and contextual realities ‘embedded’ in the settings, which predisposes researcher to explore as far as possible in natural settings so as to produce deep and complex analysis. In another words, the bounded nature of the cases creates
a ‘meaningful world’ which constitutes the natural setting of the research. The philosophy behind this statement also applies to this master’s thesis study: applying the case study to explore how the delegation compares.

The problem of generalizability of case study is often challenged. To address this, Simon’s (1996) study was cited by Stephen (2009, p. 48) to welcome the paradox of case study:

One of the advantages cited for case study research is its uniqueness, its capacity for understanding complexity in particular contexts. A corresponding disadvantage often cited is the difficulty of generalising from a single case. Such an observation assumes a polarity and stems from a particular view of research. Looked at differently, from within a holistic perspective and direct perception, there is no disjunction. What we have is a paradox, which if acknowledged and explores in depth, yields both unique and universal understanding.

[We need to] embrace the paradoxes inherent in the people, events and sites we study and explore rather try to resolve the tensions embedded in them… Paradox for me is the point of case study. Living with paradox is crucial to understanding. The tension between the study of the unique and the need to generalise is necessary to reveal both the unique and the universal and the unity of that understanding. To live with ambiguity, to challenge certainty, to creatively encounter is to arrive, eventually, at ‘seeing’ anew.

4.2 Data collection using qualitative interview

Somekh and Lewin (2011) condensed the definition of research into one sentence that “research is about the generation of public knowledge through systematic – and often private – processes” (p. 33). In this study, qualitative interview was chosen as a systematic and private approach to collect data for further analysis. Miller and Glassner (2004, p. 126) argue through their highly cited study The ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’: Finding realities in interviews that researchers have the ability to capture the information about social worlds through in-depth interviewing. Silverman (2001) argues that interview subjects construct not only narratives, but also social worlds (as cited in Miller & Glassner, 2004, p. 126), since narratives come from the real worlds which exist outside of interview. Additionally, interview
provides researchers with a means to explore the points of view of their research subjects. Researchers who choose interactive research approach like interviews hold a belief that “people create and maintain meaningful worlds” (Ibid., p. 129) whether we interview them or not and researchers choose to study “what is said in that discussion” (Glassner & Loughlin’s study 1987, as cited in Miller & Glassner, 2004, p. 129).

When Alasuutari (1995) describes his interviewing activity, he characterizes it as a “study of the recorded interaction situations in their entirety” (as cited in Stephen, 2009, p. 93). ‘Interaction perspective’ is highly emphasised in his approach of conducting interview. Hitchcock and Hughes (2002) echo this view when they remind us that: “interviewers and respondents have identities. They have perceptions of themselves and each other […] there is always a context to be taken into account” (as cited in Stephen, 2009, p. 93). Researcher him or herself as the key instrument in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013) is also crucial in terms of data collection procedure. Miller and Glassner (2004) argue that the role of researcher who facilitate the interview interaction should be visible, real and historical individual “with concrete, specific desires and interests” (Ibid., p. 129). Similarly, it should be taken into account that the identity of researchers – their lives, social categories – influences how the interviewees respond to the questions. At the same time, Bryman (1988) reminds us that qualitative researchers should try to avoid imposing their own “preconceived structure and predetermined notions” on their participants in the research (as cited in Fairbrother, 2007, p. 43). Rubin and Rubin (2011) also state in their book Qualitative Interviewing: the art of hearing data that, researchers cannot wipe away their experiences and expectations and it is impossible and not desirable to eliminate researcher’s biases or expectations, however, researchers should always be aware of “how their expectations affect what they see and hear” in interviews (Ibid., p. 16).

Both the philosophy and strategies behind interviews in qualitative research mentioned above were taken into consideration when designing and conducting the interviews for this study. It is also worth mentioning that the role of researcher is very special in this interview settings. All the members in this Jiangxi delegation team are leaders who hold high position in their own vocational schools. Me, the researcher of this study, is a master’s degree student in Education and Globalisation in Finland, who has little knowledge about vocational education in China, not to mention in Jiangxi province. If there was not this great opportunity as well as
my great honor to work as one of the interpreters therefore engaging myself with all the participants during both weekday and weekend activities in Oulu [the delegation spent the last three days in participating lectures at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki, where I didn’t follow them], I would have had no chance to interact with them in normal settings, not even interviewing them about how they compare vocational education between Finland and China. But in the meantime, my “ignorance” in vocational education and more importantly my enthusiasm in education, especially equality and quality education situation in China, helped to create a great and natural atmosphere of interaction and communication with these top position leadership educators. Besides, my study place in a foreign country provided an invisible trust for the participants to go deeper in the interview. In the whole research process, I positioned myself as an eager learner with a special lens which was borrowed from this groups of educators, to look at Finnish education, mainly vocational education under the arrangement of different Finnish institutions. This resonates with Rubin and Rubin’s (2011) argument that, “researchers explore in detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other their own” through interviews (Ibid., p. 3).

4.3 The procedure of data collection

I first received the permission to interview the delegation team from project manager of Liilak during our first meeting. As I have explained in the introduction part, when the training organizer is a university, the sending organizer in China should entrust a local travel agency to arrange the trip for delegation (Hölttä et al., 2009). In this circumstance, Liilak was the local Finnish company who arranged this training program for Chinese delegation of educators. Project manager of this training is Chinese person who has settled down in Oulu for more than ten years. She suggested me to conduct the interview as a temporary internship of their company and I agreed.

The original plan of collecting data also included sending emails to all the participants and asking: what are the current issues in vocational education in Jiangxi, which pushed the delegation of educators to attend the oversea training programs and what are their expectations from this training program. However, I didn’t get their contact information from Liilak beforehand so I decided to ask it as my first question during the interview. In the book *Comparative and International Education*, Phillips and Schweisfurth (2014) list out the
impulses which compose the cross-national attraction as follows: “Internal dissatisfaction; Systemic collapse; Negative external evaluation; Economic change/completion; Political and other imperatives; Novel configurations; Knowledge/skills; Innovation; Political change” (Ibid., p. 49). To understand the current issues in China from participants’ point of view is the first stage of understanding how they compare. It also helps to “underline the importance of context in comparative inquiry” (Ibid., p. 48).

The timing to ask for interview permission from participants happened after their first week’s study. By that time, the delegation had finished three days training organized by TOPIK and started their training and visiting in OUAS. I noticed that they started to form their own understanding of education in Finland and also started to relate more and more what they saw and heard to China. More importantly, I had developed “a trusting personal relationship” (Rubin & Rubin, 2011, p. 6) with them by attending as many training sessions as I could, working as an assistant in their evening or weekend activities, and even being invited to join their dinners occasionally. After I presented the motivation of my master’s thesis research plan and asked for the interview possibilities, the head of the delegation gave the permission and replied: “You can interview anyone in this group”. Immediately, others agreed to attend my interview as long as I could arrange the time with them in their free time.

Due to their very limited free time, I could only interview 17 participants and there was one time I interviewed 2 participants at the same time. I used my phone to record and due to the technological problem, I lost one interview record. Hence, in the end, I have 15 interviews which cover perceptions of 16 participants. Interviews were scheduled in the evening after they finished dinner. I chose a quiet corner at the hotel lobby where they stayed as my normal interview place. The half public and half private sense of interview place provided enough space for participants to recall their experiences and explain perspective. It also was a space for me to present my research questions and more importantly to listen. Each interview lasted 30-60 mins. Interviews were conducted in Chinese. I adopted semi-structured way of interview. Rubin and Rubin (2011) termed this form of interview as conversational partnership, in which researcher customized questions to each interview, in response both to what the participant knows and to the topics which the participant feels most comfortable to discuss. The interview questions in this research included but were not limited to:
1) What are the current issues in vocational education in China, if more specifically in Jiangxi?
2) How much did you know about Finnish Education before this visit and what do you expect from this training program?
3) How do you compare vocational education between these two different countries, if more specifically, between Finland and Jiangxi?
4) Can you list some takeaways from this training program?
5) Which parts do you think need to be improved in this training program?
6) What else has impressed you most during this trip so far?

4.4 Profile of research participants

As I have mentioned above, I had 15 interviews that cover perceptions from 16 participants (see Table 2). In the table, the specialization under “School Profile” column is used to present a general idea of what sections they are specialized in respectively. In fact, all the colleges/schools try to open as many related major programs as they can so that they can recruit more students. The reasons for recruiting more students will be explained in Chapter 5.1.3 when we analyze the interview data. The administrative information under school profile is used to give a general idea about how complicated vocational education system is. The history of changing administration of those colleges/schools are much more complicated than it could be seen here, but it is not this study’s focus.

The positions participants holding are also listed out since leadership is one of the main concepts in this study. It could also help to understand why different participants had different emphasis and concerns in their comparisons.

