

Котенко О. В. Розвиток полікультурної компетентності вчителів світової літератури в системі післядипломної освіти : автореф. дис. на здобуття наук. ступеня канд. пед. наук: 13.00.04 «Теорія і методика професійної освіти». ДВНЗ «Унт менеджменту освіти» НАПН України. К., 2011.

Міжкультурна освіта. Порадник для вчителя, пер. О. Стиславська, Варшава 2004, 176 с.

Міжкультурне навчання, Рада Європи та Європейська Комісія, Страсбург 2000, польське видання – Фонд Розвитку Системи Освіти, Варшава.

Мережа громадянської освіти в Україні. URL: <http://cen.iatp.org.ua/index.html>

Муц Л. Ф. Дискурсна методологія досліджень міжкультурної комунікації. *Держава та регіони. Сер. Соціальні комунікації*. 2015. № 3 (23). С. 17–20.

Представництво Європейської Комісії в Україні. URL: http://www.delukr.ec.europa.eu/home_ukr.html

Свиридюк Т.В., Ведищева О.В., Данилюк Т.Ю., *Програма спецкурсу для учнів 11 класу «Міжкультурна освіта школярів»*, Луцьк 2013.

Стратегія розвитку вищої освіти в Україні на 2021-2031 роки. Київ, 2020. 71 с. URL: <https://mon.gov.ua/storage/app/media/rizne/2020/09/25/rozvitku-vishchoi-osviti-v-ukraini-02-10-2020.pdf>

1.4. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN CHINA

Jie ZHANG

Compared to the civilization of China in the span of 5,000 years, Chinese early childhood education is relevantly new. Its system was not officially established until the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, nor had much development

before the 1980s, thus leaving much room for improvement. This paper examines the history, current situation, and cultural, political, social, and economic conditions in China to provide an overall perspective of Chinese early childhood education. A comprehensive literature review was conducted, using the database of Academic Search Complete, in addition to the national journals, published governmental reports, and official documents on this topic in China and the United States. It also provides suggestions regarding the future development of early childhood education and early childhood educator preparation in China. The results of this review will provide the readers with a better understanding of early childhood education in China.

China, a country with over 5,000 years of civilization, has always placed a high value on education. However, an integrated educational system, including early childhood education, did not get established until the foundation of the people's republic of china in 1949, nor had there been much development before the 1980s. The chinese culture is composed of confucian philosophy, international perspectives, and socialist ideology, in combination with specific social, political, and economic conditions at different historical periods. All these factors have influenced chinese education, and of course, early childhood education. The purpose of this paper is to examine early childhood education in china, its history, current status, and future development.

History.

The Chinese people have always highly valued education. “尊师重道,” meaning respecting teachers and honoring moral principles, is an essential component of Confucianism philosophy. From the 1840s to the end of the 1940s, however, because of invasion, wars, and internal political instability, the Chinese people had one of the lowest levels of education in the world (Fan et al., 2004). Shortly after the People's Republic of China was established, during the initial phase of socialist structuring from 1952 to 1956, the dominant influence of the Soviet Union resulted in a socialistic

perspective for early childhood education. After 1956, education was neglected again due to the continued political turmoil and adverse economic conditions caused by the “Great Leap Forward” movement from 1958 to 1961 and the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 (Wong & Pang, 2002).

The Chinese government refocused on the economy, education, and people’s quality of life in the 1980s. Due to economic reforms and the Open Door Policy, Western perspectives started to influence education while traces of the Soviet Union’s framework from the 1950s remained. The majority of kindergartens for four- to six-year-old children were managed by state-operated enterprises and only admitted children of their own employees, or collective-managed by local communities for their residents (Wong & Pang, 2002).

Since the late 1980s, the Chinese government has recognized the importance of education in the country’s strategic development plan and acknowledged early childhood education as a critical foundation in building the future of the nation (Wong & Pang, 2002). As economic growth continues, parents and families are able to invest more in their children’s education. Meanwhile, Western perspectives have further impacted the Chinese education system, including early childhood education. Teaching now focuses on the integrated development of the whole human being, cultivates their learning ability, exploratory spirit, and innovation, and guides children to interact with people and their environment (Ma, 2023). Thus, the early childhood education curriculum gradually moved from a traditional teacher-centered toward a child-centered approach.

Current Status.

In China, the growth of childcare outside the home occurred primarily after 1949 (Burkhart, 1994). The number of kindergartens increased from 166,500 in 1984 to 295,000 in 2021, at an increasing rate of 43.56% (State Statistics Bureau, 1984; Ministry of Education, 2022a). In 1949, 130,000 children were enrolled in government-sponsored childcare programs (Burkhart, 1994). Since then, the number

of children enrolled in kindergartens increased 3.7 times from 12.95 million in 1984 to 48.05 million in 2021 (State Statistics Bureau, 1984; Ministry of Education, 2022a). Due to the demographic change in the population and the birthrate drop in recent years, the number of kindergarteners decreased to 46.28 million, a decrease of 3.7% compared to 2021, and thus, the number of kindergartens decreased to 289,200 in 2022, a decrease of 1.97% compared to 2021 (ministry of education, 2023a).

