

Cherish the Chinese Dream

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The concept of 'American dream' is familiar to everyone-- through hard work, you will get ahead. The core values envisioned in the American dream have all along enlightened generations of ordinary Americans to start up from scratch and inch up the social ladders. China, as a nation striving for prosperity and stability, has its own version, which has been firmly adhered to ever since the Han Dynasty, when the meritocratic civil-service exams were ushered in the Chinese history to select the hopefuls for influential positions. Therefore, beyond hard work as enshrined in American dream, the Chinese dream places even greater faith in the value of a good education, which promises to boost the poor out of poverty and secure better lives.

It looms large, especially since China adopted the policy of reforms and opening up three decades ago, that a good education in itself means more opportunities for success. The late leader Deng Xiaoping designated science and education as the nation's No.1 productivity, creating a peculiar appeal to the then pioneers trying to get rich through education. And more important, it was these people who set the basic formula for the new version of Chinese dream—revitalize China through science and education. They shrugged off the old conception that a person with a prestigious education must refrain from seeking fortune, and took on the view that getting rich for the educated people is glorious.

Now, with China's ever-galloping economic growth cooling, millions of youngsters are facing the possibility that a good degree won't be enough. As 2008 wound down, 1.5 million new graduates were still jobless, according to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. When the Chinese lunar new year ended Monday, many more young diploma-holders were already seen milling about in the deserted job market, as only a few employers registered actually showed up. Confronted with the economic downtrend, even the giant companies are considering personnel cutback rather than recruitment. This has exerted more strain upon the young job seekers, and it seems that the Chinese dream is under threat with the prospect for employment sitting on the bubble.

The severe winter for employment was on stark display when Premier Wen Jiabao met with to-be graduates at a Beijing college at the yearend of 2008. 'If you are worried, I'm more worried than you,' he told them, promising that ensuring their employment was at the top of his agenda, alongside creating jobs for laid-off factory workers.

Hence the government has begun working to maintain the confidence of college grads by taking a wide array of steps to ensure their employment.

Most encouraging, of course, is the \$586 billion in stimulus funds the government is pouring into the economy, most of which will be funneled to state-run companies that build railways, power lines and other infrastructure. The goal is to create up to 9 million new jobs this year. Those aren't just for college alumni, of course, but the half-million engineering grads can rejoice. In the mean time, the parents of the 6.1 million students due to collect bachelor's degrees this summer are also hoping such measures work.

Despite the fact that a massive expansion in college enrollment since the 1990s began taking the shine off a degree in any job fair, and even top students are now scrambling for jobs in second-tier cities, opportunities still exist, and the government is still stepping up its job-creation efforts, which is expected to pay off in the foreseeable future. Since the global economic tailspin set in, China, without exception, has been also facing tough times. Albeit of this, the government has consistently worked hard to reassure student job seekers that hopes persist and not to give up.

It might be a sensible strategy for the young job seekers and their pushy parents to lower their ambitions faced with the ongoing bleakness shrouding the job market.

What is most valued, at least for now, is none other than confidence, as Premier Wen remarked during his just concluded European tour-- 'confidence is more valuable than gold.' Higher education, which still accounts for a small proportion in the world's most populous country, will continue to act as a living force in China's long-term endeavor to build up a prosperous and harmonious society.

Even if challenge is looming ahead for the grads to reach high-flying jobs in their dreams at the time of global crunch, they will still be able to achieve a better living standard than their parents by adjusting their expectations accordingly. As for youngsters, there is always a splendid future ahead of them. Fat years seem to be over, but in all likelihood, stormy days will be over and glinting sunrise will be reappearing on the horizon. Where there is hope, there will be a way.

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