Modernisation and Marketisation: 
*the Chinese Kindergarten in the 1990s*

*Limin Gu*

Abstract

This is a study of changes in Chinese kindergarten education in the era of the post-Mao four modernisations. Based on fieldwork carried out in China in 1997, this thesis examined the changes of Chinese kindergarten education at two levels -- changes in system (structural change) and changes in educational activities (curriculum and ideological change), especially for the period of the 1990s. Changes are described and discussed in a historical context, in which both changes in policy and in practice are examined.

Changes in education are closely linked to the social, political, economic and cultural context. The content, process and outcomes of reform in early childhood education in China have been affected by the national goals of reform, the social context of early educational institutions, their organizational characteristics, family structure, family policy, and the specific professional culture of teaching and learning. Recent structural reforms in early childhood education have been shaped by the foremost task of the nation – economic development. The previous welfare model of kindergarten, which was regarded as one of the outcomes of a socialist system, is being transformed into a new market competitive model to meet a political demand for the marketisation of society. The curricula of early educational program, teachers’ attitudes to children, and their professional activities, therefore, have been re-shaped according to new ideas about the needs and abilities of children, new conceptions of child development and, not least, the new modernisation “knowledge” that gained ascendancy in China during the 1990s.

Key words: Chinese kindergarten, early childhood education, reform, modernisation, marketisation, structure, ideology, change, continuity, progress, conflict, differentiation.
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To my family
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Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction 1

1.1 Background 1
1.2 Early childhood education in China 5
   ~ Brief introduction 5
   ~ Historical review 6
1.3 The research focus 10
1.4 Outline of dissertation structure 11
1.5 Limitation of the study 12

Chapter 2. Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks 15

2.1 Theoretical framework 15
   ~ Education and its relation to the structure of society 15
   ~ Culture, cultural politics and education 20
2.2 Introduction to research methods and focus 22
2.3 Research activities 24
   ~ Library research 25
   ~ Interviewing 25

Chapter 3. Restructuring Kindergarten System 31

3.1 Kindergarten development in a historical perspective 31
3.2 From welfare model to market competitive model 37
   ~ Kindergartens attached to enterprises and institutions – a welfare model 39
   ~ “System of contract” 42
   ~ “Making extra income” 45
3.3 Private kindergarten
   ~ Ningbo English Kindergarten  
3.4 Conclusion  

Chapter 4  Director Responsibility System  
4.1 Decentralization and financial reform
   – Background of the system  
4.2 Director responsibility  
4.3 Disbandment of party committee in kindergarten  
4.4 Financial and economic arrangement
   ~ Kindergarten fees  
   ~ Teachers’ income  
   ~ Non-personnel expenditure  
4.5 Staff management  
4.6 Evaluation of teachers  
4.7 Conclusion  

Chapter 5.  Kindergarten Educational Activities  
5.1 Characters of classical educational model in Chinese kindergarten
   ~ Subject-based curriculum  
   ~ Memory-based and imitation-privileged learning  
   ~ Teacher-centred educational process  
5.2 From “classroom lessons” to “educational activities”  
5.3 From “respecting teacher” to “respecting children”  
5.4 “More freedom and more free play”  
5.5 Conclusion  

Chapter 6.  Chinese Views of Child and Child Development  
6.1 Family banded and gender separated notion of child
6.2 Modern education and the view of child
   ~ From "family property" to "social being" 115
   ~ John Dewey's influence in China 117
   ~ Contributions of earlier Chinese educators 121

6.3 "A good child of Mao" – a revolutionary notion of child 127
   ~ Marxism and Mao's thought as a theoretical foundation 127
   ~ "Small red guards of Chairman Mao" 130

6.4 The policy of single-child and its effect 133
   ~ A review of national policy of single-child 133
   ~ Acceptance of the policy by urban people 135
   ~ Birthrate and the proportion of single-children in kindergarten 136
   ~ Changes in family structure and parental role in child-rearing 137
   ~ Changes of parents' view on child 141
   ~ Are single-children special? 147

6.5 Conclusion 151

Chapter 7. "Kindergarten Education with Chinese Characteristics"
   - Collectivism Education in Kindergarten Today 153

7.1 Political implications of "Chinese characteristics" 154
7.2 Collectivism in cultural and historical context 156
7.3 Collectivism in classroom 161
7.4 Redefining the concept of collectivism 165
   ~ Individual differences 166
   ~ Competitive ability 169
7.5 Collectivism education under new social condition 171
7.6 Conclusion 175
Chapter 8. “Crossing the river by feeling for the stones underfoot”
(Summary and Discussion) 176

8.1 Education and social transformation 176
8.2 The locus and nature of change 177
8.3 Consequences of the change 181

Appendix 1 186
Appendix 2 197
Appendix 3 209
References 222
Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Background

China may have been a dream for Swedish people who are now aged over 50. I was surprised at hearing that a huge picture of Mao Zedong titled “having a good swim in the Yangzte River” had been painted on the wall right in front of a swimming pool in Medlefors Folkhögskola of Skellefteå during the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. A couple of my Swedish colleagues have still kept the green caps, red stars, and red treasured books. During the 1970s, as China drew people’s attention as a symbol of revolution and anti-convention, a number of western people had visited China, and tried to find out the revolutionary truth in China with their own eyes. Chinese culture, Chinese people, Chinese social and political system and the mass movements became thus the focus of their exploration.

When history entered into the 1980s, China caught the world’s eyes with its economic reforms, political changes, and open-door policy. After two decades of reform, China has accomplished achievements on all fronts. Many people now saw China as a rising world power. The subjects around China have also changed. People in the West have followed with interest the 1989 student movement, on-going economical and political reforms, the situation of human rights, the Three Gorges Project, the single-child policy, and so on. China now is, in many people’s eyes, a “reviving huge dragon”, a “star of the 21st century”. Even the contrary assumption of a “China Threat” is current in the West. Undoubtedly, the destiny of China is still catching world people’s attention.

However, given the prominence of research on China’s national political and economic reforms at large, there is less room left for the study of education and its reforms of this country. Although progress

1 i.e. Quotations of Mao.
has been made during recent years with greater number and diversity of works bearing on various aspects of China's education, it is curious that among all these studies the discussion of early childhood education is relative absent.

Research on China's early childhood care and education by Western scholars give much attention to the general features of Chinese kindergarten and the characteristics of kindergarten children, which they are usually impressed by. Most of these researchers construct their understanding of China's kindergarten education and Chinese children on the observations they have done during their visits to kindergartens, where the curriculum, children's activities and behaviour, teachers' attitudes and performance in classroom, and the physical and material conditions of kindergarten have usually been their focus. Some of them try to make their analysis and explanations in a socio-cultural context, emphasizing on the impact of the traditional Chinese culture, philosophical ideas, and family and social structure upon contemporary Chinese conceptions of child and child development, kindergarten curriculum, and the pattern of care and education of young children. Some of them deal with the issue of preparation and training of kindergarten teacher, in which the major concern has been given to the general description of the teacher training program and curriculum, and the discussion on its problems in the training resources, selection of teacher students, and model of

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teaching. However, due to their relative unfamiliarity with the spirit of Chinese culture and philosophy, the details of social policy and practice and their changes, some of these researches have confined to describing the “phenomena” without giving much concern to analysing them in a historical context.

