

**Dr Zhijian Yang**  
Deputy Director-General, Department of Higher Education,  
Ministry of Education, People's Republic of China

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President Kuo, Dr Chan, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning!

Today, the “e-Learning Forum Asia 2009” has convened. Over 300 university experts and scholars from many countries and regions including Australia, Canada, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, US, UK, Vietnam, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China have gathered here to explore issues and share their experiences on e-learning. It is my honour to participate in the Forum, and I would like to thank the City University of Hong Kong for inviting me. On behalf of the Higher Education Division, Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, I wish the Forum success and that it will achieve its desired objectives.

In today's world, science and technology are making far-reaching impacts on human endeavours. With the development of internet technology, a global network with transformation, enthusiasm and expectation, has taken shape. Through the internet, education has become ubiquitous, passing through the traditional barriers of universities into the centre of the community. More people are able to receive tertiary education, and more universities can share quality educational resources. Education is changing in a significant way, and this in turn improves the quality of our human capital.

At the City University of Hong Kong, I saw a popular use of internet technology in the education process. It includes the total coverage of wireless LAN on campus, with every student owning a personal notebook computer and a strong team for e-learning. e-Learning has encouraged a change in the mode of education and the adoption of new pedagogies on your campus, leading to the enhancement of education quality. One of the most typical examples is the “PDA initiative” from your College of Business. This is a good phenomenon, an epitome of e-learning activities in the universities in Hong Kong, and reflects the development trend of a world-class higher education.

I would like to take this opportunity to briefly introduce the conditions of the development of e-learning in China on a macro level.

The concept of e-learning has different levels and perspectives. From different angles and at different levels, its meaning is different. In the recent decade, through the development of e-learning activities in China, especially the improved capability for delivering higher education in a distance mode via the internet, the opportunity for access to tertiary education has been considerably increased for Chinese youths of the appropriate age group.

China's distance higher education began in the late 1990s. Most significant was a pilot project where 68 mainland universities collaborated with the China Central Radio and TV University to start work on the delivery of distance higher education. The universities in the pilot

established 4580 study centres across the country, with nearly 25% of them set up in the Western Region. The China Central Radio and TV University operates an enormous system to provide distance higher education. It includes 44 provincial radio and television universities, 949 prefectural/civic electronic campuses and branch schools, 1823 district/county electronic work stations, and 3175 open education instructional stations in total. The programmes offered mainly focus on professional and undergraduate level education. As of 2008, the system has been educating 8.2 million students, of which over 4 million have already graduated. In the past decade, the pilot universities have actively explored and practised sharing of quality resources for distance education. We are exceedingly happy to report that great achievements have been made for the teaching model, technological model, learning support services model and even the management structure for distance tertiary education.

In addition, Chinese universities have taken full advantage of computer and internet technology to actively develop a series of online courses known as “fine work curricula/courses”. The focus is to widen the sharing of quality teaching materials and promote the adoption of new pedagogies, in order to ensure and enhance the quality of higher education for our future generations.

As you may know, since 1999, China has reformed its higher education by expanding its scale significantly. At present, we have 2663 tertiary institutions with more than 27 million students, a gross enrollment rate of over 23%. With this expansion, emphasis is placed on quality assurance of the education process and the sharing of quality educational resources. This has led to the successful implementation of the project for “national fine work curricula/courses”. The aim is to consolidate the resources and strengths around the country for the development of some 3000 courses in various professional disciplines. All of these courses will be freely available to tertiary institutions nation-wide. They are to be delivered via the internet, hence making quality higher education more widely accessible for the development of human capital.

At present, 2467 “national fine work courses” have been completed. These in turn, have encouraged the development of over 10,000 provincial-level and many school-level fine work courses, hence creating the three levels (national, provincial/city and school systems) of fine work curriculum. We are also building infrastructural support through the “national fine work curriculum repository” project. This will allow all these courses to share the same support environment, providing users with a high quality and high speed network. Presently, over 800 national fine work courses are already available via the internet.

At the micro level where actual teaching is conducted, universities in China have been putting more emphasis on e-learning. A lot of effort has been made, resulting in sound achievements in education reform. e-Learning has helped to promote the adoption of new pedagogies to benefit student learning. However, the rate of development amongst universities is not even, and the overall level can be further improved.

I believe that the discussions and exchanges from the e-Learning Forum Asia 2009 can help our collaborative effort to raise e-learning to a new level of quality.

Finally, I again wish the Forum complete success.

Thank you!