

1. General background and significance of research

1.1 Background of this research

In traditional times, learning mainly referred to one-off or end-all school learning, neglected or rejected other learning forms, and had a partial economic center doctrine. However, along with the quick development of scientific technology and economy, as well as the advance of knowledge and the capital value of manpower, traditional school learning could not meet personal demand and needs of society's continuous development. Lifelong learning began to play an important role in an upheaval of the social policy.

Since 1972, "lifelong learning" was mentioned as a term in conjunction with "lifelong education" and "learning society," which formally appeared in the famous report by UNESCO 'Learning to Be.' Lifelong learning has not only affected education reform as an educational concept in many countries and regions worldwide, but is also understood and accepted as an educational concept by ordinary people (Lengrand, 1988, pp10ff).

Lifelong learning, according to the explanation of the German educational sociologist Peter Alheit, is about respecting and using our collective ability to learn, which may be idle or blocked by social conditions. It means to fully develop and use our brains. It is also a social learning process realized by more or less "informal," conscious, intuitive, or strategically self-organized learning processes, which go beyond the institutionalized learning periods to span an entire lifetime (Alheit & Dausien, 2002, p4).

1.1.1 The factors affecting and promoting lifelong learning

The international academy of lifelong learning is in agreement on the factors leading to the emergence of lifelong learning concept so far. There are 7 factors which influence and promote lifelong learning to be considered.

(1) The development of society has called for people's new adaptability.

The rate of social change is increasing, and mobility and variability are becoming basic characteristics in the social development today. Ideas and mentality no longer maintain long-term stability as in traditional society. The 'thing of the past' phenomenon is quite common nowadays (Brown, 2006). It requires continuous learning to adapt to continuous changes in this rapidly developing society. This led to people questioning the traditional view that learning should be terminated with the end of the school education, and wondering when learning should or ought to come to the end.

(2) The growth of economic power has put forward new challenges.

Since the 1960's, many Western countries have been gradually recovering from the devastation of World War II, which is regarded as a remarkable symbol of unprecedented development of economy in these countries. Some highly developed countries have embarked on a modern industrialized method of development with the power of new technology, which has allowed this period to achieve great economic prosperity in the Western society. Economic development requires more highly skilled labor force, which thus stimulates new demands on education and learning (Wu, 2007, p37). At the same time, the achievement of economic development also provides the necessary monetary support for the improvement of the education system. Just as Alheit said "Average employment no longer means practicing one and the same occupation over a substantial span of one's life, but now involves alternating phases of work and further training, voluntary and involuntary discontinuities of occupation, innovative career switching strategies and even self-chosen alternation between employment and family- centered phases" (1992, p118). The change in the economic situation and conditions worldwide not only satisfies the demands by normal people for their daily life, but also develops their working style which will influence their living style too. The shortened work day, changing of the working place, and new forms and contents of work have brought to each person in the society great burdens and challenges which require renewing their knowledge. In this way, lifelong learning is a necessary way to satisfy these kinds of demands.

(3) The growth of the aging population places more demand on education.

Two of the most important features are the increase in the total population and the expanding proportion of the aging population. As the quantitative increase in population creates direct pressure on the size of the previous educational system, we must find methods to fulfill the increasing educational needs. This requires the educational system to expand the scope of education and service objects, while breaking the tradition of aiming education only at young people (Zhong & Wang, 2009, pp34-35).

(4) The rapid development of technology requires more scientific knowledge and professional skills.

Since the 1960's, there has been an era of knowledge explosion, such as the rapid development of science and technology, the development of new energy resources, the endless emergence of new materials, methods and ideas, a rapid increase in the stock of knowledge, the synchronous increase in the replacement rate of new theories. These trends have increased people's awareness of the importance and urgency of learning how to learn over the traditional concern for the study of knowledge itself (OECD, 1996).

(5) The variability in modern lifestyle requires education to create more possibilities.