A special concern with the relations between early childhood education and the political change in China is expressed by Ruth Sidel who takes the period of the Cultural Revolution as her research focus, and concentrates chiefly on the shift of goals and content of early childhood education in relation to the political and ideological changes. The current changes of early childhood education in China are presented by Wang and Mao, who show a specific interest in curriculum reform, which is analysed as an outcome of the combination of traditional and modern culture of Chinese society today. However, while the prominence given to curriculum reform, there is a gap in research on the changes of the system of kindergarten education in China in the more recent years, particularly on changes of the administrative structure and management of kindergarten that embody policy and practice changes both at state and individual organizational levels.

For a long period of time, the field of early childhood education has been most permeable to the influence of psychologists, and psychology has become its primary “supply” discipline. Thus, a great effort has been made, mainly within the pale of curriculum reform. Theoretical discussions about curricular goals have been predicated upon distinctions within psychological rather than educational paradigms.

References:


dominated over the field of research on educational reform,\(^8\) there is still ignorance among the early childhood education circle. During the past three decades program and research developments in early childhood education have been rapid and significant, but only a few scientists have attempted to write about the socio-historical context in which these developments have occurred, and "only rarely has critical analysis focused on the political and social assumptions that have guided this field."\(^9\)

During the last twenty years, economic and political reforms have brought rapid, substantial changes to Chinese society, which have greatly affected people's attitudes, behaviours and ideas about education and other aspects of life. In addition, traditions and new developments in Chinese culture have always played important roles in shaping people's perceptions concerning the nature of child development, goals and proposes of education, and teaching patterns. Institutional and structural changes in Chinese early childhood education, that were ignored during the early time of reform have become a key focus followed the process of "system" (体制) reform of the nation, which is regarded as not only a political question but also an intellectual one, since focusing on institutional change reveals much about the nature of Chinese society and its policy process. It is in this social, cultural, political, and economic context that early childhood education in present China is critically and reflectively examined in this study.

The present study builds on the work of my licentiate degree, which was started in 1994. During the same year I travelled to USA as an exchange student for advanced study in the field of early childhood education at the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, School of Education at University of Wisconsin-Madison. The study in Madison gave me the opportunity to consult data about China's educational reforms through library study. In the fall of 1995, I made a journey to

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Introduction

China where a small number of informal interviews with university teachers, kindergarten teachers and kindergarten administrators were made in my hometown Hangzhou in Zhejiang province. The thesis for licentiate degree was titled “Chinese Daycare in Cultural Change” and was successfully examined in 1996.

That thesis is short of empirical data from fieldwork, and it lacks practical and concrete examples in supporting the arguments of the thesis. The interviews were just a few, which had dealt with only one single kindergarten. It was not possible for me to construct a comprehensive explanation and a convincing argument. The limited sampling made a comparative analysis impossible. These aspects of my licentiate thesis were a crucial factor for me in deciding on the orientation of my doctoral dissertation. I believed that a further study on China’s kindergarten education based on my licentiate thesis was possible and necessary, and would be an ideal choice for me because of my good knowledge and experience about this field. I also believed that the new project could address the changes and issues occurred during more recent years through collecting data from a number of field works and case studies.

1.2 Early Childhood Education in China

Brief introduction

In China, children enter primary school at the age of 6 or 7. There are three types of early childhood programs for children under 7: nurseries, kindergarten and pre-primary programs. Nurseries serve children under the age of 3. Small groups and many caregivers assure prompt and abundant care. Since physical care and nurturing are the primary goals, the caregivers are trained as “nurses” rather than as teachers. Nurseries are not considered educational institutions and are not, therefore, under the supervision of local educational authorities.

The term kindergarten in China refers generally to full-day programs serving children from the age of 3 to the age of 6. There are also boarding kindergartens and half-day programs. Attendance is not compulsory as in primary and lower secondary education, nor are
kindergarten places universally available. Children in kindergarten are generally grouped by age: juniors (3-4-year-olds), middle (4-5-year-olds) and seniors (5-6-year-olds). Group size increases with age, ranging from 25 to 35 children. Typically, each group has two teachers and an aide. One teacher works with the children half-day and spends the other half-day planning and preparing teaching aids. These teachers may alternate, teaching mornings one week and afternoons the next. The teacher aide works with the children throughout the day. Rural kindergartens may have only one teacher per class with no aide, but these classes are often smaller. Large, affluent centres also often have one or more doctors on the staff to care for the sick or injured children. They also provide other health-related services, such as health screenings, immunisations and planning nutritious meals.

An alternative type of early childhood program is the pre-primary class, which is usually set up in primary school. This is typically a half-day program serving children the year prior to the 1st grade, much like the "sexårsverksamhet" system in Sweden. This type of program usually places greater emphasis on academics and the teaching methods are similar to those in Chinese primary school.

**Historical review**

Education in Imperial China focused on preparing individuals for the examinations needed to become government officials. Therefore, the earlier tradition of education did not include education for young children and the development of universal education. For more than two thousand of years, the field of education was mainly dominated by Confucianism, which emphasized the power of education in maintaining social harmony and class hierarchy, stressed the transmission of classical knowledge and valued mechanical memorisation. In the last days of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), there was some concern about the lack of modern elements in Chinese society and the need to reform Chinese culture to allow the country to compete with and defend itself against Western imperialist nations. The reformers turned to Japan for educational inspiration because of its proximity and its success in adapting western elements. Scholars
were sent to Japan to learn Japanese models for the reform of Imperial China.\textsuperscript{10}

In 1903, a group of twenty Japanese kindergarten teachers were brought to Hubei Province in China to establish kindergartens for children below the age of 6 and to train Chinese kindergarten teachers. The first official Chinese kindergarten was established in Wuchang, Hubei, in 1904.\textsuperscript{11} The curriculum and even the name were translated from Japanese. Similar kindergartens, some of which were influenced by the Hubei kindergarten, emerged in various parts of China during this period.\textsuperscript{12}

A small number of Froebelian and Montessori kindergartens were also established in China by Western (mostly American) missionaries during this early period. These kindergartens were part of a welfare plan to help poor families. The kindergartens, called "Meng Yang Yuan (蒙养园)" hired widows to teach young children copying indiscriminately programs from the West.\textsuperscript{13}

After World War I, Japanese political activities in Asia were unpopular with the Chinese. Many Chinese were discontented with the Versailles Treaty that had given Japan extra-territorial rights. Chinese thus resisted the Japanese influence in education and cultural affairs, and in turn looked more towards America and Europe. American money was used to support Chinese educational efforts. Both missionary and secular American educational institutions were established in China, and funds were also provided to send Chinese students to American universities where many of them were influenced by John Dewey and the American Progressive Education movement.\textsuperscript{14}

During the period of 1919-1921, Dewey visited China and lectured extensively in Beijing, Nanjing, Shanghai and a number of other cities. Even if Dewey's progressive philosophy did not have the wide-

