



# Research and Environment News from China

## Number 45 – March 2008

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### Introduction

On the last day of March, Chinese President Hu Jintao lit a cauldron in Beijing's Tiananmen Square with the Olympic torch Monday morning, marking the official start of the round-the-world relay. The flame is scheduled to depart from Beijing on Tuesday, 1 April, 2008 for the Kazakh city of Almaty, the first stop in its global tour of 135 cities. The relay will cover 137,000 kilometers in 130 days before the flame finally arrives at the National Stadium in Beijing on 8 August, 2008 for the opening ceremony.

Congratulations to the Swiss Scientist, Lothar Reh, from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zurich), who won the Award for International Cooperation in Science & Technology presented by the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS). The awards were given for the first time in China for the recognition of international scientists' contributions to China's science and technology development. American scientist, Scott Douglas Rozelle from Stanford University, was the co-winner of the award.

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## Special Report on “NPC, CPPCC Annual Sessions 2008” & “17th CPC National Congress”

### China's Cabinet sets tasks for new term

(Xinhua, 2008-03-21)

China's State Council, or the Cabinet, arranged its working plan for a new five-year term in the first plenary session held on Friday.

Presided over by reappointed Premier Wen Jiabao, the State Council set its goals as: to achieve further economic progress; improve people's livelihood; push forward social justice as well as advance opening up and reforms.

The Premier elaborated immediate jobs for the government:

Basically complete the government reshuffle preparations before the end of June;



Continue restoration work in snow and ice hit areas in the south, especially to rebuild power, communications, water and other infrastructure and ensure disaster-hit citizens' basic necessities.

Encourage farmers to grow more vegetables, grains and oil plants, keep high alert on bird flu and other influenza and put irrigation works in good condition;

Go all out to increase commodity supplies in the market to keep soaring prices stable and implement emergent price control over some vital commodities and services in line with law;

Suppress excessive growth of investment into fixed assets;

Put more efforts into energy conservation and emission reduction;

Other jobs include deepening financial, revenue and medical system reforms, providing better services to college graduates for finding jobs and for handicapped people as well as veterans.

Wen urged officials to free minds, be self-disciplined and build a more efficient, transparent and honest government.

### **New Cabinet formed with 5 "super ministers"**

(Xinhua, 2008-03-18)

China's parliament on Monday approved Premier Wen Jiabao's nomination of a new Cabinet, including five "super ministers" who are put on the frontline of a major government reshuffle.

The "super ministers" include minister of industry and information Li Yizhong, minister of transport Li Shenglin, minister of human resources and social security Yin Weimin, minister of environmental protection Zhou Shengxian and minister of housing and urban-rural construction Jiang Weixin.

"From this lineup, we can see the new requirements on the Cabinet ministers, set by the current social and economic development: capacities in strategic thinking and policy-making, administration and overall coordination," said Chi Fulin, executive president of the China Institute for Reform and Development.

Li Yizhong is widely known as former head of State Administration of Work Safety and a seasoned professional in petrochemical industries and state assets management. Li Shenglin has worked in factories and served as Mayor of Tianjin before he became vice-minister in charge of the former State Economic and Trade Commission and later, vice-minister in charge of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC).

New minister of environmental protection Zhou Shengxian used to work in China's northwest, a region of adverse environmental and natural conditions. He served as director of the State Forestry Administration and the State Environmental Protection Administration respectively before Monday's nomination.

The new minister of human resources and social security Yin Weimin is a master of economics, and Jiang Weixin worked in the real estate sector and served as vice-minister in charge of the NDRC.

The current government reshuffle is expected to address focal issues in China's economic and social development, and to seek all-round, coordinated and sustainable development, said Prof. Li Junpeng of the National School of Administration. "The 'super ministers' therefore need to be enterprising and innovative."

Observers say the reshuffle is more an exploration of China's overall administrative reform, rather than a simple downsizing. The performance of the new government is also crucial to China's future development.

In comparison with the previous Cabinet consisting largely of technocrats, most of the 35 new Cabinet members are well-grounded in their specialities including economics, law, political science, agriculture, administration, science and philosophy.