The development of technology and information has brought a general increase in productivity, and an increasing enrichment in material possessions, so that people are left with more disposable time to themselves. In the meantime, the satisfaction of material life has led to dissatisfaction with spiritual life; consequently people are willing to spend more time and effort to upgrade the quality of their spiritual life, so as to make life more fulfilling and more diverse. Along with increased social mobility and tolerance, consistent and stable living conditions have been devalued, which results in each person having a greater freedom of choice in lifestyle. All of these changes require a response by our educational system (Zhong & Wang, 2009, pp34-35).

(6) The democratization process has encouraged the lifelong learning trends in the modern era.

During the 1960s, the democratization process in the world came to a climax. Many developing countries gained independence in this period. More and more people regarded the fight for the right to education as an important aspect of the modern social democratization process; therefore, the demand for continuing education and learning is becoming more and more urgent, and the quality of education has been given more importance than ever before (Rogers, 2006). At the same time as new social structures emerged, the traditional relationships among citizens and the state have undergone change. Democracy not only embodies a system of governance, protection of fundamental human rights, and a judicial procedure, but enables and encourages citizen awareness and effective participation in public affairs as well (Zhu & Gao, 2014, pp51-53).

(7) Modern communication media has placed higher demands on people's ability to receive and process information.

The world is gradually becoming more of a community because of increased communication enabled by modern electronic media, such as computers, internet and mobile phones. With such information sources we can gain more knowledge and information at a faster rate. However, these modes of communication place new demands on education and learning. In the face of a broad array of knowledge and information, the learner must develop new skills, such as a higher level of reading and writing, the ability to analyze, identify, criticize and choose (Shi, 2008), and to "filter" and "distinguish" the useful information from the useless or even harmful information.

The lifelong learning ideas and theories were spread and reinforced rapidly under the support of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other international organizations. The theory was gradually enriched and deepened, and ultimately it caused widespread inter-

national concern and attention (Chen, 2002, p35). Today, many countries and regions regard lifelong learning theory as the basic guiding principle and a major policy consideration in promoting modern education reform. Since the early 1970s, many national, regional and international organizations has formulated and promulgated various forms of lifelong learning policy in accordance with their own circumstances. These organizations have carried out a variety of education reform actions in order to adapt to the trend of lifelong learning; not only in developed, but also in developing countries. After initial doubts, suspicion, and confusion, citizens of almost all countries finally understand, support and practice the lifelong learning concept today (Chen, 2002, p18). However, not all of the agents of change in educational reform have known exactly the core notion or importance of lifelong learning in their era or into the future.

After carefully studying the development status of lifelong learning, we can recognize that there is a wide consistency of the importance of lifelong learning. Moreover, the challenges come from environment and social developments have also called for lifelong learning all the time. Therefore, the lifelong learning developments in these countries, regions and international organizations have shown their own unique features (Alheit & Dausien, 2002). Some of them cannot be explained only by one factor or one situation, but the complex circumstances overall. Meanwhile, there are also some important common characteristics (Zhu & Gao, 2014, pp51-53).

To understand the differences in performance and understanding of lifelong learning in each country, it is helpful to consider some examples. Some countries, such as the UK, position lifelong learning more in the field of vocational and technical education or learning in workplace; however, the adult education and learning is suffering from severe marginalization (Chen, 2002). In other words, lifelong learning seems to be limited to periodic educational activity, without covering the whole lifespan. Other countries, such as some Pacific islands, seem to have little interest in vocational and technical education, but vigorously advocate the kind of lifelong learning aimed at improving culture and life, especially mental health (Chen, 2002). In this way, lifelong learning is regarded as a tool with which the government can solve problems occurring in the economic and cultural areas in a country (Chen, 2002). In some countries, such as the U.S. and France, basic education is usually not within the scope of lifelong learning, because the latter always refers to adult or continuing education; and some other countries, such as Sweden and Australia, are trying to integrate “cradle to grave” learning into their educational system (Chen, 2002). As for the influence of lifelong learning, some countries (such as the Netherlands and Singapore) regard the implementation of the lifelong learning concept explicitly and directly as means of improving their international economic competitiveness in the 21st century. In contrast, Pacific Island countries place

more emphasis on the relationship between the development of lifelong learning and cultural and social capital (Wu & Huang, 2008, 20ff). In terms of intercommunity, most countries recognize and actively encourage the cooperation among each aspect required in the promotion of lifelong learning. However, there are some problems with the implementation process of lifelong learning. For example, it has produced “learning differentiation”, or even exacerbated existing social inequalities. In addition, implementation of lifelong learning practice lags far behind the recognition, praise and commitment to the concept. Finally, there are some scholars who believe that the recent concept of lifelong learning emphasizes on human capital too much and ignores the basic functions and properties of education.