\textsuperscript{14} Spodek, B, 1988, p. 104-5.
ranging influence on the political and social life of the Republic (1911-1949) that some of his Chinese students had expected, it did have a major influence on Chinese educators and helped to shape new ideas of education and teacher education. His lectures throughout China were recorded by his students, translated into Chinese, and published in book. A number of short-lived progressive education journals were also started during this period.15 Dewey’s ideas have also formed the basis of the establishment of Progressive kindergartens in China in the 1920s. These kindergartens evolved parallel to the American progressive kindergartens and were influenced by them. The curriculum was based on child development theory, much like their American counterparts, and regarded the social life of the child as the subject of education in kindergarten.16 The best known of these progressive Chinese early educators is Chen Heqin (1892-1982) who established his first progressive experimental kindergarten in his hometown Nanjing in 1923. He created a unit-based kindergarten curriculum -- with learning activities centred around a theme in accordance with general knowledge about children’s daily life -- that would be the focus of the program for several days or a whole week. During the same period, several other Chinese educators such as Tao Xinzhi, Zhang Xuemeng, and Zhang Zongling also attempted to absorb the democratic and pragmatic educational ideas of the West, and explored early childhood educational theories and methods suited to Chinese conditions. However, these early Chinese educators implemented their ideas only to a limited extent. In a nation-wide scope, their ideas did not produce much impact on the whole system and ideology of traditional education.

The founding of the People’s Republic of China entailed a new social system, a new ideology, and a new value system, all demanding a new aim of education: the training of new socialists and an educational system serving social development. The aims of education in the first phase of the People’s Republic were presented in Mao’s statement of educational policy in 1958: “Education must serve

16 Spodek, B, 1988, p. 105.
proletarian politics and should be combined with productive labour.”  

In the 1950s, Dewey’s theories were harshly criticized as “a tool of U.S. imperialism for poisoning people and invading the world” and thus totally negated. Instead, Soviet educational theories and practices were uncritically introduced into China as a result of political and ideological intimacy between these two countries. The progressive kindergarten programs based upon Dewey’s theories were replaced by the Soviet model. Child-centred approach was criticized, and teachers’ leading role in classroom was affirmed. The unit-based curriculum initiated by Chen Heqin and used broadly in kindergartens before 1949 was replaced with a subject-based curriculum copied from the Soviet. Instilling collectivism into the children through organizing unified collective activities was emphasized. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), although the kindergartens remained open, the training of kindergarten teachers all but stopped. Kindergarten curriculum still followed the Soviet model, but the content of education focused more on political education, particularly Mao’s thought, even for preschool children.

After Mao’s death in 1976 and especially since the National Science Conference and the Fifth National Education Work Conference in 1978, the nature, aims, and directions of education were re-defined. The theme of “four modernisations – agriculture, industry, defence, and science” were presented as the key to future development. In preschool field, during the 1980s there was a re-evaluation of Western educational ideas including Dewey’s progressive theory. Curriculum reform was emphasized, characterized by a greater numbers of curriculum experiments carried out nation-wide, in which the unit-model based on progressive ideas was re-approved and encouraged. In addition, there were demands for redefining and reconstructing the goals and mission of early childhood education, as a response to the single child policy.

Along with the national economic and political reform in the 1990s, the reform focus shifted from more academic issues to questions involving organizational and structural transformation. The state

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encouraged a decentralisation policy and multiple ownership in the education system at all levels, which also meant restructuring the kindergarten system. Meanwhile, reconstruction of educational ideas was required as a result of the increased impact of Western ideas after the open-door policy, and the implementation of the single-child policy. The processes of globalisation, marketisation, commercialisation and privatisation of the society also shaped debate on collectivism or (and) individualism in kindergarten education.

1.3 The Research Focus

Broadly, this study addresses the changes and development in the field of Chinese early childhood education in the era of the post-Mao four modernisations. Particularly, it focuses on changes of Chinese kindergarten education at two levels -- changes in system (structural change) and changes in educational activities (curriculum and ideological change), especially for the period of the 1990s. Both change in policy (national level) and change in practice (local and individual institutional level) are stressed. In addition, it studies the relation and distinction between actual change (change activities and organization of a kindergarten) and symbolic change (change in goals statements and self-description). Finally, it also focuses on changes in the process of transformation from the formulating of policy to the implementation of policy.

There are four related fundamental research questions in shaping this study:

• What changes occur in Chinese kindergartens recently?
• In what context are these changes produced?
• How are these changes experienced and understood by the policy-makers, practitioners, and parents?
• How can these experiences be interpreted and understood?
1.4 Outline of Dissertation Structure

The literature on educational change in socialist countries does not provide much direction for fruitful ways to conceptualise the research, but other related bodies of theoretical work, reviewed in Chapter 2, suggest that the structural and ideological change of education reflects economic, political and cultural transformation of society. Drawing on research on educational reform in China, I consider change and continuity in Chinese early childhood education as a reflection of these transformations of the larger society, as well as a result of the nature of culture and of cultural politics.

Changes in kindergarten structure and administration are examined in Chapter 3 and 4. The reform process of the 1990s was conditioned by the historical context of kindergarten education, and the recent economic and political demands of the state. This part presents current political, economic and social reforms at the national level in China, and how they affect educational policies and practices. Structural changes with shift of administrative authority in kindergarten education have taken place at local and individual institutional levels. The policy action, that is, has been a combination of formulation and implementation of policy, which reflects the power relations between state and civil society, central and local governments, and institutions at different levels.

Chapter 5 focuses on the transformation of educational ideas. It describes changes in kindergarten curriculum, classroom activities, and the relationship between teacher and children. Changes in the views of child and child development are discussed in Chapter 6. The background to these changes is the tension between Chinese traditional culture and Western influence, between the popular social ethic and the present policy of family planning, and between the conventional culture of people and the demands of social transition.

The function of Chapter 7 is supposed to "bring a picture of a dragon to life by putting in the pupils of its eyes" (画龙点睛) – adding an apt word to clinch the point. The information presented in the first six chapters can be summarized by looking into the question of "kindergarten education with Chinese characteristics", since the answer to this question reveals the features of Chinese kindergarten education, as well as presenting the prospects for the Chinese people
Chapter 1

in the future. Based on the data from interviews, the conclusion of this chapter is that the characteristics of Chinese kindergarten education “persist in collectivity and collectivism education”. Changes in the concepts of collectivity and collectivism in classroom action, combined with the effect of new social conditions, are discussed in a historical context.

The consequences of this process of structural and ideological change in Chinese kindergarten education are discussed in the final chapter. Overall, it is assumed that such a deeper understanding of changes in early education is essential to a better understanding of the social transformation of China during the era of the post-Mao four modernisations.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

China is an agricultural land, in which the rural population is still about 70 percent of the whole population. The proportion of children born to rural inhabitants is much higher than in the urban population. A stronger traditional sense of birth and a looser binding with the birth control policy in rural areas are the main reason for higher proportion of births. People living in rural areas have stronger traditional senses of birth and of family than in urban areas, for instance, notions such as “the more children, the much happiness (多子多福)” and “to give birth to a son is a kind of insurance for one’s old age (养儿防老)” were still accepted by many rural people in the 1990s. The relative lower level of economic development, less efficient agricultural production, and worse social welfare for old people are the main obstacle to transforming these traditional ideas to a modern one.