At least five of them hold doctoral degrees, including Commerce Minister Chen Deming, Health Minister Chen Zhu, Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, minister of agriculture Sun Zhengcai and minister in charge of the State Population and Family Planning Commission Li Bin.



Some of the ministers studied overseas: Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi at London School of Economics and Political Science, and Minister of Education Zhou Ji at State University of New York.

The two non-Communist ministers, Chen Zhu and Minister of Science and Technology Wan Gang, were trained in France and Germany respectively.

"Their profound experience will help them stand firm in the process of reform and opening up, remain cool-headed and make practical judgments in complicated situations," said Prof. Li Junpeng.

More than 10 ministers were born after New China was founded in 1949 and witnessed the country's impoverished and unrestful past, and the momentous changes in the 30 years of reform and opening up.

Many of the new Cabinet members, including Premier Wen Jiabao, had worked as farmers or workers or in other grass-roots posts.

"They share similar experiences: they suffered the worst natural calamity in recent decades in the early 1960s, and their avid desire for knowledge was dampened by the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)," said Wang Ronghua, president of Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

Analysts say the coming five years will be a crucial period for China to implement the "Scientific Outlook on Development", and maintain sustained and balanced growth.

"The public is watching how the new Cabinet will boost sustainable development by transforming the economic growth pattern, provide basic and secure public services to promote social harmony, and deepen political reforms through administrative restructuring," said Chi Fulin.

### **China to set up five new "super ministries"**

(Xinhua, 2008-03-11)

China will set up five new "super ministries" in a fresh round of government institutional restructuring, and a plan for the reshuffle was submitted to the National People's Congress (NPC), or parliament, by Premier Wen Jiabao, for deliberation on Tuesday afternoon.

The five "super ministries" are the ministry of industry and information, the ministry of human resources and social security, the ministry of environmental protection, the ministry of housing and urban-rural construction, and the ministry of transport.

To strengthen the government management on the energy sector, a high-level inter-ministerial consultation and coordinating body, the national energy commission, is also to be established, with a national bureau of energy to be set up as its executive office under the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC).

The new bureau will integrate the NDRC's functions relating to energy management, the functions of the National Energy Leading Group and the functions of the Commission of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense on nuclear power management.

The combination of a sizzling economy, soaring investment growth in the heavy industries and cars crowding urban streets have driven up China's demand for fuel. In 2007, the country's imports of crude oil hit 159.28 million tons, rising 14.7 year-on-year and contributing 46 percent to the total crude consumption.

### Bigger say in decision making

The State Environmental Protection Administration will be elevated to a full-fledged ministry after economic miracle has brought in its wake severe challenges to the environment.

"This elevation shows the government has become more concerned with environmental protection," said Wei Fusheng, academician with the Chinese Academy of Engineering. The full membership in the State Council means a bigger say in the government policy-making, he said.



"China will face the severe challenge of environmental protection for a long time to come, with the arduous task of reducing pollutants," said State Councilor Hua Jianmin, also secretary general of the Cabinet, while making explanations of the government reshuffle plan to the NPC.

#### Cost of logistics to decrease

China also plans to organize a new transport ministry that is big enough to cover road, water and air transit, but short of incorporating railways.

The Ministry of Railways, which manages more than 77,000 km of railroads, will be kept because of "the special needs in building and managing railways," said Hua without elaboration.

The annual logistic cost totals about 4.8 trillion yuan (671 billion U.S. dollars) in China, equal to 20 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and twice of that in developed countries, industry insiders said. They blamed the transport system administered by different authorities as the key reason, and the new ministry is expected to further promote the country's fledgling logistics industry.

#### Food safety woes addressed

According to the reform plan, the Ministry of Health will be empowered with the function to oversee the State Food and Drug Administration (SFDA), since the government has come under great pressure after a series of food-related scandals, or even deaths of people over the years.

The former head of the SFDA, Zheng Xiaoyu, was executed last year after being convicted of taking bribes in return for approving hundreds of medicines, some that proved dangerous.