Furthermore, a total of 5,062 children enrolled in pre-primary education are diagnosed with disabilities, among which 1,634 are girls (32.28%) (Ministry of Education, 2023b). In addition, 160,500 private kindergartens serve 21.27 million kindergarteners (Ministry of Education, 2023a). Boys and girls are about evenly represented in kindergarten classrooms. In recent years, as the number of kindergartens in the Midwest and rural areas increased, the gap in the numbers, quality, and resources among kindergartens between urban and rural areas has decreased (Ministry of Education, 2022a).

The early childhood teachers in China are mainly from three sources: those who graduated from colleges or universities, from secondary normal schools or vocational schools, and other schools. Ministry of Education (2023a) reported that the number of kindergarten faculty and staff increased to 3.24 million, 90.30% of whom graduated from college. The kindergartener-teacher ratio decreased to 15:1 in 2021, compared to 26:1 in 2011 (Ministry of Education, 2022a).

Early Childhood Education System in China.

The education system in China consists of early childhood education, primary education, secondary education, and higher education (National People's Congress, 1995). Early childhood education, which is the foundational stage of the Chinese education system, in a broad sense, is education for children from birth through age six or seven and before primary school; while in the narrow sense, it means kindergarten education for children aged three to six or seven (Wong & Pang, 2002).

Nurseries and kindergartens are two major types of institutions in the early childhood education system in China. Nurseries, for children under three, are under the jurisdiction of the Public Health Department. Classes are small with multiple caregivers, and the primary goals are to ensure prompt and abundant physical care and nurturing. Kindergartens, for children from age three to six or seven, generally group children by age into juniors, middle class, and seniors. Unlike nurseries, kindergartens are under the Ministry of Education, their class size increases with age, ranging from 20 to 40 children, and academic education replaces physical care as the primary goal (Wong & Pang, 2002). There are also boarding kindergartens that provide children with 24-hour care, and the children return home only on weekends (Burkhart, 1994).

Early Childhood Teacher Preparation.

Teachers are essential to early childhood education, and they receive an integrated two-part professional training/development system. Pre-service teacher candidates go through part one, the initial training, and pass the qualification examinations to be certified as early childhood education teachers. Part two is to provide continuous professional development opportunities for in-service teachers to keep up with the ever-evolving demands of society (Bullough & Palaiologou, 2019).

Impacting Factors.

Confucian philosophy, international perspectives, and Socialist ideology, in combination with specific social, political, and economic conditions at different historical periods, have all influenced Chinese education. The next section discusses these factors.

Cultural Influences.

For over 2,000 years, the unique Confucian philosophy, such as respecting authority, obeying rules, and accepting the status quo in society, has influenced the mindsets and behaviors of the Chinese people. The Chinese hold schools and teachers in such high regard that parents and families are committed to their children's

education without questioning the authority of the teachers (Deng et al., 2001). The kindergarten teachers are very much in control of their classrooms: classroom disciplines, routines, and orders are emphasized (Graves & Gargiulo, 1994). Teacher-directed whole-group instruction is used to foster interdependence, group solidarity, harmonious relationships, and collegiality (Wang & Leichtman, 2000). Since the Chinese attribute educational achievement to persistence and effort (Lin et al., 2002), poor performance is usually accredited to not working hard enough, which results in admonishing the child to work more diligently (Vaughan, 1993). After the 1980s, international perspectives, such as neuroscience research, developmentally appropriate practices, creativity, autonomy, exploration, innovation, and critical thinking have influenced the development of early childhood education in China (Ma, 2023).

Political Influences.

The central government relies on the local governments to set up guidelines about kindergarten education, while kindergartens are expected to design their curriculum considering the general principles outlined by the local government (State Education Commission, 1996b). The Kindergarten Management Regulations (State Education Commission, 1989) put forward some basic requirements for principals, teachers, childcare providers, and medical staff. Then the Teachers' Law of the People's Republic of China required teachers in kindergartens to receive preservice training (National People's Congress, 1993). Following that, the State Education Commission (1996a) issued the Kindergarten Operation Regulation to ensure the competency of administrators to lead the organizations and be responsible for their quality. In the same year, the Statute of Kindergartens mandated the establishment of a Parent-Teacher Association, which changed the role of parents from passively accepting advice and instructions from the teachers to respected and active partners of the school in the education of their children (State Education Commission, 1996b).