Preschool education, which is outside the system of compulsory education in China, has a worse situation in most of rural areas of China. It has been ignored by the government, officials of educational department at different levels, educational researchers, and even parents. Education in rural areas has lower quality, less economic support, less opportunity of access to equal education, and worse condition both in hardware (physical and material conditions) and in
software (teachers’ qualification) compared to those in urban areas.\textsuperscript{19} However, the greater number of preschool aged children in rural areas has given prominence to the importance of these children’s education.

One constraint on the present study is the lack of exploration on rural kindergartens. This is mainly because the limited economic support for this study made it impossible for me to have a wider investigation into rural areas and to collect data from these areas. Furthermore, the dearth of literature in this field is also a reason for its absence in this study.

The second constraint is that the data for this study has been collected only from three areas of the central part of China, and all these three areas are categorized as economic well-developed coastal area. This is mainly because of the limitation of my personal relations in China. There have been usually two ways in access to an organization or institution in China: an official way -- that means you should have a letter of introduction (reference) written by the organization where you work; and a private way -- through the personal relations\textsuperscript{20} to get contact with the persons in the institution you want to visit. For me the first way was impossible since I did not belong to any work unit in China at present.\textsuperscript{21} The only way I could take was thus to make use of my personal relations in China, and ask them to introduce me to kindergartens. The members of my family, friends of mine, and a number of my old colleagues helped me with the access to the kindergartens. Unfortunately, my personal relations in China were limited in these three areas. Furthermore, the kindergartens I looked into were those of quality, which means there is an absence in this study of kindergartens run by local communities. So, to a certain extent, the data from my case studies is not easily


\textsuperscript{20} Sometimes can be indirect relation.

\textsuperscript{21} However, as an overseas Chinese I could be welcome by some institutions without any personal relations only if I could provide them with the opportunities for international cooperation or exchange projects, which was out of my competence. Since the open door policy, educational institutions from the central to the local have been searching for any opportunities to get contact with foreign institutions doing cooperative research, to carry out exchange project, or to have chance to visit a country. These can be understood as a sort of a deal -- both economically and academically.
Chapter 1

generalized. Therefore the findings from the present study cannot reflect the whole general picture of China.

The third constraint is the absence of preschool teacher training. Teachers hold the key to the success of a school. Indeed, the restructuring of the Chinese educational system has had a direct influence on teachers’ professional careers and even their livelihood. The construction and reconstruction of educational ideas, the renewal of curriculum and knowledge, and actual change in classroom actions do, in a final analysis, hinge on the quality of teachers. Kindergarten reform and change are, undoubtedly, correlated with the reform and change of kindergarten teacher training. My interview questions have dealt with the issues such as the qualification of kindergarten teachers, the development of pre-service and in-service teacher training programs, changes in teacher training curricula, the current hot topic in China -- the male preschool teachers, and the related issues of gender and professionalism. However, the lack of data directly from kindergarten teacher normal schools and colleges, combined with other practical problems, means that this source of information is not exploited. It is important and, therefore, has been left for future work.
Chapter 2

Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Education and its relation to the structure of society

Education in a given society is the reflection of the politics, economy, and culture of this society. At a more abstract and general level, education has been defined as "socially organized transmission and acquisition of knowledge and character formation for the reproduction and/or change of fundamental individual and social functions."\(^\text{22}\)

Education is, in other words, closely related to economic and political needs and to the power structure of society. From the historical materialist point of view, the act of economic production shapes social relations and, therefore, the structure of society. Furthermore, economic production gives rise to a system of ideas and beliefs which come to represent the productive relations that stand as "conscious images in mental life."\(^\text{23}\) According to Marx:

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will. These relations of production correspond to a definite stage of the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, which is the real foundation on top of which arises a legal and political superstructure to which correspond definite forms of social

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Chapter 2

consciousness. It is not the consciousness of men, therefore, that determines their existence, but instead their social existence determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or — what in but a legal expression of the same thing — with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then occurs a period of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed.  

In contrast to Marx’s theory of seeing economic forces as the sole determinants of history and society, Weber believed that social phenomena could, in fact, be studied outside the realm of economic forces and he took the view that there were other determinants of social life derived from the political, religious and legal spheres of society. Weber believed that these social spheres were fundamental to an understanding of historical and social development. According to Weber, four major spheres make up society: the political, legal, economic, and religious. He believed that no single sphere was dominant in society, since they tend to overlap in relation to each other. He maintained that the various social spheres act in different ways to bring about social change and historical development. Weber argued that Marx had presented an overly simplified scheme that could not adequately take into account the tangled web of causative influences linking the economy and the social structure to cultural products and human action. Weber refused to believe that ideas were simple reflections of material interests. He attempted to


show that the relations between system of ideas and social structures were multiform and varied and that causal connections went in both directions, rather than from infrastructure to superstructure alone. In the discussion about the role of education in the formation of society, many analyses have focused on the relation between education and economic reproduction. The relation between economy and schooling, however, is not a one-to-one correspondence; it is instead the product of the "subtle tensions" that occur as culture, labor, and politics interrelate. Educational policy has been linked so closely to economic policy recently that analyzing the former must pay regard to the latter. Some researchers also pay heed to education's reproductive role for the class structure of society, and the ideological role of education for the state. More recent analyses of education in capitalist countries point out that schools play a contradictory role in reproduction reflecting the inherent contradictory social relations of capitalist society. As a state apparatus schools perform important roles in assisting in the creation of the conditions necessary for capital accumulation (they sort, select, and certify a hierarchically organized student body), and they also serve ideological legitimation (they maintain an inaccurate meritocratic ideology and, therefore, legitimate the ideological forms necessary for the recreation of inequality). These roles are often in conflict with each other. Schools become one of the sites where the ideological struggle takes place and where these dominant ideologies are produced. Poulantzas asserted that it is "the economic, political and ideological class struggle which has the school as its effects." The complex relations

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between cultural, economic, political, and social patterns are a key factor in the production of education reforms.

The educational system of any country can be regarded as "a complicated pattern of educational components which interact internally and with other social phenomena in a process of constant change." However, changes in the educational system, caused by social conditions, will in their turn change the social conditions. The process of social and educational changes can be regarded as a dialectical flow of contradictions inside and outside the education system. Situating education in relation to the rest structure of society is the only way to understand fully how it interacts with and is dependent on its political, economic, and cultural environment, and how this interaction constrains and determines the action of educational organizations and the ways they can change. As Apple argues: "... schools are not separate from the wider society, but are part of it and participate fully in its logics and social-cultural dynamics. Struggling in the schools is struggling in society." 

Levin has also noted that the structure and source of authority are important educational issues since they provide reflections on the way educational decisions are made and carried out, and since they reveal connections between schools as organizations, the state, and society. On the one hand, these issues have consequences for teaching, teachers, curriculum, and learning; and on the other hand, they affect access to the opportunity provided by schools. Researchers have also argued that educational change is always problematic because "there is virtually no educational innovation that does not threaten someone's vested interest and ideological beliefs."

