Illiteracy is one of the most critical social issues in the contemporary world. The eradication of illiteracy is the only means to pull a nation out of poverty and backwardness. Thus, all the nations in the world have taken literacy as the fundamental project for the empowerment of the population and the development of the national economy. On the other hand, literacy rate among the adults is not only seen as a symbol of a nation’s economic power, but also an indicator of its civilization.

China, a developing country with the largest population in the world, has the largest absolute number of illiterates. As a result, literacy and post-literacy education in China directly contributes to the prosperity of the nation and the construction of the Four Modernizations. Literacy is of special significance to politics, economy, culture and the overall education. Since the founding of new China, the government has placed top priority on literacy and has adopted the principle of “prevention, promotion and continuing education.” Earth-shaking achievements have been accomplished in the field, the empowerment of the population fulfilled and the society is pushed forward. These accomplishments are recognized by the world and the glorious chapter has entered the history of literacy promotion.

In the past 50 years, 200 million Chinese became neo-literates. In 1949, when new China was founded, 80% of the adults were illiterate, whereas at the end of 1998, illiteracy rate dropped to 12%. Illiteracy rate among young and middle-aged adults between 15 and 40 years old dropped to 6%. Survey conducted by the national government in more than 10 provinces and cities prove the goal of eradication of illiteracy among young and middle-aged adults has been reached in these areas.

Material development plays a fundamental role in literacy and post-literacy education. The tremendous success China has made in literacy and post-literacy education is no doubt attributed to material development. Government at all levels has always been placing great stress on material development. Organizations and individuals also contribute important support and active participation. In China, the central government is in charge of the development of materials and at the same time encourages local government to produce and disseminate their own versions. Relevant people were organized to develop materials like “A Textbook of Basic Literacy for Farmers”, “A Fast Learning of Chinese Words for Farmers”, and “A Reading Textbook of Fast Learning Chinese Words”, which were published by the People's Education Publishing House and distributed by the National Xinhua Bookshop. On the basis of this, local versions were created catering to local needs and problems. Statistics show that over 100 kinds of literacy and post-literacy textbooks and over 1,000 kinds of post-literacy materials have been produced at the national and regional levels. Several hundred millions of literacy and post-literacy textbooks were also published and distributed by publishing houses at various levels.

In conclusion, China has developed, published and disseminated a huge number of literacy and post-literacy materials of various kinds, which were tailored to the local situations. Recognition has been given to this both at home and abroad.

1. Material Development

(1) Strengthening National Macro-Management and Guidance of Material Development to Ensure the Quality of the Materials

In response to the unbalanced development in economy, culture and education in this vast country, a number of policies have been enforced with a special reference to syllabus-formulating, prototypical material-developing and developer-training. The goals for these policies are to reflect the national guidelines and objectives in material development and to adapt the materials to local needs and problems.
a. Formulating Syllabus to Provide Guidance for Material Development

In October 1992, the Former State Education Commission of China formulated the syllabuses of adults’ primary education in literacy and functional skills. These syllabuses lay down the goals, demands, contents and learning hours of the three subjects “Chinese for Functional Uses,” “Functional Mathematics,” and “Functional Technical Skills.” The guidelines of material development, i.e. fast-learning, practical, moral and value education are combined with literacy education and education of production skills as well as skills for daily life, so that materials developed can be morally wholesome, scientific, functional and diversified. The amount of information included the formats, the spelling of frequently used words, the reading methodology of literacy, and the arrangement of texts and exercises are all specifically promulgated. The formulation of syllabuses demonstrates that material development in China is conducted in a systematic manner.

