

# The Hong Kong Institute of Education Confers Its First Honorary Degree Since Establishment

22 October 2001

The Hong Kong Institute of Education will confer its first Honorary Degree to Professor Gu Mingyuan, Dean, College of Education Administration, Beijing Normal University, at the second session of the Institute's 7th Graduation Ceremony to be held on November 22.

## Personal Background of Professor Gu

One of China's most prolific scholars in the field of comparative education, Professor Gu Mingyuan was born in 1929 in a small town of Jiangying, near the city of Wuxi in southern Jiangsu province. His father left the family when he was still very young and his mother devoted all her efforts to providing an education for him. His primary education was completed in 1942 through attending different primary schools including an old-fashioned private school (sishu) during the Japanese invasion of 1937. His six years of secondary education (1942 - 1948) took place in the famous Jiangsu Nanqing middle school in his native Jiangying well known for its high standards. Failing to gain a place into one of his targeted universities in 1948, Professor Gu took up a post teaching primary school in Shanghai. Once he started teaching he took a particular interest in observing how children learned. This experience was to shape his subsequent career choices. In the next year (1949), before the establishment of People's Republic of China, Professor Gu was admitted to Beijing Normal University. After two years of study, he was selected for study at Lenin Normal College in the Soviet Union, for five years. After returning from his studies in the Soviet Union, Professor Gu took up various posts in Beijing Normal University, including Vice-President and Dean of the School of Graduate Studies respectively. Professor Gu was active in promoting foreign education studies, international exchange and comparative education. Now 72, Professor Gu is renowned as a scholar, researcher and teacher. Aside from his post at Beijing Normal University he is active in public service. Devoted to education for over half a century, Professor Gu also went through years of hardship during social campaigns in the 60's and 70's. Ever persevering in his professional development, he regards the turmoil he suffered as an experience which has deepened his understanding of educational and cultural issues.

## Contributions to Comparative Education and Education Reform

Professor Gu's reflections on the education he received in his secondary school days, his days in Beijing Normal University and in the Soviet Union, laid the roots of his later interest in comparative education. Professor Gu's researches and writings on educational reform in the early 1980's provided a deep historical and philosophical justification for the modernisation of education, and have had a influence on China's educational reform over the two decades since then. He also provided valuable advice on China's education system, allowing much greater regional and institutional autonomy, and initiating a pattern whereby the main parameters for education activity are laid down by law, rather than administrative fiat from above.

Throughout the 1990's, he was very active in fostering an Asian identity in comparative education, which culminated in the establishment of the Comparative Education Society of Asia in 1996. He has also written on the educational trends and patterns in countries and regions such as the Soviet Union, the USA, Japan and Europe which are compared with China's educational thought and experience.

## Efforts in Promoting Overseas Exchange

As a leader in Asian educational circles, Professor Gu seeks to build a theoretical framework for understanding the experience of education and modernisation in East Asia, and the ways in which unique elements in East Asian cultural patterns interacted with the modernisation process. Eager to promote overseas exchange, he founded the journal "Foreign Education Conditions" "Comparative Education Research", established an influential Chinese Educational Association and took a leading position in the Chinese Education International Exchange Association. He has taken an active role in promoting overseas exchange after joining China's first formal delegation to the 18th meeting of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation held in Paris, France. To attain this goal, study tours were made to Japan, Korea, the USA, Canada, Brazil, Spain, the then Soviet Union, Czech Republic and Hong Kong since then.

## Awards Received

As China's most prominent educational theorist, Professor Gu is held in high regard throughout the country. He was awarded the prestigious title of National Distinguished Teacher, First Class Teacher Award for Normal University Teachers from the Ceng Xianzi's Education Foundation and People's Teacher by the city of Beijing.

## Publications

Professor Gu has to date published 13 books, 218 scholarly articles and edited a 12-volume dictionary of education in Chinese. His publications mainly cover the topics of comparative education with insights on education development and major education issues in China and throughout the world.



Professor Gu Mingyuan

- End -