Table 2 Profile of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>School Profile</th>
<th>Position in College/School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 1</td>
<td>Higher Vocational College (HVC), specialized in nurse and healthcare, under</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Female)</td>
<td>municipal government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 2</td>
<td>HVC, specialized in Industrial engineering, under provincial education department</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 3</td>
<td>HVC, specialized in textile industrial engineering, under provincial State-owned</td>
<td>Deputy-Principal, member of the Party committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 4</td>
<td>HVC, specialized in machinery manufacturing, under provincial education government</td>
<td>Deputy-Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 5</td>
<td>HVC, specialized in medicine, under provincial government</td>
<td>Deputy-Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 6</td>
<td>HVC, specialized in tourism business, under provincial government</td>
<td>Deputy-Principal, member of the Party committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 7 (Female)</td>
<td>Secondary Vocational School, specialized in mining engineering, under provincial education department and geology and mineral department</td>
<td>Deputy Principal, Secretary of Party Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 8</td>
<td>HVC, specialized in ceramics and art, under provincial education government</td>
<td>Deputy Principal Secretary of Commission for Discipline Inspection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 9</td>
<td>HVC, specialized in mining engineering, under provincial Land &amp; Resources Department</td>
<td>Head of ICT Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 10</td>
<td>Secondary Vocational School, under provincial education department</td>
<td>Deputy Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 11A and 11B</td>
<td>Both are Secondary Vocational Schools A’s school is under provincial agriculture department B’s school is under provincial statistic department</td>
<td>A: Deputy-Principal, member of the Party committee; B: Deputy-Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 12</td>
<td>Secondary Vocational school, under county government</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 13 (female)</td>
<td>HVC, comprehensive, under provincial food department</td>
<td>Deputy-Principal, member of the Party committee, Labour Union Chairman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 14</td>
<td>HVC, specialized in teacher education, under provincial education department</td>
<td>Deputy Principal, member of the Party committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 15</td>
<td>HVC, specialized in ICT, under provincial government</td>
<td>Principal, Secretary of Party Committee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Some higher vocational colleges (HVCs) also recruit students who just finished junior secondary schools. Students can choose to study 3 years and graduate at Upper-secondary vocational school level, or study a special 3+2 years program in order to get the diploma which is equivalent to normal college level.
4.5 Analysing the data – Finding the meaning

Data analysis is the process of moving from raw interviews to evidence-based interpretations that are the foundation for published reports. Analysis entails classifying, comparing, weighing, and combining material from interviews to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal patterns, or to stitch together descriptions of events into coherent narrative. Researchers construct from this analysis informed, vivid and nuanced reports that reflect what the interviewees have said and that answer the research questions. Though the analysis is based on the descriptions presented by the interviewees, the interpretations in the final reports are those of the researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 2011, p. 201).

Eisner’s study cited by Somekh and Lewin (2011, p. 3) makes an analogy between social science researcher and connoisseur and emphasizes that the researcher should build the ability to ‘appreciate’ empirical data with an ‘artistry’ perspective. The artistic characteristic of analysing qualitative data is also epitomized by Rubin and Rubin (2011), which we can tell from their highly cited book title: *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. In this study, I mainly refer to Rubin and Rubin’s (2011) book when analysing the data. It is to be noted that Mandarin Chinese is both researcher’s and participants’ mother tongue, therefore it is also the language for data analysis so as to keep the procedure as smooth and accurate as possible. Quotes from participants used in this study were translated into English by the researcher.

The analysis started with transcribing all the 15 interviews. Transcript of the interview data was not detailed into pauses and hesitating words, but the actual words spoken by both researcher and participants. Next, I read the transcripts carefully and thoroughly. By doing so, I summarized key points from each transcript, classified and connected them. The summary of the contents of each interview was very important because it often indicates the concepts I wanted to dig further or explore more systematically. Besides, a general comparison of what was said across all the interviews could be easily made from the summary notes, and it could suggest the themes I wanted to test. For example, by making the preliminary summary notes, I noticed that the educators in the first place compared education system and current practices in these two countries. The history of vocational education reforms in China were brought up
by many but when talking about Finnish education, they only looked at the current situation, which caused an imbalanced comparison in terms of the time dimension.

The second step was coding the data, which means defining, finding and marking the relevant concepts and themes in the transcripts that answers to my research questions. Rubin and Rubin (2011, p. 192) suggest that systematic coding forces researchers to “look not just at what you remember from the interviews but also at the passages that might modify your ideas or indicate when and how your ideas might be true or not true”. By doing so, it prepares researchers to bring all passages with a similar topic together. In this research, coding started with defining the concepts and themes evoked in the summaries from the first step – transcribing and reading data, as well as the concepts and themes suggested in published literatures (Vickers & Zeng, 2017; Stewart, 2015; Yang, 2014; Yi et. al., 2017). Rubin and Rubin (2011, p. 197) also remind us that it is better not to rely on literature too much because we probably would miss the insights from our own data. When labeling coding categories, I tried to come up with “informative but brief” (Ibid., p. 200) labels. The labels were described in English considering that the whole thesis would be written in English. Besides, a hierarchy of labels and codes were adopted in this research to show the relationship among the codes. Codes and labels have been tested and revised many times to give a clear structure of the full data. For instance, the final coding and labeling outline of the first research question – what are the current issues in vocational education in Jiangxi, China – appeared as follows:

A. Popular disparagement of vocational education

B. Constraints from national situation

C. Education system
   1. policy and regulation
   2. structure and students’ quality
   3. administration and finance

D. Curriculum and content
   1. curriculum, assessment, teaching materials, pedagogy etc.
   2. on-the-job training and cooperation with companies
   3. teachers
   4. school leaderships

E. Linkage to work life
When coding and labeling the comparison data in the transcripts, I used the lowercase alphabetic letters “a b c d and e”, in correspondence to the concepts, themes and labels in the first question. When coming across important data but hardly being categorized into the concepts and themes under issues or comparison, I coded into others with Roman number “I II III and IV”.

After marking all the interviews text with codes, I sorted all the excerpts into one single Excel file (Appendix 1 & 2). In this file, there are three documents. The first one is filled with the excerpts that are answering the first research question: what are the current issues in vocational education in Jiangxi, China, which push the delegation of educators to attend the overseas training programs. The second sheet is filled with excerpts that explains: what aspects do Jiangxi delegation of educators compare when observing and studying Finnish vocational education during the training program. The third sheet contains excerpts that are hardly to be categorized into the above codes but share their important reflections and suggestions related to Chinese-Finnish collaboration on vocational education. I studied these documents, compared the excerpts and made adjustments based on my interpretations. The last step is summarizing, in which I focus on how the interviewees collectively answered these questions in terms of certain aspect and what are those different answers. In the following chapter, I will explain the findings from the summarizing and comparing the coded data.
5 Findings of the Data

This chapter presents and discusses the data collected during the training program in Oulu. The literature which I have reviewed for better understanding of the vocational education in both Finland and China have also been taken into consideration while writing this.

5.1 Current issues in vocational education in China

Issues in Chinese vocational education is not the focus of this research paper but serves as the bedrock for both author and readers to understand the impulses from the educators to attend the training program abroad and make the comparison. Hence, it is a primary question to be answered both in the interviews and the final report.

5.1.1 Popular disparagement of vocational education

The status of vocational education is very startling in China and the popular explanations of Chinese aversion to vocational education often come from the deep-rooted influence of Confucian culture and the stereotype of vanity of Chinese people. “The student, having completed his learning, should apply himself to be an officer” (学而优则仕) were quoted by 4 interviewees. There is no place for vocational school students in the training to be an ‘officer’ or to be recognized as ‘well educated’. The despise towards blue-collar workers extends to education and brings the disparagement towards vocational education. Combined with the vanity inside Chinese people, everyone squeezes themselves into the path of being ‘academic’ or ‘scholar’ with regardless of their own aptitude.

Interviewee 10 added that:

In Chinese culture, for thousands of years it is believed that “well educated person is superior to others in the society” (万般皆下品，惟有读书高). But with the development of society and economy, people’s perspective (towards vocational education) are changing gradually, especially the employers.

However, interviewee 15 made the argument that:
Influenced by traditional Chinese culture, vocational education is inferior to general education and this exists in other developed countries too. […] In terms of national development strategy, government understands the importance of vocational education, yet you will know the real answer when you ask the head of county or the Party secretary of the county whether they are willing to send their kids to vocational school. […] the power of Chinese economic development could absorb vocational school students not because they graduated from vocational education but because they are labors.

I chose popular perception and the real position of vocational education in China as my first finding is because comments from the participants alarm us, the obstacle embedded in our culture, values and popular perception makes every step in vocational education reforms difficult and slow. This finding resonates with what has been mentioned in Chapter 2.2 that, the challenge of changing national attitudes to vocational education would remain formidable and the well-rehearsed calls from different levels of officials and academics appear to be far from sufficient to start the revolution in vocational education.