The considering and analyzing these differences and common trends in these countries is necessary in order to learn from successful and mature implementation of lifelong learning policies and activities, as well as to avoid the improper methods or understandings of lifelong learning. In this way, we need to develop necessary systematic and rational thinking on the lifelong learning notion, as well as master the overall development of the international lifelong learning concept, in order to carry out and strengthen the basic theory of lifelong learning (Zhu, 2008, pp4-5).

1.1.2 The basis for comparative research on lifelong learning between China and Germany

As lifelong learning is a widely recognized system, which possesses international importance, multiple connotation and complex branches, the research and analysis on lifelong learning and concrete learning behaviors, politics, theories, performances and influential factors is extremely difficult. It is seemingly impossible to conduct an international integration of the lifelong learning concept from all over the world, but there are likely valuable insights to be found by selecting some individual representative countries to carry out research. After an achieving an overall understanding and distinction of these various and complex lifelong learning modes, activities, and efforts in the international scope, this research decides to focus on a comparison of lifelong learning in Germany and China specifically. Individuals from different categories of representative people in each country were interviewed to determine their views, acts, practices and effects of lifelong learning in their daily life. These interviews were used to compare the attitudes of people in different classes and countries towards lifelong learning and how lifelong learning influences the lives of ordinary people.

The basic incentives for doing research between China and Germany are as follows:

(1) Lifelong learning concept possesses a wide range of influence and consistent recognition (Zhong & Wang, 2009, p35); however, based on the diverse

and complex circumstances in various areas in the world, human's capability of understanding and their values are different and selective, which is closely related with the social and cultural environment (Zhu, 2008). The practice and understanding of lifelong learning in Germany is more mature and advanced from the role of the government to the ordinary citizen. This can be used as a reference for Chinese lifelong learning progress, which is still at the beginning phase and is in need of relevant mature experience and theoretical guidance.

(2) Even if the social environment is in the face of similar transformational trends and characteristics changes, the impacts and outcomes of these kind of changes in each country and region are often inconsistent because these impacts are mutual, linking inextricably with the existing national or regional economic, social, political, psychological and cultural environment (Xie, 2007). This inconsistency produces differences in practical behavioral choices of lifelong learning. In social systems, cultural traditions, habits, education levels, and economic conditions between Germany and China will be helpful to point out the direction for the development of lifelong learning in China with horizontal comparison in their similarity and longitudinal comparison in their differences (Zhu, 2008, p7).

(3) The spread of lifelong learning theory and practice requires a large variety of resources, which are scarce for large groups of learners. This imbalance results in competition (Brindley, Walti & Zawacki-Richter, 2004, p5), which should be controlled and constrained by the society. Therefore, there will inevitably be a corresponding system to be produced to use resources effectively and some unexpected problems will result. Researching and learning the ways of using and allocating resources in Germany during the development of lifelong learning has great reference value for China to resolve its own problem of scarce resources.

(4) Even if we are able to fully recognize individuals' development needs and to grasp the basic trends of social changes and improvements, we can still not control everything; therefore, it is appropriate to realize the local optima in the course of practice under the guidance of effective theories (Moore, 2014, p17). Consequently, we need to start from the individual specific concepts, behaviors and impacts of lifelong learning with the correct methods guidance, and then extend to the whole range of situations for individuals from different classes and practice of lifelong learning in the two countries. Ultimately we can make a holistic comparative study of overall lifelong learning development in two countries.