b. Developing National Prototypes to Set up Examples for Material Development

Besides direct involvement in material development, the national government also organizes some provincial or municipal sectors to produce high-quality materials of special characteristics. For instance, in March 1984, in response to the demand of the Ministry of Education, Heilongjiang, Fujian and other provinces produced their respective part-time school textbooks for farmers both in the North and in the South. In July 1988, responding to the appeal of the Former State Education Commission, the four provinces of Henan, Hunan, Anhui and Ganshu developed a series of prototypical materials, such as “Basic Literacy”, “Functional Chinese,” “Functional Mathematics,” “Functional Science and Technology,” and “Popular Science.” These materials have been published and used since 1990. Furthermore, responsible sectors were also organized by the Former State Education Commission to develop and publish series of reading textbooks in literacy and post-literacy for national utilization. These practices served as an incentive in local material development and a catalyst of the emergence of high-quality local versions with noticeable characteristics and greatly contributed to the development of literacy and post-literacy continuing education.

c. Training Personnel Involved in Material Development and Encouraging Material Evaluation

In recent years, massive training programmes were given to personnel responsible for developing materials at both national and regional levels, through which these people could improve their expertise by sharing experience and discussions. As a result, experienced material developers, both part-time and full-time, are playing vital roles in many provinces, regions, counties and townships. In order to give incentives to excellent materials so that they can be distributed in a wider scope, experts appointed by the Former State Education Commission carefully examined the literacy materials developed at the provincial level and classified 6 materials into the category of “excellent.” They were “A textbook of Literacy and functional Skills,” and “Basic Literacy for Adults” by Fujian, “Functional Literacy for Farmers,” by Sichuan, and so forth. The training of personnel and evaluation served as a significant drive in the improvement of the materials.

(2) Mobilizing Local Resources in Developing Materials to Give Diversity to Materials

Under the macro-monitoring and guidance of the national government, the quality of materials becomes an essential factor in evaluating literacy education. Funds are collected, personnel trained and contents of materials tailored to practical situations. Finally, types of materials and their formats are diversified and people at differentiated levels are involved in material development.

a. Material Developers at Differentiated Levels

1) On one hand, there are prototypical materials produced by the central government, regional materials by provinces and cities, local materials by counties and districts and supplementary materials by township literacy teachers for their own use; and

2) On the other hand, there are materials independently developed by institutions such as educational and agricultural sectors, science associations, women’s league, and also materials jointly produced by the Ministry of Education, People’s Education Publishing House and provinces or cities.
b. Types of Materials

1) Types of literacy materials: materials covering everything about culture, politics, technology and daily life, strictly functional material aiming to motivate learners to participate in literacy activities through teaching functional life skills, literacy materials especially prepared for women and minorities, and specialized literacy materials focusing on ethnic languages.

2) Types of post-literacy materials: primary education materials focusing on literacy and functional skills.

c. Format of Materials

Literacy materials are mainly written texts, with additional means such as posters, pictures and audio-visual materials.

The common features shared by current materials are:

1) Literacy goes side by side with technical sills and at the same time makes special reference to moral and value education;
2) Contents of teaching are structured with the understanding features of adult learners and their learning needs taken full consideration; and
3) Materials are highly scientific, practical and intriguing; and indigenous culture and local characteristics can be easily perceived with these materials.

(3) Exploring Laws and Determining the Principal Procedure of Material Development to Ensure the Quality

After many years’ research and exploration, a general pattern of Chinese material development for literacy and post-literacy education has come into being, with key words at each stage. It goes as follows:

Identifying targets □ Field survey □ Analyzing data □ Identifying problems □ Selecting themes □ Selecting formats □ Determining contents □ Writing texts □ Field-testing drafts (simple printed papers) □ Revising drafts (simple printed papers) □ Publishing and distributing □ Evaluating materials

Since the mechanism of developing materials for adult is different from that of developing textbooks for children, developers cannot directly borrow the existing pattern, which responds to the developing process and learning behaviors of adults. Materials for adults must cater to the needs of different learners, and these needs can be sharply different.

At present, the procedure of material development for adults goes as follows:

a. Examine and study the documents issued by the government and educational sectors on literacy and post-literacy education (including syllabuses on material development and documents on developing, publishing and distributing materials).