The Guidelines for Reforming and Developing Early Childhood Education (Ministry of Education, 2003), the Kindergarten Teacher Professional Standards (Ministry of Education, 2012), the Notification of the Further Improvement of Kindergarten Supervision and Evaluation (Ministry of Education, 2019b), A review of achievements in preschool Education (2012-2021) (Ministry of Education, 2022b), and other guidelines, policies, and regulations, emphasize the importance of high-quality early childhood education (Jiang et al., 2022).

Social Influences.

China is a family-oriented society with children at its center. The Chinese love and value their children, regarding them as the treasures of the family and nation. Even when the resources are limited, parents and families prioritize their children. The Chinese government and the public realize the importance of education in the early years. For example, nurseries have changed their focus from “childcare” to “Educare”, taking responsibility not only for children’s hygiene and health but also for their age-appropriate learning (Wong & Pang, 2002). In addition, “幼小衔接”, i.e., transition and continuation from kindergartens to primary schools, are emphasized to support children to adjusting learning and social challenges they may encounter during the transition (Ministry of Education, 2022a).

Economic Influences.

As the Chinese people get more affluent, they are willing and able to spend more money on education. The investment from the Chinese government is relatively small since early childhood education is not compulsory. However, recognizing the importance of early childhood education to the sustainability of the nation, the Chinese government has increased its investment in early childhood at a yearly rate of 20.6% with a total of more than CNY 170 billion (or US\$ 23 billion) from 2011 to 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2022a; Rao et al., 2023). Since early childhood education relies on the collaborative efforts of local government, different sectors of society, and individuals (State Education Commission, 1989), inequity among different regions

and even within one region remains an issue, even though the government has been working hard to lessen the gap (Rao et al., 2023).

Discussion and Conclusion.

Early childhood education in China is shaped by various factors, such as Confucian philosophy, socialist ideology, international perspectives, and social, political, and economic conditions at different historical periods. Despite the long history of civilization in China, early childhood education is still new, thus leaving much room for improvement.

First, access to resources varies due to the social and economic inequalities between rural and urban areas and between the Midwest and coastal regions. Even though the central government has increased financial investments in the Midwest and rural areas, disparities still exist (Ministry of Education, 2022a). Affordable and reliable early childhood education is much needed, especially in the Midwest and rural areas (Neuman & Bennett, 2001; Bullough & Palaiologou, 2019).

Second, with the influence of Western perspectives, the early childhood education curriculum has gradually moved toward a child-centered approach in recent years, focusing more on the student's independent learning, autonomy, innovation, and the development of a whole human being (Ma, 2023). However, traditional teacher-centered and academic-focused approaches remain. It is urgent to establish a nationwide training system for pre- and in-service preschool personnel that builds professionalism and consistency of skills and knowledge (Kagan & Hallmark, 2001; Bullough & Palaiologou, 2019). Meanwhile, it is necessary to set up a system that can provide competent personnel with career opportunities and reasonable salaries to attract and retain qualified teachers (Ministry of Education, 2019a).

In addition, academic achievement is over-emphasized in Chinese society. Compared to the United States, the percentage of children with disabilities in China who receive special education services is relatively low (Kim et al., 2019). As a result,

special education, including early diagnosis, early intervention, and related services for children with disabilities, needs more financial support and further development.

Last but not least, Chinese parents and families must be encouraged to build a collaborative relationship with professionals and schools about their children's early education. In the United States, for example, parents and families often act as strong and powerful advocates who not only initiate but also move policies and regulations forward (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1996). This requires parents and families to challenge the traditional Confucian philosophy of completely obeying what the teachers and schools say and become the engine of change. It also required early childhood educators, schools, policymakers, and the government to keep open-minded and perceive parents and families as collaborators, not merely service receivers.

In conclusion, China must take into consideration its unique educational conditions when looking for theories and practices in early childhood education. Only with the joint effort of policymakers, advocates, professionals, and parents and families, can those different factors contribute to a more sustainable Chinese early childhood education.

References

- Bullough, L. & Palaiologou, I. (2019). *Early childhood education in People's Republic of China: A literature review of the publications written in English*. The Centre for Teacher and Early Years Education, UCL.
- Burkhart, R. (1994). Child care in China. *Children Today*, 23(2), 16-20.
- Deng, M., Poon-McBrayer, K. F., & Farnsworth, E. B. (2001). The development of special education in China: A sociocultural review. *Remedial and Special Education*, 22(5), 288-298. <https://doi.org/10.1177/074193250102200504>
- Fan, S., Zhang, L., & Zhang, X. (2004). Reforms, investment, and poverty in rural China. *Economic Development & Cultural Change*, 52(2), 395-421. doi: 10.1086/380593

