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**UNDERPINNING CHINA'S ECONOMIC GROWTH:  
A Study of Urban Secondary Vocational and Technical Education  
1978 - 2000**

by

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## ABSTRACT

In 1978, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) embarked on the national economic reform and development. Education was identified as one of the strategies for this great endeavour. The CCP government soon launched a reform of educational structure, in which secondary vocational and technical education (VTE) was one of the focused areas in the reform. From the 1980s onwards, the Chinese government attempted to develop secondary VTE on a large scale, streaming 50% of senior secondary students into VTE, with the rhetoric that China needed tens of millions of skilled workers for the economic construction, and secondary VTE would play an important role in this process. Secondary VTE went through several stages of development and changes during the 1980s and 1990s. It can be summarized into three periods: restoring the old system developed before the “Cultural Revolution” from the end of 1970s, reforming and developing on a full scale from 1985, and stagnating from the second half of 1990s. In the different periods of time, secondary VTE had different impact on China’s economy and society.

This dissertation not only examines the achievements and problems in the structure, funding, teaching resources, curriculums as well as employment opportunities of the secondary VTE, but also assesses political, social and psychological effects on secondary VTE students and parents. Although the social bias against VTE has been rooted in the Chinese society for several thousand years, the government’s policy and attitudes were the major factors for the problems. The rigid streaming of secondary education in which the government favoured the general stream in funding and teaching resources, and the lack of opportunities of tertiary education for secondary VTE students failed to encourage students and parents to be enthusiastic about this option; and employers’ preference for university graduates and the saturated job markets since the late 1990s led secondary VTE to a gloomy future.