1) Identify the objectives, tasks and crucial contents of literacy and post-literacy education.
2) Clarify the guidelines, principles and requirements of material development and keep these in the mind throughout the process of development.

b. Determine the clientele of literacy and post-literacy

The clientele is either urban or rural dwellers, either men or women, either minority groups or other special communities. Contents of materials are oriented to the characteristics of the clientele’s language, customs and the geographical features of where the clientele lives.

c. Conduct field-surveys and collect data to decide the most crucial problems

After determining the clientele for literacy and post-literacy, developers should look into the features of the clientele, i.e. their living conditions and needs for post-literacy so that they could collect information to adapt the contents of materials to the practical life and interests of the clientele. On the basis of this, relevant themes can be chosen and specifics with the contents can be also determined.

Major methods of field survey include: observation, questionnaire, interview (arranged or casual and some unusual means of field survey). These methods are all adopted to investigate into the life, production and educational profiles of the clientele.

To find out the most urgent needs of the clientele, developers should sort out the collected data and put them into the following categories: food, clothing, housing, water sources, health, environment, population, transportation, income, education, culture, and spiritual life.

Field surveys must be conducted in a careful manner. The people who conduct surveys should be given training on the ways, methods and sills of surveys and be acquainted with the surveyed area. The purpose and methods of the survey should be made known to the recipients before the practice. One thing deserves special attention: the survey should be conducted in an atmosphere in which both parties bear confidence and trust in each other, so that the target groups are willing to talk with the conductors of the survey and understand and agree to answer questions on their private life. Good questions give the interviewee the wish and opportunities to talk about themselves. They will tend to feel they are taking up an equal position in the literacy activity.
d. Select Themes, Formats and Contents

After identifying the needs of the clientele, developers have to arrange them in an order of priority so that they will be able to select relevant themes. These themes are classified into different categories, on the basis of which a systematic diagram can be designed demonstrating the needs of the clientele.

e. Develop Materials

Materials should respond to the problems in the clientele’s daily life, production and environment and observe the principles set down in the national syllabus for literacy and post-literacy.

f. Print and Field-Test Materials

The draft materials are printed and presented to learners who share characteristics with literacy and post-literacy clientele. Such field-testing serves as an evaluation on the practicality and effectiveness of the materials so that improvement can be made in time with the materials. Before the field-testing, developers should first brief the teachers who present the materials either orally or in written notification on the target and objectives of the materials, means of application, expected outcomes and follow-up activities.

After the field-testing, teachers, target groups of the materials, illustrators, developers and producers should come together to arrive at an evaluation, in accordance with which developers and illustrators will make necessary revisions.

2. Publishing and Distribution of Materials

Chinese government has always been placing a great emphasis on literacy and post-literacy education. As a result, the publishing and distribution of materials is a government order given to publishing houses and distribution sectors at various levels (e.g. Xinhua Bookstore, distribution centers).

In China, publishing houses and distribution centers are state-owned properties. Although making profits is an important target for all these institutions, they should put in the first place how to create better feedback from the readers. To achieve this goal, government orders will naturally rank as the top priority. Materials of high quality and appropriate quantity must be published and distributed on schedule even if the publishing houses and distribution sectors gain no financial benefits.

National materials developed at the state level are normally published by Chinese publishing houses directly under the leadership of the central government such as People’s Education Publishing House. The headquarters of the National Xinhua Bookstore take up the responsibility of distribution, whereas materials developed at local levels (provinces, cities, counties and districts) are published by the local publishing agencies and distributed by the Xinhua Bookstore branches in different bookstores or small agencies in the towns. Difficulties arise and costs become higher with the distribution of materials in remote areas. Nevertheless, these problems have been solved.

As a result, for many years, Chinese Publishing houses and Xinhua Bookstores have been making great endeavors to publish and distribute materials.