1.2 The current researching situation and results in China and Germany

Since its formation, the lifelong learning concept has stimulated the attention of nearly all countries and regions. Some countries, realizing the importance of lifelong learning, have published official statements (Kong, 2007, p90). Some have put forward a comprehensive policy for the implementation of lifelong learning, some education committees and governments have published a Green Paper, White Paper, or various other kinds of reports on lifelong learning, and some have constituted laws to protect the right to lifelong learning and reflect its great importance (Kong, 2007, pp90-91).

Lifelong learning, as an international educational concept, was originally formed in the late of 1950's in Europe. The International Adult Education Meetings, held in Sweden in 1949, and in Canada in 1960, both held the opinion that learning had to be regarded as a lifelong process for the rapid change of the society (Zhu, 2008 pp.4-7). 'An Introduction to Lifelong Education', written by Paul Lengrand in 1965, had an extensive influence among nations, and was regarded as the representative writing on theories of lifelong learning (Lengrand, 1988, p2). In 1968, another important document acting as a milestone of the development of lifelong learning 'The Learning Society' was released by the American educator R.M. Hutchins, emphasizing the importance of lifelong education and learning (Hutchins, 1968, 120ff). By 1970's it had won nearly worldwide praise. In 1972, UNESCO published 'Learning to be: the world of education today and tomorrow' which fully affirmed the formulation of the learning society and lifelong learning. A report by the World Bank provided a development model for building lifelong learning systems in developing countries (Delors, 1996, 5ff). The concept of lifelong learning was becoming universal and drawing continuous attention. Then in 1976, the United States agreed on the 'Law of Lifelong Learning'. The European Union joined the conversation in 1990 by publishing three White Papers on lifelong learning, claimed the year of 1996 to be the "European Lifelong Learning Year," and in October 2000, issued a 'Lifelong Learning Memorandum' (Savuran, 2014, p19). In 1997, the Dutch government published an official report entitled 'The Inchoation of Lifelong Learning in Dutch' and in 1997, Norway published a Green Paper named 'New Competition'. South Korea has already enshrined lifelong learning in the Constitution in the early 1980s, and transformed the 'Social Education Law' to the 'Law of Lifelong Learning' in 1996 (Zhu, 2008 pp.4-7; Zuo & Quan, 2008; Wu, 2007, 24ff). By now, many countries, especially most developed countries, have their own policies and theories on lifelong learning, as well as the proper ways and specific aims of popularizing and making use of lifelong learning national-wide. The research on lifelong learning

has become an international topic and is emphasized by many countries and governments (Zhu, 2008 pp.4-7).

1.2.1 The current researching situation in China

China has made a breakthrough development in the establishment of lifelong learning in recent years. Papers and writings on this concept have been increasing year by year since 2000. They are mainly focused on the interpretation and discussion of the concept, the classification of lifelong learning and other learning forms popular today, the necessity and importance of lifelong learning, various functions of components and roles in the whole system of lifelong learning, the reformation of school education from the perspective of lifelong learning, and the preliminary study of construction of the lifelong learning system based on the concrete situation in China (Wu, 2007, 24ff). Since the introduction of lifelong learning theory, the research produced is becoming more and more abundant. Furthermore, the understanding and awareness of the necessity and importance of lifelong learning in China has been awoken. The main direction of the lifelong learning study in China is based on two aspects. The first is introducing and reviewing the results and practical experience of research on lifelong learning by international organizations, particularly UNESCO, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union. The second aspect is the reference, spread, and comparison of practical processes and mature theories during the development of national lifelong learning.

(1) The Chinese research based on internationally prestigious reports and publications.