The critical approach also suggests that reforms cannot be seen solely as policy change in its conventional sense; they must be viewed as part of the larger educational system, which itself must be situated in the structure of the larger society. Educational policy impinges on politics, economics, and culture. When it is translated into concrete

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structures (schools), the interwoven threads can be disentangled to reveal the pattern of interaction of the basic components of society—the production process and the social relations of production. In a particular local context, institutions are both arenas for struggle and outcomes of struggle. Indeed, on many of the key issues confronting the education system today, including funding, testing, curriculum, school management, educational selection, and teacher training, there is conflict rather than consensus. 36 Levin has described a correspondence between schools and the “institutions of the larger society”—social, political, and economic ones—and implies that meaningful reform is greatly constrained by education’s domination by the “sponsoring society”:

As long as there are no contradictions between that society and its schools, any serious attempt at “school reform” will fail since the schools will follow their master, and not vice versa ...Schools are to be viewed as functional in obeying the rules of the game set out by the larger society, and analysis of the educational sector must take this tenet into account. 37

In China, in every period of social change, schools have reflected current economic arrangements and developments, political strategies, as well as the ideological transformations. There have been significant changes in the patterns of politics, culture, and economy both expressed and influenced by schooling. Since the death of Mao in 1976 and the 1978 Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress, China has experienced changes affecting the structure of authority, first in the agricultural sector, then in industry, and more recently in ideological and cultural production. Four changes are particularly relevant: first, authority has been delegated to lower levels of decision-making—a decentralisation of some aspects of the agricultural, industrial, and cultural production. Second,


37 Levin, H., 1976, pp. 43.
Chapter 2

administrative decision-making has been delegated to experts, as opposed to party bureaucrats; while daily operations in most sectors were previously supervised by Party branch secretaries, recent reforms have assigned much operational control to managers and administrators. Third, there has been a stronger emphasis on efficiency and accountability. The fourth area of change, widely publicized in the West, involves the rise of influences of marketisation and privatisation and their incorporation into Chinese social relations. These results of the change have a direct impact on educational policy-making, educational ideas and practice.

Culture, cultural politics and education

The term “culture” has been defined in different ways by different people. The concept of “culture” as it is used here is regarded as a way of life, containing the totality of the complex relations regulating the behavioural patterns of a group. Social relations, that are the human ties holding a cultural group together, are based on two components: The material component providing for physical surroundings and nature, and the ideological component giving meaning to life. Cultural change refers to a “change in the basic patterns of social relations due to changes in either material relation or ideological perception.”

When changes occur in either material relations or the ideological domain, social relations will adapt and adjust, often haltingly and laggingly.

In discussing the relations between education and the politics of culture, Apple argues:

*Education is deeply implicated in the politics of culture. The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a selective tradition, someone’s selection, some group’s vision of legitimate knowledge. It is produced out of the*

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39 Ibid, pp. 16-17.
cultural, political, and economic conflicts, tensions, and compromises that organize and disorganize a people...\(^{(T)}\)he decision to define some groups' knowledge as the most legitimate, as official knowledge, while other groups' knowledge hardly sees the light of day, says something extremely important about who has power in society.\(^{40}\)

Apple uses the notion of *hegemonic cultures* to explain the power relation in the politics of education. According to him, the concept of hegemony refers to a process in which dominant groups in society come together to form a bloc and sustain leadership over subordinate groups. Such a power bloc relies on *winning consent* to the prevailing order, by forming an ideological umbrella under which different groups who usually might not totally agree with each other can stand.\(^{41}\) "The existing curriculum is never a neutral assemblage of knowledge. ... it is always based on an assertion of cultural authority. The same must be said about schools."\(^{42}\) However, in any given historical situation, as McGuigan states, "The dominant cultural never commands the field entirely: it must struggle continually with residual and emergent cultures."\(^{43}\) In educational sphere, this kind of struggle is mainly displayed in the process of ideological conflicts. These conflicts over knowledge, pedagogy, goals, and criteria, in correspondence with political, and economic struggles outside education, have produced distinct configurations of educational policies and practices.

In China, great changes have occurred in the social, political and economic systems as well as in social ideology. However, it is uncertain to what degree these changes have affected people's cultural behaviour or rules of conduct. From the point of view of the population's adjustment and adaptation to cultural and sociopolitical changes, one wonders what characteristics of Chinese cultural behaviour, manifested in individual behaviour, group organizations

\(^{40}\) Apple, M.W., 1996, p. 22.
\(^{41}\) Ibid. p. 14.
\(^{42}\) Ibid. p. 95.
and social relationships, have interrupted such change. One also wonders what aspects of the Chinese culture have changed due to forces of industrialisation, westernisation, marketisation and privatisation, as well as legitimisation of knowledge, and how such a culture is reflected in Chinese kindergarten educational theories and practices.

2.2 Introduction to Research Methods and Focus

The design of this study comes out of its theoretical conceptualisation that contains two elements. First, change in education is seen as closely linked to the social, political and economic context. The content, process and outcomes of reform in early childhood education can be described as affected by the social context of early educational institutions and their organizational characteristics, family structure and policy, and the specific professional cultural of teaching and learning. Second, it is argued that systems of ideas are constructed, given meaning and legitimacy within historical and cultural conditions. The curricula (include hidden curricula) of early educational program, teachers’ attitudes to children, and their professional action are affected by the changing philosophies and ideas concerning children’s nature, abilities and needs, the notion of child development, and the legitimacy, value, and expression of “knowledge”.

My study focuses not only on outcomes but also on understanding the process of change and the issues, conflicts and contradictions embedded in that process. It is necessary to stress both policy changes at central level and policy implementation at local, individual organization levels, as well as the interaction between them. The aim is to understand and learn more about education, society, culture and the change process in the special setting of China.

Based on these considerations, the project was designed by relying on both historical analysis and case study of Chinese kindergarten education. Historical analysis was conducted mainly at macro

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(national) level in order to gather information about the changes of ideology, policy and system. My emphasis on the shift of ideas, the evolution of policy, my interest in changes of structures, and my concern with understanding the process of change in the Chinese’s own terms as a historical struggle all require historical analysis as a fundamental research tool for this study. In order to understand the role and position of early childhood education in today’s China, it was also necessary to study its history and socio-political context. In addition, a historical dimension can provide the case study with a meaningful “backdrop” to the structures and practices evolving today at micro (local) level.

The other research method -- fieldwork -- was essential to ascertain the nature of change, which requires some description of implementation of policy at local and individual institutional level. At this time field research represents the only way to get crucial baseline data on early educational institutions of China and their organizational transformation, as well as changes in the ideas of individuals. The selection of the regions was of “having no choice” in the beginning, but was thought of as the best alternative under limited conditions. Beijing and Shanghai are two of the four municipalities directly under the Central Government. The former is seen as the political center of the nation, and the latter the economic center. Hangzhou is a medium-sized provincial capital city. Though Ningbo and Pinghu both are located in developed coastal area, and both are famous for their ports, they differ in many aspects. Ningbo is a large town at prefecture level, and Pinghu is a new named small town at county level. They are different not only in size and population, but also in degree of political, economic and cultural development. The selection of locations made possible for a comparative analysis of policy implementation at these different levels.