#### Macro-regulation to be strengthened

After the reshuffle, the National Development and Reform Commission will focus on macro-regulation and phase out its involvement in economic micro-management and the examination and approval of specific projects, Hua said.

The Ministry of Finance is to reform and improve its management of the budget and tax systems. The People's Bank of China, the central bank, is to strengthen the conduct of monetary policy and improve the exchange-rate mechanism.

The reshuffle also includes the establishment of a ministry of human resources and social security, which will combine the Ministry of Personnel and the Ministry of Labor and Social Security. A state bureau of civil servants will be formed under the new ministry.

A new ministry for housing and urban and rural construction will replace the Ministry of Construction.

The proposed institutional restructuring, an important part of China's overall plan to deepen reforms in its administrative system, is a continuation of the previous five major government reshuffles over the past 30 years.

After the reshuffle, the State Council will have 27 ministries and commissions apart from the General Office, compared with the present 28.

On the necessity of the reform, Hua Jianmin said that functions of government have not been completely transformed, with public administration and public services being still weak; Structure of government institutions is not rational enough; Powers in some regards were too concentrated and lack due oversight and checks.

President Hu Jintao vowed to accelerate the reform of the administrative system and build a service-oriented government at the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) last year.

"We must lose no time in working out a master plan for it," Hu said in October.



## Science & Technology

### Chinese scientists' breakthrough in GM-modified rice

(Xinhua, 2008-03-22)

China's prestigious Zhejiang University announced that it has developed a method for creating selective terminable GM-modified rice, which could probably lead to the industrialization of the GM-modified crops.

The invention was reported on the latest version [www.plosone.org](http://www.plosone.org), an open access, online scientific journal from the Public Library of Science, which was published on Wednesday.

The accidental escape of GM-modified crops has been reported in the past few years, which has caused major safety concerns over utilization of GM-modified crops, especially GM-modified crops for industrial and pharmaceutical applications.

"To make GM-modified crops selectively controllable is critical for the full utilization of the plant GM-modified technology," said Zhang Zhitao, former associate director of the Rice Institute of China.

"The principle beneath this strategy is simple: the genes of interest in these GM-modified rice plants are tagged with an RNAi cassette which suppresses the expression of the rice detoxification enzyme against a common herbicide, rendering the GM-modified rice to be sensitive to this herbicide," said Dr. Shen Zhicheng, the project leader.

Shen said this strategy is reliable and inexpensive for implementation, and is particularly useful for development of GM-modified crops as bioreactor for production of industrial and pharmaceutical proteins.

"While all biotech products today are safe and nutritious, this technology could allow certain crops targeted for industrial, energy or health uses to be grown under controlled conditions and keep separate from other channels," said Nick Duck, Vice President of Research for Athenix Corp. in the U.S.

### Space observatory set up on Dome Argus

(Xinhua, 2008-03-20)

China's automatic space observatory at Dome Argus, the highest point of the Antarctic ice sheet, has been successfully completed.

The observatory was set up by China's 24th science inspection team on the South Pole at Dome Argus, the Antarctic icecap peak at 4,093 meters above sea level. It has undergone more than one month of tests and examinations and now transfers back nearly 10M of astronomic data every day.

"Only when we can get data stably from the observatory, can we take the load off our minds, and see that our efforts at the Antarctic icecap have been successfully completed," said by Zhu Zhenxi, one of the astronomers in the inspection team.

Setting up this observatory is an international project led by China's astronomers in cooperation with astronomers from Australia, the U.S. and Britain. It is a milestone in the development of astronomy in China, said experts in the inspection team.

The past 10 years of scientific research showed that Dome Argus, due to its special geographic site, had great potential to become one of the best places on the earth to set up an observatory.

The observatory will for the first time in the world map the parameters of Dome Argus helping to enable the building of larger observatories at a later date.



## **Tianjin banking on biomedical future**

(Xinhua, 2008-03-19)

A high-profile biomedicine research institute is under construction in Tianjin, and several projects are expected to be developed there, Cheng Jinpei, vice-minister of science and technology, said yesterday.