(1) Editing

Developers of materials and publishing houses work together to edit the products with special focus on:

a. The Format of Materials

The likes and dislikes of the users, their education level, the conditions and environment in which materials are used, the methods of using materials, and production costs should all be taken into full consideration in selecting the most satisfying formats.

b. Illustrations

Illustrations play a significant role. Their contents, frequency and their interrelations partly determine the feedback from the readers. Too many illustrations may distract the readers’ attention from the real key points in the materials. The contents of illustrations are even more important; they should fully reflect the social outlooks recorded in the materials ranging from urban and rural life to modern and traditional customs.

c. Layout

The layout of the pages should be visually attractive. Combined with easy and fascinating contents, materials can arouse great interest in the readers. The texts, sentences, diagrams, captions and photos should be simple and easy to comprehend. Moreover, producers should also balance the distribution of each section in a page and the proportion of blank areas. Five principles should be observed here: contrast, balance, coordination, symmetry, and unification.

Besides, the size of the printed words, the length of the sentences and their structures should also cater to easier comprehension and acceptance. For instance, words printed in bold types are more impressive and the effective use of the blank areas on the pages can enable the learners to read the materials with greater ease. The distance between the learners and the materials can thus be bridged.
d. Revision

Literacy materials should provide correct examples of words and sentences for the learners. As a result, where the linguistic elements and grammar are correct is of special significance. Revision should be made on the text thoroughly, because printing and editing errors can do fatal harm to the effectiveness of the materials.

(2) Distribution

One of the essential points in literacy promotion is the distribution of materials in wider areas. Objectives of literacy cannot be met unless an easy and quick access is created to the learners. On the other hand, frequent utilization of literacy materials through reading, writing and calculation can maintain and improve learners’ education level. Difficulties often arise with material distribution in remote rural areas, where transportation services are underdeveloped. Consequently, literacy materials should be developed in advance and disseminated as early as possible. Costs can be reduced and distribution facilitated if grass-roots level organizations are encouraged to develop materials. In present China, there are 3 ways in distributing the materials: supply free of charge, government covering part of the expenses and learners paying alone.

a. Many literate people in China live in disadvantaged and remote areas. Due to financial difficulty and lack of motivation in participating in literacy and post-literacy activities, the learners there are often unable or unwilling to purchase materials. However, literacy and post-literacy continuing education is a government order or an obligatory task for the local responsible sectors. Therefore, local educational sectors have to wait for special funds to purchase the materials and then give them out among the learners. This gives a positive push to literacy and post-literacy education.

b. Government at provincial, county and township levels raise part of the funds for materials. Learners will pay the remaining part of the expenses. In this way, learners are more motivated.

c. In economically more developed areas where learners have greater interest and desire in learning, they are requested to pay all the expenses of the materials.

Distribution of materials is normally organized by sectors responsible for literacy education. Educational sectors and relevant organizations will send the materials to every learner.

3. Evaluation

As a significant part of material development, evaluation greatly contributes both to material improvement and to literacy as a whole. Chinese government has always been attaching great emphasis to evaluation of materials.

(1) Organization

Experts in education and material evaluation, experts in material development, administrators from areas in which materials are utilized and teachers engaged in literacy and post-literacy education are organized or invited by educational sectors at various levels to evaluate the materials.

(2) Criteria

a. Factors Concerning the Clientele

Clientele:
1) Individual person
2) Gender
3) Age
4) Objectives of the programme
5) Language
6) Location
7) Special needs and benefits

b. Practicability

1) Needs of vocational skills
2) Needs of information and knowledge
3) Local needs

c. Methods and Expertise

1) Quantity
   ● Number of materials developed and produced
   ● Amount of various expenses involved in development
   ● Number of materials in distribution and utilization

2) Quality
   ● Comparison between learners before the utilization and learners after the utilization
   ● Feedback from learners
   ● Records and reports of teachers
   ● Interviews with organizers
4. **International linkages and cooperation to share and learn from successes in literacy and literacy materials**