Although this first step of lifelong learning research in China has not started as early as other developed countries, the Chinese researchers are enthusiastic about this topic and are attempting to catch up with the advanced and modern ideas on lifelong learning based on the analysis of famous reports and publications from international organizations. The writing 'Lifelong learning policy and practice analysis of OECD countries' written in 2003 by Wei Feng has focused on the introduction and analysis of the lifelong learning concept, policy documents, practices, and status quo since the 1990s (Feng, 2003). This work also summarized the common trends in the lifelong learning policy development in OECD countries, such as laws, the diversification of learning opportunities, changing information, and the socialization of learning (Feng, 2003). Xiaoqiang Liu focused on the change of life learning strategies of the EU since the Lisbon meeting with his paper 'The new features of the lifelong learning strategies of the EU' in 2005, such as giving the lifelong learning strategy a more important position, the complete re-understanding of lifelong learning, supporting projects and institutional developments of this new concept and promoting European integration by lifelong learning (Liu, 2005). The article 'The progress and difficulties of international organizations on lifelong learning

strategy' which was published in 2007, introduced that although UNESCO, the OECD and the EU are all in favor of the concept of "lifelong". They defined this term differently. In addition, although their lifelong learning policies issued between the 1970s and 1990s played a tremendous role in promoting the practice of lifelong learning, there were also difficulties in the implementation, such as a fuzzy understanding of the lifelong learning concept, the differences in understanding the influences of lifelong learning, the neglecting of cultural backgrounds, and the huge gap between the practice and consciousness on lifelong learning. Collectively, this meant fewer people could implement the concept of lifelong learning in daily life (Kong, 2007). 'The development, influence and inspiration of lifelong learning in the EU' has also introduced briefly how the implementation status in the education and training area have been influenced by the lifelong learning strategy since the 1990s (Guo, 2010, p5), and also pointed out its role in promoting EU employment, education and training policies and the process of European integration. The article 'The exploration of the evolution of lifelong learning concept during the education co-operation in the EU' explored the changes of the concepts, policies, practices and actions of lifelong learning, which has been a key strategy in the process of European integration since 1957 from a historical view point (Guo, 2010, p5).

Looking to the contributions from monographs, the 'Lifelong learning: philosophy and practice' published in 2004 provided more in-depth studies on the lifelong learning strategy by UNESCO, the OECD and the EU, and also made the concrete comparisons of the periods, concepts, purpose, actions, the core ideas and issues, practical promotions, policy actions of digital divide, and indicators of lifelong learning (Guo, 2010, p5). This book concluded from the study that the objectives of lifelong learning policies of various international organizations are either universal or limited, the connotations of the concepts on lifelong learning are mixed, and the actual action attaches great importance to innovative, systematic and stable characteristics (Guo, 2010, p5).

From the articles and writings by Chinese researchers, it is obvious that they have paid great attention to the lifelong learning research of the internationally important research results, focusing not only on the historical research development, but also with an eye to the latest status and trends. Based on these works and writings, not only the Chinese scholars, but also the society as a whole, have a good intuitive understanding of the lifelong learning theory, practice, and development over time. However, the theory and practical activities of lifelong learning in China could still be enhanced and deepened. Past conventional research was lacking an assimilation of advanced theory with actual experience relevant to the Chinese situation.

(2) The research results of the lifelong learning implementation process and theories in different countries.

There are many noteworthy research results, which include 'The policy, management and legislation of lifelong education in the contemporary world' in 2002; 'Equal education opportunities for the citizens affected by the lifelong education policy in Japan' in 2003; 'The development of lifelong learning movement and community education in the United States' in 2003; 'The developing strategy of lifelong learning in Sweden' in 2003; 'The measures and effects of lifelong learning implementation in Japan' in 2004; 'The development course and promoting measures of lifelong learning in Sweden' in 2004; 'The basic experience and revelation of the American lifelong education' in 2005; 'The social background and practice strategies of lifelong learning in Japan' in 2006; 'Lifelong Education Law-unworthy of the name, and a brief analysis of the making process and problems of the Japanese 'The Revitalization of Career learning' in 2007; 'The comparison research of the European lifelong learning policies' in 2009 (Li, 2012, pp41-42). These works and articles can be found publically and some of the notions and ideas in them have often been quoted for lifelong learning research. From the publishing years, we can conclude that the academic interests in the twenty-first century have tended to make comparisons and references to lifelong learning situations and conditions in developed countries in order to make use of them to construct the Chinese lifelong learning system and structures.

