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School dropout in China alarming

BELJING, Oct. 19 — Dropping out of school has become a serious problem in China when an increasing number of educated people are needed to build a modernised country, according to this week's "Beijing Review", reports Xinhua.

An investigation showed that about 685 or 3.14 per cent of the students in 33 middle schools in the Hedong district of Tianjin dropped out in 1985. The dropout rate in Beijing, China's political and cultural center, is among the lowest in the country — about 1.2 per cent in 1948 and 0.9 per cent in 1985.

The dropout rate in urban areas is much lower than in the countryside.

Dropouts are chiefly students in their second and third years of junior middle schools. Some of them take temporary jobs. Some follow their parents into business or sideline production. Some even make trouble in society and go astray.

Since China passed its compulsory education law last year and all middle schools improved their educational methods, the dropout rate has declined, but the problem is still serious in some rural middle schools.

The reasons why students dropout are many-sided and complicated, said Li Tailun, Director of the Sha-baizhuang middle school in Beijing, and Tian Guoyu, Headmaster of the Beijing No. 20 middle schools.

Because of China's single-track education system, most schools are inclined to concentrate on students who will go on to further education instead of developing students' special skills, said Tian, adding: "since the final goal of students is to enter college or university, there is sharp competition for the limited number of college and university places, putting students under great psychological pressure, which adversely influences their studies. Those who lose confidence in themselves fall far behind".

Chinese schools and classes are divided into key ones and ordinary ones. The best students enter the key schools and the ordinary schools are left with the rest. Students in ordinary schools or backward classes feel looked down upon by their families and society. They lose their self-esteem and their desire for improvement, and may give themselves up as hopeless and fool around instead of doing their lessons. They start to cut classes and eventually drop out.

Both Li and Tian agreed that another important factor leading students to drop out is the idea that studying is useless and only money is

important.

"A teacher earns only about 100 Yuan a month, but I can get more than 100 yuan a day selling tomatoes", one student said.

Many parents, especially uneducated ones in the countryside, only consider their immediate interests. They allow their sons or daughters to drop out to earn money, Li said.

Some people even say that money should be worshipped instead of knowledge. "What is knowledge worth?" They ask. Li thought this was the result of China's long-time discrimination against knowledge and intellectuals.

Since knowledge hasn't gained the respect it deserves, students are unclear in their goals and attitude towards their studies. And their parents have not realised that it is important for them to urge their children to study hard", Li said.

Also, because the situation of intellectuals remains somewhat difficult, those without knowledge do not feel ashamed of themselves or imbued with a desire to study.

Both schools and parents contribute to the drop out rate, Li and Tian noted. Some parents beat their children for bad marks instead of instructing them, leading students to run away from school and home.

Only when society's attitude to knowledge changes, and people of knowledge and talent are respected not only in words but in deeds, will students want to obtain knowledge and pay more attention to their education", they said.