Strengthened international linkages can definitely be a positive push to material development in China. Since the 1980s, China has been sending delegates to attend workshops on material development to other countries organized by UNESCO PROAP and ACCU. Similar workshops were also held in Fuzhou, Chongqing and other cities in cooperation with ACCU. On these occasions, materials were developed in the light of the NP Method to cater to the local practical situations. This has been a great reform and enlightenment to Chinese material development. Besides, China is also playing an active role in international material-evaluating activities and Chinese materials are gaining world renown in these practices. In 1985, the material entitled “Learning Chinese” was awarded a third-class prize at the Third ACCU Material-evaluating Festival on Fully-illustrated Post-literacy Materials organized by UNESCO and ACCU while 9 materials were given awards. These materials were developed by the All-China Women’s League, People’s Education Publishing House, Fujian, Sichuan and Hubei. Honorary certificates were also granted to materials produced by Fujian, Sichuan, Ganshu, Inner Mongolia and Dalian by UNESCO PROAP. In recent years, over 10 kinds of materials developed by UNESCO and ACCU have been modified, translated and distributed in China. These engagements are very helpful to material development in China.

As a systematic process itself, material development not only concerns the writing of texts, publishing and dissemination, evaluation, international sharing, but also government policies and support, social involvement and fund-raising. It is a time-consuming and tremendous project that calls for constant improvement and devotion.

Problems should be clearly identified with material development such as:

1. Parties involved in material development are still not well-organized;
2. There is a big gap between the high-quality materials and poor ones;
3. Materials with written texts prevail over illustrative and audio-visual ones;
4. The contents and comprehension requirements set in the materials are not well tailored to the needs of the target learners.

To solve these problems, thorough and more constructive reforms should be carried out in education. Researches and surveys should be enhanced. More human power should be engaged in the practice and bigger funds should be collected.

5. **Recommendations**

In the light of the retrospect on material development in China in the past 50 years, several recommendations can be put forward as follows:

1. Material development should be assigned to governments, publishing houses and bookstores at various levels as a government order so that the quantity and quality of the materials can be guaranteed and materials can be produced on schedule. Besides, the quality of literacy materials should be taken up as one of the standards in evaluating the contributions of these mentioned sectors.

With the development of the market-oriented economy, financial gains are given greater emphasis at the publishing houses and bookstores. While supplying profit-making books to these institutions, governments should also try to encourage them to produce more books that cost smaller expenses so that they will not encounter financial difficulties that may hinder further publishing and distribution.

The overall management of material development on the part of the government should be reinforced so that good products can be given awards and poor ones will receive criticism. Outstanding examples among the materials, organizations and individuals should be given awards, while institutions and individuals should be responsible or even punished for materials with poor quality.

2. Strong appeals must be made to the whole society to raise funds for literacy and post-literacy education, as the Chinese people have been doing with the “Hope Project.”

3. Literacy materials should always cater to the target learners. Since over two thirds of the illiterate population are women, their needs should be taken into more consideration so that the materials will be accepted and liked by women. Meanwhile, the high illiteracy rate among the disabled calls for relevant literacy materials.

4. Many materials developed in the past have become obsolete and the contents are quite old-fashioned. The rapid development of the times calls for the improvement of the materials. New materials should be constantly produced and revised and enhanced to catch up with the development of the society.
(5) Materials should be practical and reflect learners' daily life. Aspects of the learners' life with which they are acquainted, such as politics, culture, daily life, production, health, environment, science and technology, and education should all be able to find their entrance into the materials.

(6) As farmers are the subject of literacy, rural literacy materials are also the subject of all materials. Contents like introducing modern science and technology into growing crops, diversified production and eradication of poverty should be the major topics in these materials. Fresh subjects like agricultural technology and environmental protection should also be discussed in the materials.

(7) Neo-literate people who make notable successes can become important members in developing relevant materials.

(8) Theories on education and psychology can be introduced into the materials so that developers are able to select appropriate details and make a more reasonable arrangement of the collected data. Materials should contain information that extends from the easiest to the most difficult, from the most familiar to the most far-fetched topics, from the specific to the general, and from the basics to expertise. Finally, local characteristics should reconcile with national character.

These are only some personal suggestions and recommendations. Material development is a national endeavor, calling for contributions from all sides.