These kinds of research and academic results are mainly focusing on two aspects: 1) as a comprehensive introduction and analysis of the situation and development of lifelong learning in other countries, and 2) to address the concrete problems experienced during the implementation of lifelong learning strategies. These studies provide us a basis for the understanding of the lifelong learning development in the major developed countries abroad, enrich the existing researching data, and provide plenty of information on all aspects of lifelong learning. However, as for the further understanding of the issues related to lifelong learning, there should be more research and analysis of the actual history background and the influence of modern societal conditions on citizens' reaction to lifelong learning with the theoretical thinking on the basis of the existing research. In this sense, only introductions or descriptions of the general policies in different countries seem to be not sufficient. In other words, the researches on normal and ordinary citizens in these countries seem also important and necessary, because these people have been influenced and acted on lifelong learning policies during their daily life, and only they can reflect the effects and roles of lifelong learning in the society with actual and living examples (Liu, 2014, pp71-72).

Looking again to monographs, The book 'Modern international lifelong education theory' in 1999 and its revision has focused on the basic introductions of

lifelong learning in different countries, such as the United States, Britain, Germany, France and Japan. For each country, the book introduced the development history, policy structure, implementation and knowledge or evaluation of the characteristics of lifelong education (Wu, 2007, 2ff). 'The comparison of the lifelong education' in 2003 mainly introduced the implementation situation of lifelong education respectively in China, Korea, Japan, the United States, Britain, Germany, France and Sweden. In addition a comparative analysis between countries pointed out the similarities and differences, such as government support, financial support, emphasis on adult education, and scientific cultivation (Huang, 2003, pp1-2). In 2004, the book 'Lifelong Learning-Concept and practice' discussed different topics on international lifelong learning development from the 1990's according to an analysis and comparison of the theories and practices (Guo, 2010, p5). This book conveys that the lifelong learning style and model should be built based on concrete and current country conditions, without referencing other countries as models. The book 'Lifelong education, lifelong learning and learning society' in 2005 discussed the specific approach to promoting lifelong learning in the chapter about practical and operational strategies. The basic logic of the study route was firstly, to highlight the overall recommendations of the three concepts of lifelong education, lifelong learning, and learning society from the six aspects, including social laws, organizations, certifications, finance, time, and public opinions. For lifelong education, this book has suggested corresponding reform proposals for each level and each kind of education development form, and focused on the explanation of development strategy of the adult education area. (Gao, 2005, 2ff).

The monographs, on the whole, were more advantageous for comparative studies of different countries, because they collected more research and thorough analysis concerning the specific characteristics of different countries (Mu & Yang, 2011, pp3-5). These kinds of analysis and introductions are more persuasive than just an article and also have offered researchers more vivid and comprehensive ideas about lifelong learning in the international context. Therefore, the monographs on lifelong learning can transfer and spread their ideas and researching results with much more effectiveness.

Although these research results have stimulated interest by many Chinese scholars on the practice and the promotion model of lifelong learning and have provided plenty of information and data for later studies, the current researches have been stagnating and remain on the surface of lifelong learning situations and theories. Moreover, national-wide, the research and practices of lifelong learning has not been given sufficient attention and there is a lack of necessary theoretical and systematic understanding and reflection to the basic problems. This includes defining the basic meaning of lifelong learning, the dimensions for dividing lifelong learning into different types, and the individual

and social impact from different lifelong learning concepts and models. The system and establishment of a development model for lifelong education in China are far behind the developed countries and can not meet the current needs of people. When conducting a search in China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), only 198 articles are specially and purely focused on lifelong education in China, some of which stay on the level of theoretical analysis when it comes to building the lifelong system, rather than putting concepts into concrete practice. The discussion about the mechanism construction stays at the macro-level, and therefore fails to give clear and concrete measures for implementation. Also there is not a mature mode with Chinese characters for lifelong learning of different social groups (Mu & Yang, 2011, pp3-5).