The following table describes the kindergartens surveyed in my study.
Chapter 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>No. of children</th>
<th>No. of Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beijing No.1 Experimental Kindergarten</td>
<td>Run by department of education at district level in Beijing</td>
<td>District demonstrational kindergarten</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing No.2 Experimental Kindergarten</td>
<td>Attached to a normal university in Beijing</td>
<td>Grade 1 &amp; class 1</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai No.1 Kindergarten</td>
<td>Attached to a medical university in Shanghai</td>
<td>Grade 1 &amp; class 2</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai No.2 Kindergarten</td>
<td>Run by the department of education at district level in Shanghai</td>
<td>Grade 2 &amp; class 1</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hangzhou No.1 Kindergarten</td>
<td>Attached to a government organization in Zhejiang Province</td>
<td>Provincial demonstrational kindergarten, special grade</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hangzhou No.2 Experimental Kindergarten</td>
<td>Attached to a preschool teacher training school in Zhejiang Province</td>
<td>Provincial demonstrational kindergarten</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinghu No.1 Kindergarten</td>
<td>Run by department of education at municipal level</td>
<td>Grade 1 &amp; class 2</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinghu No.2 Kindergarten</td>
<td>Run by department of education at municipal level</td>
<td>Municipal demonstrational kindergarten</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ningbo English Kindergarten</td>
<td>Private kindergarten, run a trade company in Ningbo</td>
<td></td>
<td>120</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Averages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>338</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Brief introduction on kindergartens surveyed.  

2.3 Research Activities

The research had two foci: library study and field work. Based on the theoretical framework and early fieldwork, my focus gradually

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45 For ethical reason I did not use the real name of the kindergartens. All kindergartens in China are graded and classified according to their quality of hardware (conditions of houses, circumstance, equipment, etc.) and software (teaching and educational quality), in which "grade" deals with the level of software, and "class" deals with the level of hardware (1=High). Such work of grading and classifying is done usually once a year by the educational department of government at city, town or county levels.
narrowed to changes in three major aspects of kindergarten education: administration, curricula, and classroom action.

**Library research**

This had been done both in Sweden and China. I began this aspect of the research in Sweden prior to my field work, studying Chinese scholarly education journals, the Chinese national press, international educational journals, and books on China’s educational reforms. These provided information on national educational policy, kindergarten curriculum, changes in early childhood education, and current debates in pre-school circles in China. These written sources gave me background to guide my preparation of interview questions.

Library work continued when I was in China. I spent two weeks at the library of Department of Education at Hangzhou University browsing among the major national educational journals and the local educational journals for the period 1995-1997. During the fieldwork, the scope of my reading was extended to include local press, kindergarten textbooks and some school archival materials.

**Interviewing**

In 1997, I worked out three schedules to interview different groups -- kindergarten administrators, kindergarten teachers, and kindergarten children’s parents. According to the principle of triangulation in case studies, I used the same questions with different types of people, as well as special questions for different types of people. In October of 1997 I travelled to Beijing, Hangzhou, Shanghai, Ningbo and finally

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46 For example the monthly journals such as *Preschool Education*, Beijing Municipal Educational Committee; *Early Childhood Education*, Educational Committee of Jiangsu Province; and *Infant Education*, Zhejiang Infant Teacher Training School, and *People’s Daily* (Oversee Edition), etc.

47 From Beijing No.2 Experimental Kindergarten, Ningbo English Kindergarten, and Pinghu No.2 Kindergarten.

48 See Appendix 1.

Pinghu, and carried out totally 42 interviews over a period of two months. My reading guided me to seek interviews with individuals performing certain roles and to raise specific questions. Informal interviews occurred sometimes when I met my friends during my stay in China -- some of them were parents to kindergarten age children, some were kindergarten or school teachers, and some were university teachers. They were an invaluable source.

The formal interviews were conducted with ten kindergarten directors, seventeen teachers, and fifteen parents from total nine kindergartens in five regions. They provided information on the transformation of kindergarten structure and administration, changes in ideas about children and child development, and personal views of these changes. In addition, I gathered information on official policy and plan at provincial level from the Zhejiang Provincial Educational Committee where I interviewed an administrator in charge of the sector of pre-school education at the Department of General Education. The following table shows the number and distribution of interviewees by categories and kindergartens.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kindergartens</th>
<th>Directors</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beijing No.1 Experimental Kindergarten</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing No.2 Experimental Kindergarten</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai No.1 Kindergarten</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai No.2 Kindergarten</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hangzhou No.1 Kindergarten</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hangzhou No.2 Experimental Kindergarten</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinghu No.1 Kindergarten</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinghu No.2 Kindergarten</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ningbo English Kindergarten</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2:** The number and distribution of interviewees by categories and kindergartens.\(^{50}\)

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50 Interview with the head of Ningbo English Kindergarten was held in the director's office, the vice director who shared the room with the director also took part in the interview.
In the interests of getting comparable data, interviews were designed to ask three different samples the same questions, followed by special questions for that particular group. After the prepared questions were covered, I encouraged free-ranging discussion by asking quite broad questions and/or following up on comments made earlier in the session by the speaker.

Interviews tended to range from 45 minute to one and a half hour, the average being approximately one hour. All interviews were recorded by tape record, and at the same time I made some notes of main point in Chinese. The circumstances of the formal interviews varied somewhat and in some respects were out of my control. Interviews with kindergarten directors were usually held in their offices, and interviews with teachers and parents were generally held in reception rooms. In some cases there were no reception room or other free room available, so the interviews had to be held in rooms where other personnel were present. In Beijing No.1 Experimental Kindergarten and Shanghai No.2 Kindergarten the interviews with parents were arranged in group-form. In addition, at every visit to kindergartens, I made and recorded informal observations on classroom and outdoor activities of the children.

To help readers gain a better understanding, it is necessary to make a brief detour on the geographic, economic and cultural backgrounds of these cities or towns where the kindergartens are located. The following is the map of P. R. China, and the location of cities and towns I have visited.

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51 e.g. something I wanted to give more attention to in the latter analysis.
52 I had no control over the selection of teachers and parents, interview objects -- teachers and parents were assigned by the heads of kindergartens.
Beijing (北)

Beijing is the capital city of China with a permanent population of over 12 million, a transient population of over 3 million, and an area of 16,808 square kilometres. It plays the role of political and cultural centre of People’s Republic of China. Beijing Municipality is one of the four municipalities directly under the Central Government, and is divided into 10 districts and 8 counties.

Beijing has 67 colleges and universities with 175,000 students. There are 534 advanced vocational schools for adults, and technical secondary schools with a total 226,000 students. The total number of primary and middle schools is 3,728 and there are 1,608 million students. Primary school education has been made universal in both urban and rural areas, and nine-year compulsory education has been made universal in urban areas and towns. The enrolment rate of school-age children in Beijing reaches 99.92%.
Shanghai (上海)

Situated in the middle of east China’s coast, Shanghai is the largest and most populous city in the country, and is one of the largest cities in the world. Shanghai is China’s main centre for industry, commerce, foreign trade, science and technology. The municipality covers a total area of 16,200 square kilometres, which includes the city itself, surrounding suburbs, and an agricultural hinterland; it is also China’s most populous urban area with 14.19 million inhabitants. Shanghai Municipality is divided into 13 urban districts, 6 suburban counties and a Pudong New Area. In recent years, Shanghai has been in the midst of yet another transition, as its government lays the groundwork for the 21st century -- as a major international economic, financial and trade centre. Shanghai has 39 institutions of higher learning, 812 secondary schools and 1,533 elementary schools, as well as a number of special schools for handicapped children.