5.1.2 Constraints from the national situation

China’s unique size and complexity were often referred to by interviewees when they explained the fundamental causes of the problems of vocational education. The unique challenges of Chinese “national situation” (guoqing) in terms of huge population and “socialism with Chinese characteristics” were usually claimed to legitimate the policies and solutions for current issues.

Interviewee 1: We have such a huge amount of students’ population… (a lot of problems occur during) the expansion of higher education.
Interviewee 10: We have so many people that our Talents Training Mode is more like assembly line and we cannot afford personalized education.
Interviewee 15: We are such a big country that we cannot cover every school. […] The better your school is, the more encouragement you will receive from government – we call it ‘set the examples’ (Zhuashifan).
Zhuashifan echoes with Vickers and Zeng’s (2017) study that, “examinations, curriculum, content and pedagogy all reflect culturally rooted assumptions of the ‘exemplary’ function of schooling, and the association of moral exemplariness with social or political authority” (Ibid, p. 9).

Meanwhile, Interviewee 6 also pointed out that “vocational education with Chinese characteristics has certain advantages for centralization of authority. [...] Schools serve its transmission function to train people for the nation, which is an extreme advantage for such a large country”. To a certain extent, he thinks certain issues inside vocational education are not problems but advantages.

5.1.3 Problems embedded in education system

After combining with the Chinese phases corresponding to “system” in English, I will list out the issues related to education system brought up by interviewees in three parts: policy and regulations; structure and student quality, administration and finance. As I have explained the reasons behind this classification in Chapter 3.2.2: jiaoyu zhidu refers to policy and regulations, which underpin and direct the values and norms of the society; jiaoyu tixi refers to structure, including student quality which is defined and constrained by the structure; jiaoyu tizhi refers to administration and finance, which is determined by zhidu and representing the implementation of zhidu.

Policy and regulations

Recent national policies and regulations published by government in favor of vocational education were pointed out by interviewees. For example, “encourage people to start up their own businesses and to make innovation” (大众创业 万众创新), Made in China 2025, Spirit of Craftsmanship (工匠理念), One Belt One Road, Modern Vocational Education System Construction Plan (2014-2020). Some interviewees looked at those policies above in a very positive way. However, Interviewee 1 mentioned that “encourage people to start up their own businesses and to make innovation is brought up under the current background that we have a high unemployment rate”. This point of view was shared by Interviewee 3 and 8. Interviewee 14 emphasized that “the concepts brought up by Chinese government are always keeping up with international standard, but we often lack the action”. Interviewee 15 was also critical
about those ideas and concepts but reminded us that “these big concepts form the important engine of the vocational education development and national policies and regulations help to pre-construct the infrastructure for vocational education development”.

Structure and student quality

Popular disparagement of vocational education which we discussed above is represented and reinforced through our special structure of education system, further influences the student quality. I have roughly discussed about phenomenon in Chapter 2.2. Here I will present some excerpts from the participants in this research. Interviewee 6 said “vocational education in China has no head. As long as students choose vocational education, there is no chance to get further education”. Interviewee 10 added “we have government document to control the 1:1 ratio between numbers of students entering regular senior secondary schools and secondary vocational schools, which is used to distribute the students… There is a ceiling that since we have three-year’s short-cycle courses program with only diploma sitting in between secondary vocational schools and HEIs offering normal courses degree program, it is very difficult for vocational education students going further to bachelor’s degree program in HEIs”. It means that “students who are in secondary vocational schools can only go to three-year’s short-cycle courses program offered by Higher Vocational Colleges”, said by Interviewee 15. To make it clearer, Interviewee 2 told me “there are about 10,000 students in my school, among those 9,000 come from regular senior secondary schools and the rest 1,000 come from secondary vocational schools”. Interviewee 2 worked in Jiangxi Provincial Department of Education before he was assigned as the principal of his current school 9 months ago. By then, he was in charge of students’ enrollment planning department. It is the only form of “planned economy” existed so far since the marketization in China from early 1990s. That is also, why we have the 1:1 ratio mentioned above.

The human-made ratio and how the whole society admires academic achievement but despises labour work, caused the crucial outcome that vocational schools, no matter in secondary school level or higher education level, can only recruit students who have lower test scores in those two important exams: Senior Secondary School Entrance Exam and College/University Entrance Exam. Most of the interviewees simply used “bad quality” to describe those students. Interviewee 5 sarcastically described this phenomenon that “those students ‘successfully’ enrolled into Higher Vocational Colleges”. It means that students are
forced to make the choice and they have extremely low motivation to study. I will explain in the following findings about what do vocational school students have to study in schools. Some interviewees considered it as the worst “short board” of vocational education in China, described by interviewee 5.

Administration and finance

I would like to cite a figure (in figure 4 shown below) made by Guo and Lamb (2010) to show the complicated administrative situation of vocational education in China. The bureaucratic and administrative system is so complicated that I had to draw the maps whenever the interviewees explained both the whole vocational education structure and their own school’s history to me. Especially for secondary vocational schools, there are Vocational High Schools, Specialized Secondary Schools and Skilled Workers’ Schools (I will call them properties in the following passage). What makes it more complicated is that schools would like to keep two or three properties in order to optimize financial support from government. For example, Interviewee 10 explained to me that his school has all three properties, which means it is a Vocational High Schools, Specialized Secondary Schools and Skilled Workers’ Schools. He further explained that “even our school is under education department’s governing, but we mainly train students who are under Skilled Workers department’s government. We are still keeping the property as a Specialized Secondary School, but we don’t enroll students because there is less finance support from government”.

The statement that government invest much more into HEIs providing bachelor’s degrees especially key universities than the investment into vocational education schools was shared by many interviewees when talking about finance. It is highly emphasised by Interviewee 15 when he described the disparagement of vocational education in government level. School profiles determine which levels of government will allocate financial support and how the total amount is distributed among different levels of government. “Lack of financial support, especially in under-developed Jiangxi province. Government can only help to maintain the operation of schools. Improving the quality is an idle talk”, said by Interviewee 11A. In addition, “the money I receive from government is calculated by the numbers of students I recruited, hence I will recruit as many as I can even I can’t provide the quality due to the expansion. But I need money”, said by Interviewee 5. This also explains why schools open as
many programs as they could so that they can recruit more students and then receive more money, answering the question raised in Chapter 4.4.

**Figure 4 Administration of Vocational Education in China**

*Source:* Guo & Lamb (2010, p. 26)

*Note:* In Guo and Lamb’s book, they use technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to describe vocational education I used in this study.

5.1.4 Curriculum and contents

Criticisms of vocational school curriculum, pedagogy and learning content is such a cliché, which echo with many researchers’ findings in Chinese vocational education. In this part, I will mainly quote what the interviewees said.

*Curriculum, assessments, teaching materials and pedagogy*

Interviewee 5 frankly expressed his frustration that “we tried to arrange half theoretical courses and half practical courses, but in fact, students barely understand what is taught in theoretical courses. First semester is full of politics, English and physical education studies”.

Interviewees 6 believed that the theoretical courses are enormous in vocational schools:
We have way too much mandatory courses related to ideology. Vocational school students have to take Physical Education, Computer Science, English, Chinese, Advanced Mathematics. All those courses take half of the study time. In Jiangxi, Jianggangshan red culture (communism propaganda) education is also mandatory. Additionally, there are military training and national defense education. You can’t graduate without taking all those courses. There are weekly based labour courses… Vocational education carry on the traditional way of education. It is the “compressed biscuit” of general 4 years bachelor’s degree program… The assessment is extremely simple. All you need is a test paper.

Talking about test paper, interviewee 13 pointed out that “we design the paper according to students’ capability. The test scores follow the Bell Curve”. She added that “99% students will graduate even many of them actually can’t reach our talent training requirement”.

Level of criticisms went higher when talking about the practical courses. Interviewee 4 said “we only arrange 1-2 weeks of practical study in the training workshop every semester”. What Interviewee 5 said is more saddening that “students are watching in the training workshop other than practicing and they are learning how to do surgery on the blackboard”. The worry and frustration of students’ practical ability were shared by almost every participant in this research. Furthermore, “the funding was used to build more houses other than purchasing the equipment for workshops. Purchased equipment are often outdated. Even they bought some good equipment, utilization rate is extremely low and sometimes they are left unused”, said by Interviewee 15. He also agreed with Interviewees 6 that the pedagogy in vocational education following regular education, which greatly affects the practical capability of vocational school students.

However, Interviewee 10 brought up a very different idea that “even our students’ practical capability is low on average, but because of the huge cardinal number, we can always find top students to compete with students from other countries”.