- Graves, S. B., & Gargiulo, R. M. (1994). Early childhood education in three Eastern European countries. *Childhood Education, 70*(4), 205-209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.1994.10521809>
- Jiang, Y., Zhang, B., Zhao, Y., & Zheng, C. (2022). China's Preschool Education Toward 2035: Views of Key Policy Experts. *Ecnu review of education, 5*(2), 345-367. Doi: 10.1177/20965311211012705
- Kagan, S. L., & Hallmark, L. G. (2001). Early care and education policies in Sweden: Implications for the United States. *Phi Delta Kappan, 83*(3), 237-254. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172170108300313>
- Kim, E. J., Zhang, J., & Sun, X. (2019). Comparison of special education in the United States, Korea, and China. *International Journal of Special Education, 33*(4), 796-814. doi: <http://www.internationalsped.com/documents/IJSE-ENTIRE-ISSUE-33-4.pdf>
- Lin, H., Gorrell, J., & Taylor, J. (2002). Influence of culture and education on U.S. and Taiwan preservice teachers' efficacy beliefs. *The Journal of Educational Research, 96*(1), 37-46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220670209598789>
- Ma, K. (2023). Comparison of preschool education between China and the United States. In Yacob, S. et al. (Eds.). *Proceedings of the 2023 7th International Seminar on Education, Management and Social Sciences, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research, 779*. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-126-5_58
- Ministry of Education. (2003). *The guidelines for reforming and developing early childhood education*. <http://www.moe.edu.cn/edoas/website18/info693.htm>
- Ministry of Education. (2019a, March 11). *Guan Peijun: Strengthening the construction of preschool education teachers*. http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/xw_zt/moe_357/jyzt_2019n/2019_zt2/zt1_902_dbwy/201903/t20190311_372958.html

- Ministry of Education. (2019b). *Notification of the further improvement of kindergarten supervision and evaluation*.
http://www.moe.gov.cn/s78/A11/tongzhi/201906/t20190614_385830.html
- Ministry of Education. (2022a). *Achievements in the reform and development of early childhood education since the 18th Party Congress*.
http://www.moe.gov.cn/fbh/live/2022/54405/sfcl/202204/t20220426_621796.html
- Ministry of Education. (2022b). *A review of achievements in preschool education (2012-2021)*.
http://en.moe.gov.cn/documents/reports/202210/t20221022_671524.html
- Ministry of Education. (2023a). *Statistical report on China's educational achievements in 2022*.
http://en.moe.gov.cn/documents/reports/202304/t20230403_1054100.html
- Ministry of Education. (2023b). *Basic statistics of special education*.
http://en.moe.gov.cn/documents/statistics/2022/national/202401/t20240110_1099478.html
- National People's Congress. (1993, October 31). Teachers' Law of the People's Republic of China. *Renmin Ribao*.
- National People's Congress. (1995, March 22). Education law of the People's Republic of China. *Renmin Ribao*.
- Neuman, M. J., & Bennett, J. (2001). Early childhood in cross-national perspective-Stating strong: Policy implications for early childhood education and care in the U.S. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(3), 246-254.
- Rao, N., Yang, Y., Su, Y., & Cohrssen, C. (2023). Promoting equity in access to quality early childhood education in China. *Children*, 10(10), 1674. doi: 10.3390/children10101674
- State Education Commission. (1989). *Kindergarten management regulations in the People's Republic of China*. Beijing: Beijing Normal University, 15-16.

- State Education Commission. (1996a). *Kindergarten operation regulation*.
<http://www.moe.edu.cn/edoas/website18/info5951.htm>
- State Education Commission. (1996b). Statute of kindergartens in the People's Republic of China. In Chinese Preschool Education Research Society (Ed.), (1999), *A collection of major documents on education in the People's Republic of China*. Beijing Normal University, 420-430.
- State Statistics Bureau. (1984). *Statistic yearbook of Chinese education, 1984*. State Statistics Bureau.
- Turnbull, H. R., & Turnbull, A. P. (1996). The synchrony of stakeholders: Lessons from the disabilities rights movement. In Kagan, S. L., & Cohen, N. E. (Eds.) *Reinventing early care and education: A vision for a quality system*. Jossey-Bass.
- Vaughan, J. (1993). Early childhood education in China. *Childhood Education*, 69(4), 196-200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.1993.10520931>
- Wang, Q., & Leichtman, M. D. (2000). Same beginnings, different stories: A comparison of American and Chinese children's narratives. *Child Development*, 71(5), 1329-1346. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00231>
- Wong, M. N. C., & Pang, L. J. (2002). Early childhood education in China: Issues and development. In Chan, L. K. S. & Mellor, E. J. (Eds.), *International developments in early childhood services* (pp. 53-70). Peter Lang Publishing.