Hangzhou (杭州)

Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang Province, covers a total area of 16,596 square kilometres, with a population of 6.08 million, including 683 square kilometres of city proper area and a city population of 1.69 million people. State Wu, State Yue and Southern Song Dynasty once built their capitals here, making it one of the six ancient capital cities in China. The present day Hangzhou administers two municipalities and 5 counties. It is renowned for its beautiful scenery, a multitude of historical sites, cultural relics and native products. There are 20 universities and colleges, 57 technical secondary schools, 3,200 odd middle schools and primary schools, and 80 odd natural science research institutions. The nine-year compulsory education system and pre-work training system are operated in the city.

Ningbo (宁波)

Ningbo, as the largest commercial seaport in Zhejiang Province, has under its jurisdiction 5 districts, 3 counties and 3 county-level cities, which cover 9,365 square kilometres, 1,033 square kilometres of which are urban areas. It has a population of 5.3 million, with 1.16
Chapter 2

million living in the urban districts. Ningbo is a major fishing and an industrial centre on the Yong River, and also an entrepôt port linking northern and southern China. It enjoys a privileged right of economic management at provincial level, which gives impetus to its economic development. It has 5 institutions of higher learning and 4126 full-time schools. The student population totals 926,000.

Pinghu (平湖)

Pinghu is a town at county level located in the middle between the two cities of Shanghai and Hangzhou. It is the golden region of the Shanghai Economic Zone and is honoured with the name of “Golden Pinghu”. The area of Pinghu is 536.9 square kilometres with a population of 480,000 people. Pinghu has industries such as textile, machinery, building materials, papermaking and food processing, as well as an agricultural system mainly consisting of rice, cotton, oil, and cocoon, etc. Under Pinghu town there are 10 villages and small towns.

Pinghu has 133 primary schools, 23 general middle schools and 5 vocational schools (including 1 teacher normal school and 1 teacher in-service training school) with totally 63991 students. There are 256 kindergartens (and classes) with a total of 12393 pre-school children. The Preschool children enrolment rate has reached 97.68%.
Chapter 3
Restructuring Kindergarten System

3.1 Kindergarten Development in a Historical Perspective

The Chinese educational system did not include education for young children until the beginning of the twentieth century. The first official Chinese kindergarten was established in 1904. It enrolled children from poor families. Since then, a small number of Froebelian and Montessori kindergartens were established by Western missionaries, which were part of a welfare plan to help children from poor families. During the 1920s and the 1940s the number of government and private run kindergartens increased. Unlike missionary kindergartens, most of these kindergartens charged higher tuition fees so that only the children from rich families could have the opportunity to access.

Since 1949, in line with other political, economical and cultural changes, the features of early childhood education have gone up and down. Table 3 is the statistics on the number of kindergartens and children enrolled in different periods.

1949-1957 The first “Five Years Plan”

The first decade after the establishment of P.R.China was the period of “stable development” with a stable growth of kindergartens and nurseries at national level, the development of kindergarten teacher training programs, and the formulation of principles for early childhood education. The number of kindergartens increased from

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54 See Huang, R.S., 1989.
55 Ibid; see also Lu, L.S., 1991.
## Chapter 3

### Kindergartens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Run by educational departments</th>
<th>Run by non-educational departments</th>
<th>Run by communities</th>
<th>Run by private &amp; other social sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>1301</td>
<td>824</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>477</td>
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<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>6531</td>
<td>4540</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>1148</td>
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<td>1957</td>
<td>16420</td>
<td>4367</td>
<td>3433</td>
<td>8358</td>
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<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>695297</td>
<td>4459</td>
<td>4833</td>
<td>686005</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>60307</td>
<td>7555</td>
<td>19247</td>
<td>33505</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1974</td>
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<td>170419</td>
<td>7495</td>
<td>21352</td>
<td>141572</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>172285</td>
<td>12796</td>
<td>28124</td>
<td>131365</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>174657</td>
<td>20645</td>
<td>23266</td>
<td>112462</td>
<td>18284</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>182485</td>
<td>30694</td>
<td>20410</td>
<td>106738</td>
<td>24643</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a)

### Children enrolled

(unit: in ten thousands persons)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Run by educational departments</th>
<th>Run by non-educational departments</th>
<th>Run by communities</th>
<th>Run by private &amp; other social sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>8.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>108.8</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>2950.1</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>2868.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>289.6</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>114.0</td>
<td>110.9</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>263.8</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>207.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>1395.5</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>1298.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>935.9</td>
<td>131.3</td>
<td>155.7</td>
<td>648.9</td>
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<td>1990</td>
<td>1972.0</td>
<td>442.1</td>
<td>339.8</td>
<td>1190.1</td>
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<td>1994</td>
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<td>814.6</td>
<td>326.2</td>
<td>1385.9</td>
<td>103.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2518.9</td>
<td>941.5</td>
<td>294.5</td>
<td>1148.0</td>
<td>134.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b)


(a) The number of kindergartens; (b) the number of children enrolled.
1,301 in 1946\textsuperscript{57} to 16,420 in 1957, the number of children enrolled increased from 130,000 to 1,088,000, and the number of kindergarten staff increased from 2,165 to 49,800.\textsuperscript{58} In 1950 there was only one infant teacher normal school in China. Six years later the number had grown to 21, which provided a guaranteed teaching force. To popularise and to make kindergarten education more scientific yet with Chinese style was the major principle behind development.\textsuperscript{59}

1958-1965 The “Great Leap Forward” and communisation

1958 was the year the “Great Leap Forward” movement launched by Mao. It was characterized by rapid communisation in agriculture, decentralisation of some industry and steel-making activities by the whole nation. During those years it was necessary to set up a large number of kindergartens to serve the children under school age whose parents were taking part in the mass movement and the production activities. Furthermore, communisation in the countryside provided structural, rational and material support for the expansion of kindergartens in these areas. Under this system, the commune became a local government, performing a multiplicity of functions in agriculture, industry, education, social welfare, public health, public works, and even military defence. The peasants turned over to the collective entity their ownership in land, tools, draft animals, houses, and shares in the cooperatives. They became members of a commune, of which they claimed collective ownership. In return, they were to receive five guarantees: food, clothing, housing, medical care, and education. As cooperation and collectivisation underpinned social production and people’s life, it was equally important “to educate children in the collective, for the collective, and through the collective.”

During the early stage of commune development (1958), communal kitchens were installed to free more women for production. In some extreme cases, men and women lived in segregated communal

\textsuperscript{57} The year with largest amount of the number of kindergartens before Liberation.
\textsuperscript{58} He, X.X., 1990, p. 343.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
dormitories, with their children in communal nurseries or kindergartens. Contemporary slogans were: universalising nursery and kindergarten over night; eliminating the distinctions between town and country, industry and agriculture, physical and mental labour by establishing a system of boarding kindergarten. As a result, during a short period, there was a rapid growing of nurseries and kindergarten, particularly in countryside. By 1958 there were 695,297 kindergartens, which was 42.3 times more than of that in 1957, and the number of children enrolled in kindergartens reached 29,501,000. Such speed of development not only exceeded the township and country economic developmental level of China, but also was in excess of the need of the mass. The new kindergartens and nurseries had very poor conditions in housing, equipment, and teachers.