On-the-job training and the cooperation with companies

“Our students often bring troubles to the placement of internship, hence they limit the internship size” – frankly said by Interviewee 1. “Companies have no interest towards our
students. Namely, it is on-the-job training; in fact, they treat our students as bottom level staff. There is no space and time left for them to think and reflect” – stated by Interviewee 4. The concept that companies’ low interest to cooperate with schools was shared by Interview 13 and 15. “Our teachers can’t bring innovations to companies either and it is impossible to cooperate with companies in terms of research.” – Added by Interviewee 9.

“On-the-job training students are the primary objects (for the companies, especially private companies) to squeeze from. In one of our partner companies, I noticed some of my students had to work 12 hours a day. In this condition, it would have a high probability of work-related injury. It happened once during my visit and I asked our head of the department to stop the cooperation once I was back to school.” – Complained by Interviewee 2.

Interviewee 11A was even more honest. He admitted that “there is no insurance for our students, hence if there were any unexpected accidents happened during the on-the-job training period, we would have huge responsibilities. If we strictly follow the syllabus and arrange less on-the-job training, we would be more relaxed.”

*Teachers*

The issues of teachers in vocational schools is interconnected with all the other issues. Firstly, the expansion of vocational schools needs lots of teachers and the entry as the vocational school teachers is very low and the quality of teachers is uneven, and more over the teachers for practical learning are very rare. Interviewee 4 explained that: “we have to open many programs which extremely lack teacher resources. In the first year, we prepare all the basic course (of a college curriculum) and hire part-time teachers for specialized course”. “The teachers we hired are freshly graduated from bachelor or master’s degree, who have no experience of skills in real working life”, added by Interviewee 9 and 15. What Interviewee 8 said in terms of recruiting regular teachers is very impressive to me:

> When we need to hire new teachers, they have to attend the exams organized by Provincial MoHRSS, which include written exams and interviews. Male candidates or people who have 3 years working experience are not as competitive as female candidates or people who stay at home and prepare for written exams only, hence the former group of candidates can’t even pass the written exams. This is a key part where we filtered out people who probably have experience.
The recruiting system mentioned above also limit the process to remove the person. Since “this person was hired through Provincial MoHRSS, schools can’t easily fire him or her”, said by Interviewee 1.

Secondly, many interviewees also share the difficulty of in-service training. “Considering that we can’t hire teachers with experience, we send teachers to have further studies in hospital. However, the teachers are not willing to learn, and it becomes a quick tour in the end.” – Explained by Interviewee 1. Interviewee 7 explained another reason that “the workload of teachers is extremely high that there is no time left for them to have further study”.

School leaderships

The current school leadership situation in China is Principal Responsibility System under CPC committee’s supervision (党委领导下的校长负责制). “Principals are essential for school development. If this person is knowledgeable and has to be powerful, then she/he can start the reforms and bring schools to the right track. Yet, the fact is we have so many principals who don’t understand things and also afraid of making mistakes, hence they just cope with it.” – explained Interviewee 6. Echoed by Interviewee 11A that “our leadership’s team, especially principals and Party secretary are appointed, and no one really want to risk their official position”. The key job of the leadership also leads to the problem. Interviewee 15 mentioned that “school leaders mainly supervise students’ enrollment other than quality of education”.

5.1.5 Linkage to work life

Vocational education is aiming to cultivate and train engineers, senior technicians and professional vocational workers, promote employment and entrepreneurship, so as to provide talent pool for the nation’s development. Linkage to work life is an important dimension to evaluate vocational education. Likewise, it is also very challenging. Students’ overall quality could not meet the job requirement. One reason is that “the programs in school often don’t match the requirements in the market”, said Interviewee 9. However, it does not affect much to the rate of employment. “The power from economic development can absorb this huge number of students as long as they are labour”, said Interviewee 15. More importantly,
“compared with students who are holding higher degree or even master’s degree, vocational school students have relative low expectations and are willing to take low level work, so in general they have a better employment prospect” – shared by many interviewees. In the contrary, “high expectation of students often caused low retention after internship period”, added by Interviewee 2.

Two more phenomena deserve to be noted: 1, “one third of our graduates choose to find jobs in coastal areas, which is contradicted with our goal – serve the local economy”; 2, “factories need huge amount of our student in summer semester so that they can help to produce massive amounts of products for Christmas and New Year; but we really want students to stay one more semester and start internship or work from next spring semester. But in the end, we have to comprise and send students to factories after only 2 years of studies.” Lamented by Interviewee 4 and 15 respectively.

5.2 Comparisons made by Chinese educators

The findings of comparisons were summarized from questions such as: “what are the differences between education in China and Finland”; “which aspects can be borrowed from Finland after attending this training program” and further questions asked during the semi-structured interviews. I tried to follow the previous structure in the above sections and I hope it can show a much clear structure of how Chinese educators compared and imply what they were thinking is important for further cooperation between these two countries, or more specifically, between Jiangxi and Finland.

Interviewees also admitted to me that, before coming to Finland, they had barely or no knowledge about the Finnish vocational education; maybe just heard about it. Interviewee 13 heard of it during a training organized by Chinese MoE three years ago, in which they were told that Finland and Sweden have well-developed Nordic vocational education system. Interviewee 14 mentioned the quality management meeting hosted in Helsinki in 2012. Most of the knowledge they had in the interviews came from their observation and studying during this stay.
5.2.1 The status of Vocational Education in Finland and China

Participants in this research barely saw the difference among students in academic universities, universities of applied sciences and vocational colleges during their visit in Finland; only noticed that students from vocational colleges look a bit younger. Interviewee 5 told me that “as I have noticed, students in vocational schools here are more masculine [compared with vocational schools in China]. They are confident and do not think they are lower than others are. We really lack this”. Interviewee 2 went deeper into his observation and explained to me “I noticed that Finnish way of life is simple and pragmatic. When applied to education, they are honest and practical, which is opposite to vanity, saturated in both our daily culture and education. Teaching students in accordance with their aptitude seems to be far away for us”. The last sentence of his statement resonates with the observation and reflection from Interviewee 14:

Theoretically, we are advocating that we should respect the individual differences and allow students to develop in their own aptitude. In fact, we are far away from this… We emphasize spirit of craftsmanship, we believe people are equally talented in every industry, but in the end, we only look at the written examination scores. […] In the process of bridging the gap between theory and reality, everyone is different. […] People from different social classes react differently during the transformation of society. […] It will be a long way to go…

Put it into a large extent social contract theory, Interviewee 4 made a speculation that “people are equal here in Finland. If there is not big difference in salary, then there will be less effect on students’ quality in vocational education schools… We need to reform the salary system in China first”. However, not everyone is so certain about what they have seen and told. Interviewee 3 shared his question to me that:

There is no bias towards vocational education in Finland. Nevertheless, I am still in a bit of doubt. Are there differences between graduates from general universities and applied science, especially in terms of social status and public perception?
5.2.2 Incomparability due to China’s national situation

After I asked what they found out when compare these two countries’ vocational education, the first impression I received from my interviewees was often: it is not comparable because we have so different political regime, traditional culture and education system. I then asked the following question: what are the advantages you find in their education system, which probably can be borrowed by China? The answers were categorized and explained in the next part.

5.2.3 Comparison between education systems

Every participant was impressed by simple and unobstructed Finnish education system (see Figure 5 below). They described it as “walking with two legs”. Current Chinese education system is much more complicated and has a dead-end for vocational education (see Figure 1). Interviewee 15 suggested me to read the important roadmap published by MOE, *Modern Vocational Education System Construction Plan (2014-2020)*, in which Chinese government aims to build a complete modern vocational education system (see Figure 6 below).
Figure 5 Education system in Finland

Figure 6 Education system (jiaoyu tixi) development plan


Note: UAS is University of Applied Science; HVC is Higher Vocational Colleges

The development plan of education system (jiaoyu tixi) is very similar to current Finnish education system, which attempts to bridge regular education and vocational education. It aims to improve the status of vocational education by adding bachelor and master level education in vocational track. A pilot reform was going to start at almost the same time when government issued this sketched structure. Lu Xin, vice-minister of China’s Ministry of Education back then, announced a decision to turn 600 of the country’s regular universities into applied science university, at a college and university leaders’ meeting in early 2014. But the decision was not put into reality. Interviewee 2 honestly expressed his opinion that this
decision was a “simple and crude administrative method, which lacked deliberation”. Interviewee 3 stated “government wanted to turn the regular universities, mainly those under Local Authority, into applied science university, and obviously those universities didn’t want to change. Transformation of local universities is not easy – it is very hard to change the concept, school missions, management and operations. Facilities are not qualified enough for applied science programs. More importantly, teaching method and teachers force are also falling behind.” Interviewee 6 added “regular universities are not willing to change. They are training officials but all of a sudden, they are asked to train workers, of course they will not agree to this. In fact regular universities are going through vocationalisation internally; they would prefer keeping their external brand as academic universities.” Besides, Decision on Accelerating the Development of Modern Vocational Education (State Council, 2014) clearly stated that “in principle, Higher Vocational Colleges are not going to be upgraded to University of Applied Science level that provide 4 years bachelor’s degree.”