Most of the construction work will be completed by the end of this year in the rising North China economic powerhouse, he said.

Developed at a cost of 1 billion yuan (\$140 million), the Tianjin International Biomedicine Research Institute has already recruited two deputy directors to manage the operation, Cheng told China Daily on the sidelines of 11th NPC.

The two are from multinational pharmaceutical companies and have been tasked with bringing the very latest biomedical technologies and projects to Tianjin, he said.

"The institution is designed to research and convert biotechnology into usable drugs and, more importantly, integrate biomedicine resources within the coastal city of Tianjin," Cheng said.

The research center will differentiate itself from Beijing's Zhongguancun and Daxing institutes by focusing on the commercialization of biomedical research, he said.

Rao Zihe, president of Nankai University in Tianjin and director of the research institute, said the top priority for the lab is to commercialize biomedical technologies.

Although the main focus for projects has yet to be decided, research into cancer treatments and the development of stem cell bio-drugs are two promising options, Rao said.

Members of the research institute will also seek to broaden the scope of existing research, he said.

## **Minister: Sci-tech development plan in progress**

(Xinhua, 2008-03-13)

China's Minister of Science and Technology Wan Gang said in Beijing on Thursday that the medium- and long-term plan for scientific and technological development has been "progressing smoothly" since 2006.

A number of major projects, such as large planes, nuclear power and water pollution treatment and control, major new medicines and next-generation mobile communication, have been launched and the others are expected to start later this year, Wan said at a press conference on the sidelines of the annual sessions of the national legislature and the top political advisory body.

He spoke highly of the amendment to the law for promoting scientific and technological advance, which was endorsed at the end of last year, and said it created a better environment for innovation.

The Ministry of Science and Technology and Ministry of Finance jointly issued a circular on the support of key national labs just during the annual sessions of lawmakers and political advisors.

"The circular allows scientists with the key labs to do research according to their own will," the minister said.

So far some regional innovation systems with their own characteristics have been established and have contributed to such major projects as those for renovation of machine building in northeast China, the first phase of the lunar exploration project, the Three Gorges project and the Qinghai-Tibet railway, he disclosed.

## **China-made bullet train to link Beijing and Tianjin**

(CCTV, 2008-03-10)

The first Chinese-made bullet train has completed a test run, and will begin service between Beijing and Tianjin in August.



The first bullet train designed and manufactured in China with a speed of 300 kilometers per hour rolled off production line on Dec. 21, 2007. (Xinhua Photo)

The new train is designed to run at 300 kilometers an hour and will link the two cities starting August the 1st, a week before the opening of the Beijing Olympics.

It will cut travel time between Beijing and Tianjin to around 30 minutes less than half the current travel time of 70 to 80 minutes.

In the meantime, sources say the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Railways are looking closely at plans for a 350-kilometer-an-hour train to run between Beijing and Shanghai.

That high-speed link has been in talks for years. Currently, China's fastest home-made trains run up to just 250 kilometers an hour.

Those trains, which debuted last April, link Beijing with Harbin, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

## Environment

### **Ambassador: China to be environment friendly**

(Xinhua, 2008-03-26)

Conserving resources and the environment is a basic state policy of China and the Chinese government is taking measures to deal with the challenge, Chinese Ambassador to the United States Zhou Wenzhong said Tuesday.

Delivering a speech at the World Environment Center's forum in Washington DC, Zhou said the Chinese government has given prominence to "building a resource-conserving and environment-friendly society" in the strategy for industrialization and modernization.

Premier Wen Jiabao has mentioned that China gave high priority to conserving resources and making protecting the environment obligatory, said Zhou.

"It has already set the goals -- reducing energy consumption per unit GDP by 20 percent, and cutting total emissions of major pollutants by 10 percent during the 11th five-year plan period," he said.

"In recent years, the Chinese government has enhanced macro control and stepped up industrial upgrading, in an effort to make industrial structures, modes of growth, and consumption patterns more conducive to conserving resources and the environment," he added.