In recent years, the lifelong learning research in China is still in the initial stages, although increased international communications have made this a topic of increasing concern in Chinese academia. Neither the amount, nor the quality of the research related to lifelong learning could catch up with the researches in Europe, the United States or Japan, due to the blind spots of the researches. Basically there is a lack of introduction of developing process and significance of lifelong learning (Liu, 2005). Most importantly, but ignored by the researchers, is the background conditions necessary for lifelong learning to flourish in a society, and finding the methods of waking up the demanding the interest of the citizens in the whole nation for lifelong learning. In addition, there are few academic articles carried out from the perspective of individual's daily life on lifelong learning in China, and no mature international comparison studies about lifelong learning. This study attempts to make efforts in these aspects that have been lacking in previous research.

1.2.2 The generally situation of lifelong learning in Germany

From the historical viewpoint, the practice of lifelong learning in Germany has already been broadly implemented, although the theoretical research is not the most advanced compared with some other developed countries (Pang & Meisel, 2004, pp1-4). Since the 1960's, the German government implemented a series of unique lifelong learning policies which not only gave full respect to the diversity and existing tradition of adult learning institutions, but also provided support to educational activities with more diversity and freedom on this basis (Sondermann, 2005). The research entitled 'The planned structure of educational system' already made it clear that 'learning to learn' was the core principle of lifelong learning, continuing education was the key to promoting lifelong learning, and there should be laws to implement the system of Education Vacation with paid leave (Gao, 2007, p95). In 1990, the German Federal Parliament released the important policy document named 'Zukünftige Bildungspolitik-Bildung 2000' (The Future Educational Policy-Education 2000), which involved a wide range, of lifelong learning programming in Germany and as a blueprint for Germany's education mode in the future. This document

proposed that continuing education would be of great significance in the future (Gao, 2007, 95; Ohidy, 2009). After that, continuing education has been constantly emphasized and implemented as fourth German educational field. In 1995, the German Technology Research and Innovation committee published the 'Information society: opportunity, innovation and challenges,' in order to address the difficulties of living with a knowledge-based economy in the information age. In this document, the development of self-directed, lifelong learning philosophy has been emphasized (Wu, 2007, 20ff). The development and application of information and communication technology have also been referred to be as tools and methods for the lifelong learning progress. In 2000, 'Lifelong learning in the whole nation: expanding and intensifying the continuing education' was published and stated that lifelong learning would be the main objective of development and innovation of the German education system in the future, and proposed many strategies to promote lifelong learning and expand continuing education. This indicates that Germany's lifelong learning policy had been basically formed (Gao, 2007, 95; Ohidy, 2009).

In 1996, after the OECD had put forward the concept of lifelong learning, was the first time that lifelong learning was really attached great importance in the modern German educational system. It was believed that lifelong learning could help with solving domestic social problems, such as higher unemployment rate and demands on improvement of compensation of vocational skills by normal citizens, with further promotion of vocational skills and social adaptability. Reducing unemployment and encouraging economic development were the basic and fundamental driving forces for the implementation and promotion of lifelong education by the central and local government in Germany at that time (Wu, 2007, 34ff). Now, it has become the consensus of the community that "pre-education is the preparation, post-education is the development" (Wu, 2007, 34ff). To realize the ideal lifelong learning and the learning society, the German government implemented a series of lifelong learning policies and measures, and gave strong support to laws, institutions, technology, and environments that encouraged lifelong learning. The policies and programs for lifelong learning in Germany, such as variable sources of investment in education, assistance systems for individuals' continuing education, the development of self-directed lifelong learning, the higher education for the public, etc., have all showed the advantages and progress of the lifelong education system in Germany (Ohidy, 2009). The following introductions describe the lifelong learning policies and practices in Germany:

(1) The general policies and the system of lifelong learning in Germany.