It seems like China is trying hard to build the modern vocational education, which looks similar to the Finnish one. However, we all know it will not be easy. Which type of universities should be put in the position equivalent to University of Applied Science is under controversy, as we can see from the long-term suspended decision made by vice-minister in China’s Ministry of Education and the complaints made by leaders in higher vocational education institutes. This arises the question whether we should demote the local regular universities or upgrade higher vocational education colleges.

5.2.4 Comparison of curriculum and contents

Educational leaders in regard of curriculum and contents made much more comparisons.

Curriculum, assessments, teaching materials and pedagogy

All interviewees were amazed by how “learning by doing” is implemented into teaching and learning during the training program, especially after they visited the houses which were built by house construction students. They agreed that students in Finland have strong hands-on competence, which is an extremely important merit of vocational school students. “We really do a bad job. Most of our curriculum is theoretical studies”, said by Interviewee 2. “Finnish
education is very pragmatic – enough is enough… in comparison, we really need to cut down those overloaded theoretical studies”, added by Interviewee 7 and agreed by Interviewee 1. “Subjects in university of applied science are very specialized and practical” and “they are designed to improve the quality of people’s life and solve the real world problems”, said by Interviewee 6 and Interviewee 3 respectively. Interviewee 8 specially praised Finnish assessment system. He mentioned “proper ways to assess students decides whether you are cultivating a person needed by the society and motivates students’ learning.”

“In Finland, they really put the concepts of teaching methods and pedagogy into practice. No matter project-based learning or task-driven learning, they are always problem oriented and emphasizing leadership, team work, especially interdisciplinary cooperation”, said by Interviewee 3, echoed by Interview 5 and 8. Interviewee 14 highlighted that “we really should learn from them in terms of bridging the gap between theories and practices. Our practice in reality lags behind a lot”. Interviewee 11A thinks it is because most educational leaders in China “are dare to make reformative changes” while Interviewee 6 believes that “educational leaders wanted to do it well, but they don’t know how to do it”.

Besides, interviewees also highlighted the credits system and the mechanism of transferring credit among different levels of vocational schools in Finland. “Because we don’t use credits system and courses in secondary vocational education couldn’t be transferred to higher level vocational education, it hinders students going for further education because they have to take similar courses which is a waste of time,” said by Interview 11B. Nevertheless “I encouraged my students to go for higher education after they graduated from secondary vocational education because they will need the college diploma”, disagreed by Interviewee 12.

On-the-job training and the cooperation with companies

“The cooperation between schools and companies is much closer in Finland and operated based on projects. But I really couldn’t understand why companies are willing to cooperate even without government’s requirement.” Interviewee 2 said it and the reason why companies are willing to work with schools was totally beyond this group of educators’ imagination. As I have also observed, in many sessions, they asked the Finnish lecturers what is the magic behind it since it is an important answer they have to find out in this study visit, as strengthening the cooperation between schools and companies is required in many
government documents. Interviewee 13 and 15 had some answers and I guess it is because the interviews with them were in the later stage and they started to be persuaded by what they have heard and observed further. Interviewee 15 concluded that Finnish companies have long-term perspectives. Interviewee 13 went further; she first asked herself “how can they make it” and then answered by herself:

I think it is because they trained students based on problem-solving. They encourage interdisciplinary cooperation. There are instructions from both school teachers and company mentors. Under this learning environment and mode, they learned how to solve problems and then build the virtuous cooperation circle. This is exactly what we advocated in China: deep cooperation between schools and companies. What does deep mean here? I think it is the capability to help the company solve the problems.

Teachers

Almost the whole group of educators admired the specific and advanced vocational teacher’s education, credentials and very strict requirements of being a vocational school teacher, in-service education and training, professionalism and mutual-respect and cooperation. China is on the way there and Finland is a perfect example where we can draw lessons from, agreed by most of the interviewees. However, less attention was paid to how Finland makes it happen, as I have noticed.

School leaderships

There were many times in general introduction lectures, Chinese educators asked the lecturers: who appointed the Principal of this school? However, many of them did not mention this in the interview except Interviewee 11A and Interviewee 11B made some comments:

The board and principals here are employed. Our leaderships team, especially principals and Party secretary are appointed, and no one really want to risk their official position. As long as I do not make mistakes, no one can move me away. But if I work hard, and the more I work, the higher probability I make mistakes; then my position will be in danger. In terms of reforms, everyone knows; but we will not work hard enough. Our implementation lags behind the ideas, and it is not because I do not want to do it. It is the system (jiaoyu tizhi) constrains us.
There was not much discussion in regarding the direct comparison of school leaderships during the interviews, except Interviewee 3 brought it up:

In foreign countries, principals talk about ideas and concepts; they think about what kind of schools they want to have; they raise funds and look for good teachers. Whereas in China, principals discuss about reform, reform; how should I reform this program and this research project; it’s Principal Responsibility System under CPC committee’s supervision.

However, after I asked about their takeaways from this training program, many started to talk about dilemmas they are facing. Interviewee 1 answered that “we should improve the workshop training condition and add more study time in practical learning. We should also hire people who have industrial experience and encourage in-service teachers’ training. But it is difficult to remove a person who was hired through Provincial Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of People’s Republic of China (MoHRSS)…” Interviewee 5 summarized that “I noticed Finland does well in internationalisation and interdisciplinary cooperation, which we extremely lack, but it is hard to borrow.” Interviewee 4, as a deputy principal, honestly admitted that “it is impossible for me to promote interdisciplinary cooperation in our school. I do not even think Xie Yuanzhang (Interviewee 2) can promote it in his school. In mainland China, ideology and political thoughts are primary.” Interviewee 6 made a wish that “hopefully, we can soon go back to principal responsibility system”.

Interviewee 7 brought up the case of curriculum reform. She was more than happy to bring what she had learned in Finland back to China, especially teachers’ in-service training. But she instantly talked about her current official position and the dilemma she faced:

I was Labour Union Chairman, who negotiated with principals on the behalf of staff. Then I was promoted as Party Secretary. After recent restructuring, I am the director of Education and deputy principal. Now I am in the dilemma. Yes, yes, we need reform, curriculum reform. Nevertheless, you have to leave enough time for teachers. They teach six lessons per day; how do they have time to study and reflect? If I ask them to work over time, then I am invading their rights.
5.2.5 Linkages to work life

The interviewees hardly compared linkages to work life. As I have also noticed that, there was not much information brought up during the training program. Only Interviewee 4 made some notes and told me that “vocational education here is serving local economy but in Jiangxi, it’s rarely such case”.

5.3 Reflections and suggestions related to Chinese-Finnish collaboration on vocational education

5.3.1 Arising self-confidence after comparison

There is a strong “self-confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics” across the data. Some excerpts are shared as follows:

“After I had a general idea of Finnish Education system, I noticed we have made a big progress in recent years.” – Interviewee 2

“Our country’s development is incredible, including secondary level vocational education. I believe in the near future, we will surpass well-developed capitalist countries, including Germany.” – Interviewee 7

“After I attended the lectures here, I felt we are doing that what they have done. We will proceed with the determination and confidence. We should be confident. We should have culture confidence, education confidence and social system confidence.” – Interviewee 14.

Especially when comparing the campus hardware facilities, especially for ICT usages and workshop conditions, most of them showed a great pride in what they have in their own campus. But this special pride was limited to hardware.

5.3.2 Suggestions towards further Chinese-Finnish collaboration on education

Language barrier and low translation quality

As a member of the interpreters’ team, I agree with visiting educators complain that “low quality translation is one cause of asymmetric information” and the main reason is that “interpreters don’t understand education in China”, quoted from Interviewee 1 and 9
respectively. I would add up here that, the interpreters do not understand education in Finland either, but Chinese educators could not tell because they have no idea of Finnish education and they could not judge what has been translated. Interviewee 5 said “I have no idea what was taught but I couldn’t interrupt and ask”. Interviewee 3 further complained that “the lecturer said the question I asked was very good, but the answers didn’t make sense to me at all. I guess the problem is the poor translation.”

English is either parties’ second language or even third language. Only one principal from the delegation team could communicate in English. The rest of them could pick up some words or slowly understand but barely can speak in English. The training material from Finnish party were often translated from Finnish to English and sometimes it causes big misunderstandings. One example is the different meanings of the same English word “college” in Finland and China. In Chinese context, we use college to describe higher level vocational education institutions and sometimes it also equivalents to university. The most important exam in China is often translated as “College Entrance Exam”. With this pre-conception in their mind, it took me several times to explain Oulu Vocational College (OVC) is a secondary level vocational school.