However, Zhou acknowledged that there are many problems in the Chinese economy that could hamper its steady and sustainable development, these include: high liquidity, a large trade surplus, excessive investment, and the rise in the price of commodities.

"Among many others, a major problem is the conflict between economic and social development on the one hand and resources and the environment on the other," he said, adding that some important drinking water sources in China were affected

"The Chinese government attaches great importance to this issue, and has been taking effective measures to address it," said the ambassador, noting that, due to the Chinese government's strong policies, China saw a 3.27 percent year-on-year drop in energy intensity in 2007 for each unit of GDP.

In 2007, emissions of sulfur dioxide and chemical oxygen demand (COD) in China began to decrease by 3.14 percent and 4.66 percent respectively from the previous year. And in the first three quarters of 2007, China shut down old-fashioned production facilities, notably 25 million tons of cement, 400,000 tons of calcium carbide, 11 million tons of coke, 9.69 million tons of iron, 8.73 million tons of steel, 1.7 million tons of paper making, and 350,000 tons of alcohol brewing.

Zhou said that China attaches great importance to climate change, and over the past 26 years, China's energy consumption per unit GDP dropped by 64.5 percent. Meanwhile, forest coverage is growing, and has played an important role in controlling greenhouse gas emission.

China will do its best to carry out the national plan for tackling climate change, and will, in accordance with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol, honor its due international responsibilities and obligations based on the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities," he added.

"We will work to achieve the specific goals of cutting energy consumption, increasing renewable energy, raising forest coverage, and developing a low-carbon economy," he added.

Founded in 1974, the World Environment Center is an independent, global non-profit, non-advocacy organization. One of its missions is to foster cutting-edge ideas about economic development, environmental protection and social responsibility through roundtables and other forums.

## Energy

### Huaneng to boost renewable energy

(China Daily, 2008-03-26)

China Huaneng Group, the country's largest power producer, said it will boost the development of new energy such as wind and solar power, in line with the government's thrust for renewable energy.

The company has accelerated its development of wind power in Guangdong, Jilin, Shandong, Inner Mongolia and Hainan, said Huaneng President Li Xiaopeng.

"The company's wind power projects in operation or under construction now have a total capacity of 1,347 mW," said Li. "We are also developing solar power projects in the Northwest and biomass power projects in Jilin province in Northeast China."

Besides wind, solar and biomass power, the company will also increase its capacity of hydropower, thermal and nuclear power, said Li.

Last year, the company's Yuhuan power plant in Zhejiang started commercial operation. With four 1,000 mW ultra supercritical units, it is one of the world's most energy-efficient and environmentally friendly power generating projects in the world.



The company is also developing China's first nuclear plant using high-temperature, gas-cooled technology. The 200 mW Shidaowan plant in Shandong involves a total investment of 3 billion yuan.

Huaneng has launched the GreenGen project, the first near-zero-emission integrated gasification combined cycle (IGCC) power plant in China. Located in Tianjin, the project has a capacity of 250 mW. Last year, US coal company Peabody became an equity partner in the project.

Along with giving a push to new energy, Huaneng will accelerate closures of small-scale power generating units. In the first two months of this year, the company has closed down power units with a total capacity of 100 mW. By the end of 2007, the company closed down a number of small-scale power units with a total capacity of 2,391 mW.

In 2007, the company's sulfur dioxide emissions were reduced by 8.88 percent. By the end of last year, 57 percent of the company's power units had been installed with de-sulfur equipments.

Last year, the company signed an agreement with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, Australia's national science agency, to develop clean-coal power generation and carbon capturing and storage technologies.

The collaboration includes capturing power plants' flue gases, coal gasification, coal gas purification and other generation technologies. It will also include a post-combustion capture pilot project at Huaneng Beijing thermal power plant. Post-combustion capture traps carbon dioxide from flue gases of power plants.

## Health

### **Olympics: China tags drugs to prevent athletes from misuse**

(Xinhua, 2008-03-16)

China has ordered all pharmaceutical plants to tag medicines that contain stimulants to prevent athletes from mistakenly using banned drugs during the Olympic Games, a drug watchdog official said here on Sunday.