The German educational theory has always paid attention to each member in the society; therefore, after adults enter their professional lives, society gives them a chance to have courses whose level range from the elementary to the university, if they want to pursue continuing education. This is also a good

chance for them to improve their own capability in order to adapt social pressures and challenges. This is the so-called “the second education road” (Tian, 2006). It is known that the traditional school system in the past in Germany was like a linear model from primary school, to middle school, to university (Tian, 2006). This kind of schooling system had been described as a “single-way bridge” meaning that the one who failed to enter middle school after the graduation from elementary school would lose the opportunity to obtain a university education. In this education system, most normal citizens could reach university graduation. After the World War II, the public required the government to provide higher education opportunities for adults who were already employed. This led to the development of the second educational way for those employed adults who were willing to learn further. This second way aimed at linking vocational education and regular higher education by developing vocational higher school (Kloas, 2006). This opened up various paths and options from primary schools, vocational schools, vocational higher schools or specialized higher school, to universities (Kloas, 2006). Learners could change their learning steps in such a system without any obstacles. In addition, the pre-university education at night and full-time pre-university education were the two main education forms which offered higher education opportunities for adults over the age of 19 specifically. The former required that applicants who wanted to participate in the pre-university examination had already finished the systematic learning of vocational education or had professional experience which lasted for more than three years, and then studied the regular course for more than three years in night school. The difference with the latter was that participants studied full-time and the length of schooling was five years (Hadjar & Becker, 2006). This kind of educational system, which has offered sufficient vocational education opportunities, has undoubtedly had an important social significance. Society’s demands for skilled and educated citizens were met to a certain extent.

The system of so called ‘with paid leave’ has been implemented in Germany according to the ‘Promotion Act for Adult Education’ from the 1970’s (Wu, 2007, 40ff), which entitles workers to educational vacation for about 10 days, in order to make sure all workers have time to learn each year, no matter how busy they are with work (Sondermann, 2005). During the educational vacation, each worker could learn about a wide range of topics, not only limited to vocational education. Due to the negative attitudes from laborers and capitalists, both of whom could not see the immediate interest or wish to pay time or money for extra learning activities, this kind of educational system and reform was not optimally effective.

There was also the assistance system which helped with personal continuing education. The German government has published ‘The Federal Ministry Promotion Act for Education and Training’ in 1971 in order to encourage citi-

zens to participate in continuing education individually, and especially provided educational assistance to individuals who took part in the lifelong learning (Li, 2004). The concrete form of this kind of economic assistance was to grant scholarships to individuals who participated in continuing education in accordance with this act (Hagestad, 1989). The amount of the scholarship depended on the specific form of continuing education which the person took part in (Li, 2004). If a person chose college or university continuing education, he or she would be financed by a combined approach of funding. In this way, the demands for continuing learning were increased. However, this stimulus policy based on economic encouragement could not fundamentally drive each person to learn from his or her own heart. However, this was still a tool which could be used to stimulate the learning aspirations for a while (Ohidy, 2009).

There were also other policies which have been used to develop the continuing learning by ordinary citizens, such as in the 1990 report by Research Committee of the German Federal Parliament 'The education policy in the future: Education 2000,' which provided advices and directions for education policy in the future. Continuing education, lifelong education and lifelong learning were important themes of this report (OECD, 2014, pp6-7). The report emphasized the concept that everyone should have the access to education and equal access to education throughout life. It also stated that higher education institutions should allow equal opportunities to anyone who wanted to receive an education, no matter gender or age (Wu, 2007, 40ff).

From the inner logic of German learning theory and philosophy, it can be found that the main starting and basic point of learning is based on the requirements from each citizen in the society. In other words, the development of "self-directed capacity of lifelong learning" is an important concept in the process of building a learning community in Germany (Tian, 2006). The use of modern information technology, such as multimedia learning tools, greatly promoted the practice of this concept. In 1995, Germany published the report 'Information society: opportunity, innovation and challenges' which emphasized that each phase and form of education should actively make use of modern information technology which make the communication with each other easier and ultimately form an information society in the future, in order to train citizens to have a self-directed capacity for lifelong learning and using and benefitting from media (Wu & Huang, 2008, 25ff; Pang & Meisel, 2004, 10ff).

In 1997, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research made the report entitled 'Lifelong Learning: the situation and prospects of vocational continuing education' in the Federal Parliament. It emphasized that education policy must enable vocational continuing education to become an integrated part of the whole education system and that lifelong learning was so extremely necessary that everyone would be encouraged and supported to participate