*Improvement for schedule and content arrangement*

Interviewees also targeted the training schedule. Many topics were sluggish and repetitive. Interviewee 3 stated that “every department introduced about their main subjects’ structure and credits system. Whenever I wanted to ask more about why they decided to start the new subject at first and how it was prepared, operated or even ended, no one really answered me. I also wanted to see how the subjects were operated inside the workshop. These key issues weren’t covered during the training.” Interviewee 9 complained the same. There was too much macro level information but very limited micro level introduction.

Interviewee 6, leader in charge of studies of this delegation team, appointed by Jiangxi Minister of Education, had a lot to say:

> It’s such an expensive training program. We should have prepared well before coming here… The training program should put people first; in this case, the habit of Chinese people should be taken into consideration. We are used to take a nap in the middle
day… The training program did not follow their “learning by doing” pedagogy but used booming style inculcation. The effect was bad, and everyone felt tired.

*Authentic experience compared with observation tour*

In general, the delegation was pleased with this training program. Especially the visit to local farms gave them opportunities to see people’s way of life in an authentic and deep way. In addition, understanding of the other culture helped them to understand education better, which can hardly be achieved by short-term business visit. Both Interviewee 1 and 2 attended many business visits when they working as government officials in Provincial MOE department, therefore they made this comparison. However, there were still unanswered questions left, for example: will the shyness of Finnish people’s personality affect their cooperation? How is innovation situation of this nation? Will the overemphasized “joyful learning” affect their capability to acquire knowledge, especially mathematics? How did they carry on the ideological education that even small kids could be so quiet in the church?
6 Ethics, Reliability, and Validity

Research ethics refer to a complex set of ethical viewpoints and evaluations that are related to science and research (TENK, 2012). The National Advisory Board on Research Ethics proposes, “universities and research organizations that have made a commitment to comply with the guidelines arrange ethical review in the way they consider best” (TENK, 2009, p. 2). According to the guidelines prepared in 2009 by The Ethics Committee of Human Sciences (TENK, 2009, p. 3), this piece of research does not contain the features requiring ethical review from the special ethics committee. However, this thesis work complies with the basic ethical principles in order to follow an ethically responsible and proper course of action in the research, and adopts honesty and integrity throughout the whole study. Likewise, Somekh (2011, p. 9) emphasizes, “education research is often seen as educational in its process as well as its effects… Constructing research as “educative” has ethical implications and has effects in terms of the quality of outcomes”.

Tangen’s (2014) paper Balancing ethics and quality in educational research — The ethical matrix method, serves as the main reference for ethical considerations throughout my research. In the beginning of the paper, Tangen points out the dilemma educational researchers usually face: “the legally and morally binding principles of protection of participants on the one hand, and the standards and criteria of quality and relevance of research on the other” (Ibid., p. 678). He then explained that ethic principals do not necessarily limit the quality, but on the contrary, they enhance the quality of research. In Tangen’s opinion, a quality research “refers to both internal criteria such as validity, reliability, and trustworthiness and external criteria such as the relevance and usefulness of research-based knowledge for practice and policy-making” (Ibid., p. 679). As Perakyla (2004) also points out, the importance of validity and reliability is significant in social science research, because they play an important role in representing the objectivity and credibility in both process and findings.

In order to make a research qualified in internal criteria, the internal version of the ethical matrix is presented in Tangen’s paper. The extended version of the ethical matrix method is also discussed when researchers intend to apply their research impact on practice. This study
mainly focuses on understanding how Chinese educators compare vocational education during their training program in Finland. Therefore, in this chapter, I will only refer to the internal version of ethical matrix (See Table 3 below).

Before getting into the general ethical matrix, Tangen (2014) divides the research ethical principles into three domains: “(A) ethics within the research community; (B) protection of research participants; and (C) the role and value of educational research in society” (Ibid., p. 679). Domain (A) resonates with what TENK’s (2012) suggestion that science should be practiced primarily within the scientific community’s own critical review and follow the joint ethical rules for the quality of research. Quality researches should be conducted within ontology and epistemology, theory and research methodology, which are recognized by the scientific community. Domain (B) emphasizes the ethical responsibility of the researchers to protect individuals’ “wellbeing and autonomy” (Tangen, 2014, p. 679). Additionally, researchers are also obligated and concerned towards the reputation and interest of groups. Especially when case study which is used in my research, both individual and the group are taken into consideration. Domain (C) epitomizes the social value of the research, the relevance of the research knowledge to practitioners and the policy-makers, in order to improve the well-being of various groups in related to the objectives which are studied by researchers, in this case could be future vocational school students.

Table 3 General Ethical Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages in the research process</th>
<th>1) Protection of participants (domain B) versus ...</th>
<th>2) ...the need for knowledge (domains A and C)</th>
<th>...external relevance (domain C)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning projects</td>
<td>Ethical considerations—discussion of prospective problems</td>
<td>Ethical considerations—discussion of prospective problems</td>
<td>(Well-founded) research problems; epistemological and ethical considerations; suitable methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting data, analyzing and reporting the project</td>
<td>Dignity; respect for privacy, autonomy, voice, Confidentiality.</td>
<td>Respect for their reputation and interests, Confidentiality.</td>
<td>Good research practice. Validity, reliability, trustworthiness. Transparency in reporting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information, dissemination and public discussion of research problems, methods, results and consequences</td>
<td>Dignity; respect for privacy, autonomy, voice, Anonymity.</td>
<td>Respect for their reputation and interests, Anonymity necessary?</td>
<td>Willingness to discuss interpretations and use of the research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal criteria of research quality (domain A) versus ...</td>
<td>Applicability versus...</td>
<td>...independent critique of policy and practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consider how the research may be relevant for users. Listen to users’ voices?</td>
<td>Listening to the voices of the disempowered and those who are seldom listened to.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Study relations between lived experience and systems or practices</td>
<td>User-adapted dissemination.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tangen (2014, p. 682)
When planning the project, in terms of domain A&C: I noticed there is a booming wave of education export in Finland and China is one of their main destination. I also learned there is very limited literature telling about the Chinese leadership training program in Finland, which is one of the main influential form of education export and an important way to build relationship with different levels of government organisations. It is important for Finnish exporter to draw the customer personas before they market their product and it is crucial for Chinese educators to acquire comprehensive information of the product. Considering this, the researcher brought up the main research question and the sub-questions (see Chapter 1.3). At the same time, interviewing the visiting delegation group was decided to collect their personal perspectives and experiences. In terms of domain B: an oral interview consent was made between researcher and Liilak in the first place and then oral interview invitation was sent out to everyone after their first week’s training and agreed by head and deputy head of delegation and then everyone else.

The potential risks of being both an interpreter as well as a researcher were also properly addressed through collecting data, analyzing and reporting the project. In addition to confidentiality, individual’s privacy and autonomy of what should be kept as personal conversation were put as the first priority and delegation group’s reputation and interest were also taken into consideration. Validity and reliability is a big concern in data collection and analysis especially when interactive interviews were used as methods to collect data. Crosscheck was employed to understand the conversation with interviewees more clearly and present both the facts and interviewees’ perspective as accurate as possible. “The ‘messiness’ of encounters with others; the ‘performances’ of those engaged in communication; the level of ‘commitment’ to being engaged in communications; ‘truth’; ‘reality’; ‘suspicion’; the hidden agendas at play; the tactics and strategies employed to ‘unearth’ information”, suggested by Somekh and Lewin (2011, p. 61) were taken into consideration during interviewing, transcribing and analysis.

While reporting the finding, the interviewees’ identities were protected by using anonymity so as to generate the public knowledge easier through private conversation between researcher and participants. The participants’ school profile was simply indicated in Table 2 so that readers can have some clue where their perceptions come from. The delegation information is
disclosed since it is the public information already. In the end, it is researcher’s own pre-
knowledge and pre-cognition influence and how she/he interpret and report the findings. In
this study, I tried to report the findings in a comprehensive and dialogued manner in order to
reduce the intentional omission of the data. As a beginner level researcher, I am willing to
discuss the procedure and my interpretations with related parties and readers of this topic.
7 Discussion and Conclusion

From one after another Decisions published by Chinese government and key scholars’ research papers, we clearly know that vocational education in China is under transformation. Can visits paid to Finland help educational leaders’ better see the issues embedded in Chinese vocational education? Can delegation of educators draw solid comparisons with this relative successful case and find practical solutions in consideration of the national situation? What else both sides could do to promote a deeper and more sustainable cooperative relationship? To answer these questions, three gaps were drawn up from this study: 1) space between what delegation of educators learned and did not grasp during their visit; 2) space between advanced concepts and practical limitations; and 3) space for ethical educational leadership. Important outcomes and implications of those gaps will be explained in detail.