Drugstores were told not to sell such medicine without tags that read "athletes cautious" on the package, said Wu Zhen, vice director the State Food and Drug Administration at a press conference on the sidelines of the parliament session.

Only approved pharmaceutical plants and wholesalers are allowed to produce and wholesale protein assimilation preparations and peptide hormones, the official said.

The Chinese law also forbids the sales of protein assimilation preparations except insulin or the sales of peptide hormones, Wu added.

The moves were aimed at a fair and clean environment for the Games, Wu noted.

A catalog of drugs needed during the Olympic Games has been compiled.

China is resolute against doping and the Beijing Olympics will feature the largest number of doping tests in the history of the Games, according to officials with the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG).

Anti-doping requirements have been issued to all participating athletes at the Beijing Games, officials said.



## Education

### Education not delivering "results"

(China Daily, 2008-03-25)

Four in 10 Chinese complain about the yawning gap between large investments in education and its returns, a recent nationwide survey has showed.

The Horizon Research Consultancy Group polled 3,355 residents aged 16 to 60 in both urban and rural areas, including seven metropolises such as Beijing and Shanghai.

The survey found that only 16 percent of respondents believed their investments on education gave good returns.

Those with higher education voiced greater disappointment at the quality of education received, the survey showed.

"Even with a master's degree, I failed to find a decent position in big companies," Mao Xin, a 26-year-old Beijing resident, told China Daily yesterday.

"My textbook knowledge gave no advantage whatsoever in the competition."

Mao had to lower his expectations and work for a small private company, with wages similar to what undergraduates got.

"I disappointed my parents, who gave me at least 30,000 yuan (4,250 U.S. dollars) to attend a postgraduate management course in a key university for three years," Mao said.

People in the rural areas generally gave more positive feedback on the quality of education than those from the cities, the survey found.

"Our education has been focusing on an examination-oriented system," Huo Qingwen, the deputy director of language education testing service center under the Beijing Foreign Studies University, told China Daily yesterday.

"The survey result doesn't surprise me, as I had heard complaints not only from the students, but also from the teachers who have been asked to focus more about the exam-passing rate," Huo said.

The Ministry of Education has called on schools and universities to gradually phase out an exam-dominated education system, amid concerns that students pursue higher academic results rather than practical experience and competence.

"The job market is still hungry for talented staff, but many graduates are not competent because the posts require more practical experience and creative ability of workers," Huo added.

However, some educators argue against the view that the quality of education is disappointing many.

"At least the quality of education is not the fundamental reason causing the rise of unemployment in China," Hong Chengwen, a management professor at Beijing Normal University, told China Daily yesterday.

"Vacancies in the employment market have not caught the pace of economic development in recent years," Hong said.

Hong said a domino effect will follow if the government does not take more effective efforts to control the unemployment rate.

"People have great expectations for higher salaries when they invest more on education."

"A low employment rate will influence the desire of Chinese to pursue education, particularly among the groups who long for higher education," Hong said.



Hong's comments come even as the number of students expected to take part in the national postgraduate entrance examination this year has dropped for the first time in a decade, statistics from the Ministry of Education show.

It was reported that 1.2 million people across the country registered for the exam this year, down 6 percent from last year.

Vivian Guo, the chief executive officer of a private company in Beijing, said her company employs people who can contribute the most for the least expense.

Most university graduates prefer jobs in large cities, causing an imbalance in human resources between urban and rural areas, Hong said.

The graduates would get better job options if they chose to work at the grassroots level because of the government's preferential policies, including the waiving of tuition for those willing to work in the country's rural and western regions, he added.

About 580,000 graduates last year found county- or village-level jobs, and more than 550,000 got jobs in the central and western regions, Ministry of Education figures showed.

"Because many graduates focus only on jobs with high salaries and that are directly relevant to their specialties, they miss other good work opportunities," Kong Xiang, a Beijing graduate who works as an English teacher in a college located at a remote area in Yunnan province, said.

Financial costs are another factor in the education system that residents complain about.