7.1 Discuss with the findings

7.1.1 Space between what delegation of educators learned and didn’t grasp during their visit

When we compare culture in Chapter 3.2.1, Mason (2007) have reminded us to check whether the time-based portions that we selected are indeed representations of cultural patterns in the longer term. Delegation of educators came to Finland with pre-conception, pre-knowledge of vocational education in China. Many of them have been witnessing or been involved in the expansion of vocational education since the beginning of 2000 or even earlier. Before coming to Finland, the delegation had barely or no knowledge about the Finnish education; maybe just heard about it. During the training program, they experienced only the minor part of Finnish education system.

Educational leaders were surprised by the high social status of vocational education in Finland but they did not get chance to learn how Finnish educators have actively and constantly worked on improving its status. For example, as an active and leading participant, Finland worked closely with other European countries in Leonardo da Vinci project SPES-NET in 1996-1997. One of the aims of the project was to improve the status of vocational education and training by a range of reform strategies (Stenstrom & Lasonen, 2000). Even until now,
Finnish educators are still working to reduce the difference between vocational and regular higher education. University of Applied Science in Finnish is *ammattikorkeakoulu (AMK)*, and when the Rectors’ Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences decided to use the term “University of Applied Sciences” rather than “polytechnic” recommended by Finnish MoE, there was a big argument in the society. Isopahkala-Bouret’s (2015) recent study shows that, compared with traditional higher education credentials, newly established vocational ones are still considered as a second-class thing. Bathmaker’s (2017) editorial paper shows that many countries, particularly those so-called well-developed countries, are still working hard on bridging the liminal space between vocational and higher education. Improving the status of vocational education to an equal but different status with average higher education is not a one-step-to-heaven thing, but needs continuous negotiation among all the stakeholders.

It is disappointing to notice that, at the end of the training program, the delegation was still lamenting over the legacy of China’s Confucian heritage but ignored the fact, culture is a practice, more efforts should be performed, and time should be invested to improve the way Finnish educators have been doing.

It is also obvious for the delegation to see a smooth transition from initial vocational education to higher vocational education in Finnish Education system; but at the same time it is hard for the delegation to figure out the discrepancies across different levels, as well as the need for transition. There has been lacking in an overall comparison among the same subjects across OVC, OUAS and University. This might also be associated to the relation between vocational qualifications provided by different levels of educational institutions and the qualification required by occupations in the labour market. However, this topic has not been brought into attention during the training program. Chinese researchers suggest systematizing a national qualifications framework, but it is probably beyond the concerns of the practitioners like delegation in this context. It would be one of the speculations why participants in this study found little to compare in terms of linkage to work life. It is not difficult to be impressed by Finnish students’ hands-on competence during the visit, but the supportive mechanisms behind it is not easily noticeable. Similarly, vocational education quality management in Finland is another important series of mechanisms, but it was not brought up as a topic in the whole training program.
On-the-job training and cooperation with companies are large concerns of delegation. In terms of international cooperation in vocational education in China, Germany is one of the precedents. The successful dual system in Germany provides young people a sense of identity, value and esteem and constantly supported by German companies and government. However, China has its limitations in adopting this kind of vocational education based on missing real-world problems and work-based learning (Barabasch, Huang & Lawson, 2009), even though apprenticeship as a pilot project has been brought into government agenda. Considering the background of China, Finnish school-based model of vocational education is a good alternative when China is looking for international cooperation. We could be cheerful of this outcome but still, in the end, participants still could not understand why companies are willing to cooperate with vocational schools. This is simply beyond their imagination. They are coming from a context where their students are “exploited” by companies during internship; students might create problems for companies; the educational leaders are worried about work-related injury and make the decision to shorten the training period and prolong the theoretical learning. Merely visiting schools and listening to orations could not answer the question that is haunting them all along that: what are the motivations of companies to work with vocational schools and their students. However, we should also notice that, this type of study visit is very short and not everything can be included in a short training program. Preparation and after visit study could be a good supplement way to find the answers.

7.1.2 Space between advanced concepts and practical limitations

In China, advanced concepts and ideas are normally delivered through government policies and Decisions from the top officials. They are supposed to underpin and direct society values and social norms. As reminded, when comparing values, we should often inquiry ourselves: what are the preferred value in the current society? How do individuals make the choice between personal and society values? In addition, is there a gap between policy and implementation in education? This reminds me of Interviewee 14’s statement:

People from difference social classes react differently in the development of society. Our country does not lag behind in terms of concept and idea. Our country believes that there are talented people from all walks of life and everyone is talented. We advocate Craftsmanship. However, in terms of the implementation of ideas from the policy, every individual is different. Individual difference exists.
Individuals here can be policy makers themselves, can be educational leaders, and can be parents and students. If you still remember, there is a counter example given by one of interviewees that: ask government officers whether they are willing to send their kids to vocational school.

Participants themselves very often brought up the gap when they criticized vocational education curriculum and contents: we know we have too many theoretical courses; we know we are compressed biscuits of regular education and lack of appropriate equipment, learning materials and practical training; we know we are short of qualified teachers and teaching approach is outdated. And we also know “learning by doing” and Project/Task-based learning; we open arms for teachers with double qualifications (teachers’ qualification and professional qualification) but there aren’t many and we can’t leave the stage in the classroom empty; we know hands-on competence is the core but we have so many students and we are underfunded... The discussion of the space between advanced concepts and practical limitations often takes us to another question: how to transcend the national situation (guoqing) in China?

Many academics and practitioners could not find quick solutions here. I could not either. But I want to go back to read a statement from Adamson and Morris (2007) that “the various conceptions of curriculum are shaped by social ideologies that are underpinned by normative views and beliefs about the desired role of schooling in society, the nature of knowledge and learning, and the roles of teachers and learners” (Ibid., p. 266). There is a gap between social values and ideologies, policies, roles of schooling and curriculum. It is a special period between what was and what is next. It is under dynamic interactions. China is undergoing this transition, and vocational education is part of it. As educators, especially educational leaders, they need a framework to understand the changes and uncertainties, as well as a paradigm to help with decision making. This will bring us to the next space.

7.1.3  Space for ethical leadership

We have seen different types of dilemmas educational leaders are facing: the dilemma of development and reform despite the national situation (guoqing) and situation in their own
institutions; the dilemma of implementation of policies and Decisions in spite of the constraints from our system (jiaoyu tizhi); the dilemma of believing in the values conveyed from the higher authorities but experiencing different ones in the society and so on.

If a leader takes the official or orthodox perspective, she/he might mainly adopt the ethic of justice. She/he will follow the Four Cardinal Principles of China, and looks at the laws and public policies for ethical guidance (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2010). National situation (guoqing) and system (jiaoyutizhi) will become a good excuse if there is any gap between implementations of these advanced ideas and concepts in policies. While looking at the concepts, economic development and hardware, they may believe that the Chinese people have every reason to have confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In terms of role of schools, she/he will probably agree more with one of the ideologies summarized by Bray et al. (2007), which we have discussed in Chapter 3.2.3: to induct learners into a particular political orthodoxy. However, Vickers once commented in Freshed Podcast with Will Brehm (2017) that, if you ask a Chinese what socialism really means, they probably could not answer it.

Supporters of ethic of critiques aim to awaken us from our taken-for-granted values and force us to rethink many important concepts such as democracy, privilege, power, and even the language we are using (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2010). However, at this stage, in the context of China, critiques’ holders among educators at most can reach the level to criticize Chinese education system (jiaoyu xitong) and the popular stereotype of students in vocational education. And it’s more likely to stop at the basic level. Language used to describe those students by educators themselves, like low quality (suzhi), are on the contrary enhancing the stereotype. We lack the “language of possibility” in schools to fend off reproducing the society (Ibid., p. 14). There are also a lot of criticisms about curriculum, teaching materials, teaching methods, but they are hardly understood as critiques. Those criticisms are not based on neither critical theory nor critical pedagogy, but more likely built on human capital paradigm with the practice-oriented lens.

Ethic of care was more or less presented in the interview data. With regard to the popular stereotype of students in vocational education, Interviewee 5 was lamenting how harshly the society treats vocational school students. As an educator, his first job is rebuilding students’
confidence. Interviewee 2 also made a decision to stop the partnership with one company after he noticed long working hour was assigned to his students and there was a higher probability of work-related injury. A single spark can start a prairie fire. It is encouraging in a sense.

However, over concerning of work-related injury and canceling the partnership with internship provider can probably cause another phenomenon as Interviewee 11A mentioned that, to shorten the training period and prolong the theoretical learning. How to make the wise decisions in front of all those dilemmas during the transition of society, culture and values? A good suggestion from Shapiro and Stefkovich (2010) is to develop educational leaders’ own professional codes with the reference to ethic of the profession. A dynamic and multidimensional ethic that makes the best interests of their students the fundamental value of all decision-making and actions (Ibid., p. 25).