The recent survey showed that education costs form one-quarter of an urban family's income, while it forms one-third of a rural family's income.

About 150 million primary and junior middle school students across the country have benefited from a tuition fee exemption for compulsory education since 2006, officials said.

At the same time, a number of schools violate rules, asking for "extra" money if some students want to enter them to take advantage of their seemingly better teaching environment, Sun said.

To address this issue, the government should help narrow the gap in the quality of education between schools, CPPCC member Tian Shulan, who is also an official of the Ministry of Education, said.

## **China's prodigy education project sparks controversy**

(Xinhua, 2008-03-23)

As 40 newly-joined teenagers are leafing through the college textbooks for a bright academic future, China's unique education program for gifted youngsters has raised controversy about the country's education reform 30 years after it began.

The "Shao Nian Ban" project ("Special Class for Gifted Youngsters") was first set up in 1978 in the University of Science and Technology (USTC) at the suggestion of Nobel Prize Laureate Lee Tsung-dao.

Most of the students, aged between 11 to 16, skipped years of primary and secondary school to enter college because of their outstanding intelligence. The project is aimed to train them to be top-notch scientists in the shortest possible time.

"The special class reflects the innovation of the country's education system and is a new full-scale approach for education reform," said Lin Chongde, vice-president of the Chinese Psychological Society, at a seminar on special education for gifted youngsters held on Friday to mark the 30th birthday of the project in east China's Anhui Province.



While school marks only play a minor role in the evaluation for the children, the project's enrolling process mainly consists of exam papers and interviews drafted by education experts. According to an interviewer, the professors may even give a spot lecture for the applicants and ask questions to see how much they get.

In the first two or three years, students in the class have to learn all basic subjects. Later, they can choose any major they like among all the university provides.

Zhou Mansheng, an official with the Ministry of Education, supports the project and encourages schools to explore their own way of selecting students. "In the future the country will give colleges more freedom to choose students who are suitable for their own education style."

While other similar prodigy classes in the country all died out, the project itself has been struggling hard amid media fuss and expert criticisms which say that it is unreasonable to group those talented children together by sacrificing their childhood and social experiences.

Xin Houwen, former vice-president of the USTC, said it was true that a small group of talented children exist and society had to create a fitting environment for them to learn and grow.

Jiang Yong, an '86 classmate and now a company boss, said "At first I didn't want to admit that I was a genius because it meant much more responsibilities I had to take. After joining the class, I finally did and I learnt to pursue my own dreams in a world full of obstacles."

Li Junlin, an '87 classmate and a graduate from Stanford University, said, "After joining the class, I finally felt the freedom of academic study. We have little limitations and teachers always did their best to satisfy whatever we wanted to learn."

However, Zhou points out, "The project is only a supplement to China's mainstream education. And since the country's education resources are limited, the project system should not be promoted much further."

### **More foreign students come to study on Chinese mainland**

(Xinhua, 2008-03-13)

The Chinese mainland received more than 190,000 foreign students last year, the highest number since the founding of New China in 1949, the Ministry of Education (MOE) said here Thursday.

Altogether 195,503 overseas students from 188 countries and regions came to study on the mainland in 2007, up 20.17 percent year-on-year, the ministry's figures showed.

Overseas students entered 544 universities and colleges in 31 Chinese provincial-level areas.

The Chinese government awarded scholarships to 10,151 exchange students, up 19.6 percent over the previous year. Self-funded students totaled 185,352, up 20.2 percent.

Asian students accounted for 72.47 percent of the overseas students, the biggest proportion. 13.47 percent of the overseas students came from Europe, 10.06 percent from America, 3.03 percent from Africa and 1.07 percent from Oceania.

The Republic of Korea, Japan, the United States, Vietnam and Thailand were the five biggest source countries, the ministry said.

More students came to China for academic degrees, as the number in 2007 increased by 24.34 percent year-on-year to reach 68,213, accounting for about one third of the total.

According to the ministry, the Chinese government will expand its scholarship program by making 3,000 more awards to foreign students each year from 2008 to 2010.