7.2 Limitations of the study

My starting point of this study is that the comparison made by the delegation of educators will affect the value and meaningfulness of this training program, and further affect the cooperation between Finnish and Chinese vocational education. In terms of comparison, I looked at what aspects the participants compare and explored how much they find these two objects as comparable. Furthermore, what educators found useful and adoptable from the practice of Finnish vocational education is also an important context to be taken into consideration. One limitation here is that I only looked at the comparison made by the delegation during their stay. Culture shock might influence parts of their comparisons. For some of the participants it was their first time to visit a foreign country, not even mention such a very unfamiliar Nordic country with such a different climate. Their reflection might be different after they went back to Jiangxi, in their own context. The change of place would probably affect the aspects they compared or influence what they thought is comparable. Therefore, the process for the whole group to compose the report for Jiangxi provincial education of department and for individuals to prepare internal reports for their own leadership teams and educational institutions would provide supplement data, as well as the content of those reports. The reports are internal documents, which I have no access to it.
In addition to this, there is a strong regional focus in this study. The delegation came from Jiangxi, a less developed province in China, in terms of education condition as well. However, it is hard for the educators to only talk about Jiangxi without the whole context of China. As I was told that 70% of one college’s graduates would first go find a job in coastal cities. The findings might be different if the delegation comes from Beijing or Shenzhen, which are much developed cities. Especially if we consider delegation’s English language skills, the effect and degree of comparison would also be different. I have tried to balance the levels of local and national in my study but it is very difficult.

A final limitation of this study would be the data. As a beginner in academic research, I understand how important the quality of data is, rather than pursuing quantity. However, in reality, I could not balance my enthusiasm to have conversation with every member in the delegation team with a rational number (8-10) I had planned. Since I could get more information from and of them by interviewing, I decided to interview as many as I could and then decided which interviews I would use in my final report after a fair justification. In the end, I adopted and analyzed all of my existing interview data. This decision might influence the depth of my interpretation in this study.

7.3 Conclusion and future study

Bray (2007, p. 37) concludes that “many people who undertake comparative study of education find not only that they learn more about other cultures and societies but also that they learn more about their own”. To study and understand the comparison of vocational education in China and Finland made by Chinese educators also provide me an opportunity to learn more about education in both countries. The social status of Chinese vocational education and the obstinate problems include underfunding compared with regular education and uneven funding among areas, over-emphasis on theoretical study and lack of practical training, short of qualified teachers, over-simplified assessment, and very complicated administrative structure, are impeding the substantial reform calling on from the higher authorities. The whole society agrees on the pressing need of change, and policy makers and education practitioners are looking for successful cases from abroad.
With a strong basic education result in PISA, which successfully created certain level of mystery in China, the Finnish school-based model of vocational education caught the attention of Chinese vocational educators. In three weeks overseas training program, delegation of educators got fully immersed into Finnish culture and society, and paid their specific attention towards its vocational education practice. During the process to understand how this group of educators compare the vocational education in China and Finland, I noticed that, on the one hand they were impressed by how everything was presented to them; on the other hand, they could hardly construct the ways to achieve it. I noticed how they often used national situation (guoqing) to explain the slow progress of reform in China and made the speculation that Finland is a developed country and we will reach there once we are developed enough. I listened to them explain to me how educational leaders make the decisions in front of all those value dilemmas generated in the transformative society, as well as in the global society but mostly limited to China’s economic power in it. I could feel them, as a person who has grown up in the fast urbanization and modernisation of China, as well as the expansion of higher education from late 1990s; I could also feel them, as a student living and studying in Finland.

Sadler’s study in 1900 cited by Bray et al. (2007, p. 37) could be used to make a conclusion for this study:

The practical value of studying, in a right spirit and with scholarly accuracy, the working of foreign systems of education is that it will result in our being better fitted to study and understand our own.

A future study on following up with this group of delegation when I get back to China will be a good complement to the current study, which I have pointed out in the first limitation of this current study. I am very appreciated by the occasional invitation messages from some of them. Making as much contribution as I can to foster the cooperation between Finland and China, will be the best gift I can give to my master’s degree study journey.
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Yang, P., (2014, CEREC working paper). Understanding Vocational Education Market in China

Appendix

Appendix 1: Example of coding the data

10.40-12.46
问：索改索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索索
需求量大起来了。我们有一个计算机室，110台计算机，一个接一个。我们教师摆弄得好吗？另外一个机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数学教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。我们老师在自然语言和数学级别的教学工作，一个接一个。数字教师摆弄得好吗？另外一次机会。
2004年改称江西制造学院。2002年的时候很多中专改成了高职，叫升格。范校长那个层面叫外经贸学校，后来改成外经贸职业学院，我们之所以改一些，是因为我们当时想并到江西师范大学去的，想成为他们的工学院，但也是因为利益关系，我们那里的学校的单位，就是机械行业来。不愿意下放我们。因为他们没有什么可管的，就管我们几所学校。学校的收益还不错呢，所以我们不愿意放。
我们学生现在将近9000学生。我82年毕业，在宣传部做了一年行政，后来一直做老师，做到2005年，到了后勤总务处，待了3年，做了副主任，相当于是副处长。到2008年，然后到基础课部（语文数学政治物理英语）当主任，包括老师调配，课程安排。2012年提为了副校长，负责基建保卫安全。
我们出来学习，回去后要在教职工大会上分享。还要给教育部写一份报告。要说借鉴，讲跨学科跨文化跨代，我是推动不了的，就讲院长，他也不一定能推动。大陆是意识形态的，思想政治放在首位。学科这种小的尝试，学生只能用业余时间来做，要占用专业的课程，学生专业课过不了就不能毕业。除非我是院长，我跟系主任打好招呼，这就是实验班。这也不是做不成，就是阻力很大。

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fEilt3lEL0k0b2nC_mlW3kUdU8CjGjO3km_QqjRGMX-KOk/edit
### Appendix 2: Example of sorting the data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interviewee 1 (Female): 高等院校教授; 省教育厅任命</th>
<th>Interviewee 2: 职业技术学院院长; 省教育厅任命</th>
<th>Interviewee 3: Deputy P. of zhiye jishu xueyuan</th>
<th>Interviewee 4</th>
<th>Issues in CVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Popular disparagement of vocational education</td>
<td>中国人还是有些保守，我们并没有问题，但教育是需要调整。</td>
<td>中国传统文化讲究“学而优则仕”，从认识上认为高官是不行的。</td>
<td>认为民营企业本身就不一样。</td>
<td>认为省属企业就是怎么也不一样。</td>
<td>Compare with &amp; Takeaway from Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Regime: Socialism with Chinese Character — One Party — National situation — Large population</td>
<td>国家的政治体制不改革会导致政策走向和教育程度有很大差异，这个结构不上。我们目前的问题是，人才聚集在高校，人员素质不一。</td>
<td>我们国家需要一个科学的制度，从认识上认为这是不行的。</td>
<td>自然因为国情不一样，所以实施起来肯定也不一样。</td>
<td>但政府现在很重视职业教育，希望通过职业教育，促进就业，鼓励“万众创新，大众创业”</td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Education system</td>
<td>新的职业教育体系普及高等教育：我们国家提出“大众创业万众创新”就是基于就业问题（失业人数不断增加）提出的。</td>
<td>我们现在高等教育的普及确实是提高了国民素质，但是以牺牲质量为前提的，另外出现的应试教育也是为了缓解就业压力。</td>
<td>政府现在很重视职业教育，希望通过政策引导，促进就业，鼓励“万众创新，大众创业”</td>
<td>政府现在很重视职业教育，希望通过政策引导，促进就业，鼓励“万众创新，大众创业”</td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 policy and regulation</td>
<td>我以前在教育部负责规划，就是全省的本科专科招生计划，现调整的计划经济。</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 administration and finance</td>
<td>我们的大学，像本科，到处都出问题的，个人只要30%，专科的30%；刚升大一大概12000元，本科大约是16000元。我们虽然的这些是省属的学校，有一小部分同济是地方所属，如果地方财政困难，他们的日子可能就过不了.</td>
<td>政府下面有很多厅，如教厅，宗教厅，交通厅，农业厅、林业厅、交通厅。</td>
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<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 structure and students quality</td>
<td>从高职升到高职的学生大概1,000多，5000多是来自高中的，所占比重不足10%。</td>
<td>我们国家高等教育通过高考来选拔，中国职业教育自然就意味着那些差等学生。</td>
<td>观念导致了生源，国内好的学生去读本科，剩下的这些学生都是差生，学习自主学习能力不强。</td>
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<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Curriculum and content</td>
<td>他们的动手能力比我们强很多。</td>
<td>对动手能力的培养，我们这方面确实很虚，尤其是高职；我们课程更多的还是理论教学为主。</td>
<td>有些理念，譬如在数学方法和教学环节中，我们觉得他们是做得比较好，但不是基于项目</td>
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<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 curriculum, assessment, teaching materials, pedagogy etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>