At that time, the kindergartens in countryside (including infant teams and infant classes) were commonly set up by a production team or a production brigade who found a room or a couple of rooms with or without a yard, and chose some native old and infirm, but honest and dependable women as teachers. In many cases, there were no tables and chairs suitable for children in classrooms, no washing and cocking facilities, and an absence of toys, books and teaching materials. The "teachers" had no knowledge about teaching children, because many of them were illiterate. Moreover, as they were quite aged, they were incompetent at their work. Thus most of these kindergartens were actually like "enclosing and pasturing sheep".

In urban areas, there was similar situation. The concept of "liberating women" (解放妇女) in that context meant giving women the

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62 See Table 3.

Restructuring Kindergarten System

opportunity to free themselves from the “kitchen sink (range)”, from housework, and from child-rearing and, thus, to participate in socialist production. A great number of kindergartens and nurseries were thus established by “streets” during these years. They had two functions: to solve the problem of female employment through providing jobs as kindergarten or nursery “aunties”, and through providing children with collective care when their parents were working. Most of these newly opened kindergartens and nurseries had very poor material and educational conditions that could not provide children with a healthy and joyful environment.

From 1961 the state began to stress “readjustment” work. By 1961 the number of kindergartens had been reduced to 60,307 which was 634,990 less than in 1958, and the children enrolled fell from 29.5 million in 1958 to 2.9 million in 1961. After two years’ readjustment, by 1963 the number of kindergartens had returned to the level of 1957, which means that kindergartens opened during 1958 and 1960 had almost totally disappeared.

1966-1975 The “Cultural Revolution”

The ten-year “Cultural Revolution” brought chaos to Chinese society, both in ideas and structure. Early childhood education was also affected by this political movement. Although most of the kindergartens were still opened during the “Cultural Revolution”, all 21 infant teacher normal schools were forced to close, so that kindergartens were opened without new qualified teacher. During the first couple of years after the Cultural Revolution there was a great shortage of qualified kindergarten teachers in all parts of the country. This “gap layer” of kindergarten teacher created problems for more than ten years. In addition, as kindergarten educational theory and practice for the previous 17 years (1949-1965) had been characterized as “bourgeois”, the earlier curriculum of the kindergarten was rejected. Political and ideological education had been the major focus of the new curriculum. Children of kindergarten age were required to recite quotations from Mao and other political slogans.

64 Or neighbourhood in cities and towns.
1976-1990 "Springtime for education and science"

Mao died on 9th of September in 1976. Three weeks later, the "gang of four" were arrested, which marked the end of the ten years’ Cultural Revolution, and the beginning of "new age of China", a "springtime for education and science". The development of kindergarten education during this period had the following features:

- The number of kindergarten dramatically increased in 1976, and then remained relatively stable.
- The state formulated regulations concerning the qualifications of kindergarten teachers and the assessment of their performance. In the whole country normal schools were devoted to the training of preschool teachers. In addition, a significant number of preschool departments were attached to vocational high schools. Overall, the springtime fostered a network of preschool teacher training.
- The issue of the "Regulations for Kindergarten (trial)" by the State Ministry of Education in 1989 was a milepost in the development of kindergarten education. They represented the beginning of "promoting a regular and scientific development of kindergarten education".
- Since the 1980s, studies on kindergarten curriculum have been carried out with the collaboration of researchers from normal universities and teachers from kindergartens. Ten new

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65 They were Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao, Yiao Wenyuan, and Jiang Qin (Mao’s wife).
66 See Table 3. The dramatic increase of the number of kindergarten in this year could be a result of a reflection of Chinese people thirsting for knowledge and education after ten years ideological confinement of the Cultural Revolution. Similar phenomena also occurred in other fields, for example there was a dramatic increase in the need for schooling, and adult education. These might have caused the need for establishing more kindergartens to serve the children whose parents were studying. After that year, there was a great decrease of the number of kindergartens. My explanation for this is that the large number of kindergartens was beyond the actual demand of the society. However, I have not been able to find sources to support my interpretation.
68 See Appendix 2.
Restructuring Kindergarten System

curriculum programs were developed, for example "The Integrated Model" and "The Activity Model". ⁶⁹

1991-present "Reformation of the system"

When the 1990s came, the nation proposed to establish a market economy system to replace the traditional planned economic system in China. Along with reforms of the national economic system, the issue of administrative and structure reform of educational institutions was also on the agenda. Early childhood education moved its attention from curriculum reform to organizational and administrative reform, characterized by the implementation of "director responsibility system", a "system of contract", and the encouragement of kindergartens maintained by non-state resources.

Extensive ideological changes in early childhood education have occurred since the "Regulations for Kindergarten (trial)" came into effect. The influence of ideas from other countries has become prominent since the open-door policy. As a result, a major focus is the relationship between teacher and child, and re-defining the notion of child development.

3.2 From Welfare Model to Market Competitive Model

There have been four categories of kindergarten in China: state-owned kindergartens run by the Department of Educational Commission at city and town level; kindergartens run by factories, enterprises, schools, and other institutions; kindergartens run by communities (a kind of neighbourhood collective kindergartens); and private kindergartens. All kindergartens are supposed to operate under the guidance of the Infant Educational Department at city, town or county levels. In the administrative sector only those kindergartens run by the department of educational commission are directly under the jurisdiction of educational commission. The size and staff number of

⁶⁹ Yu, Y.P., "Retrospect and Reflection of the Kindergarten Curriculum Reform in China", Education for Young Children, No. 3, 1994: 4-6, See more descriptions in Chapter 5.
these state-owned kindergartens, the appointment of directors, teachers’ wages and the expenditures on kindergarten buildings are decided by the educational commissions.

By 1990, the number of kindergartens dropped to 172,285, which was mainly a result of the single-children policy. Since the beginning of 1990s the number of kindergartens has been stable. The number of kindergartens run by educational departments has increased from 12,796 in 1990 to 30,694 in 1997, and the kindergartens run by non-educational departments and collective kindergartens has decreased from 159,489 to 127,148 over the same period.70

Changes in the Chinese economy have brought about the restructuring of the pre-school system. In urban areas, state-owned enterprises now have heavy deficits, as well as many small- and medium-sized collective enterprises. This situation is more serious in larger and medium sized cities than in small towns. As the enterprises are “unable even to fend for themselves” (自身难保), the kindergartens that they sponsored have actually become a burden, a load, or in their own words – “a cloth-wrapper” (包袱) – a kind of encumbrance for the existence and development of the enterprises, who are trying in every possible way to cast off such “cloth-wrappers”.

In 1993, The State Council issued “The National Program for Educational Reform and Development”, which is regarded as the first official policy document concerning structural reform of the educational system. Although the program did not included the special field of preschool education, its principles and strategies for primary, secondary, and higher education reform have been adopted to guide the structural reform of kindergarten education. Strategies for structural reform of education are, according to the program, separating managerial authority from ownership in public schools, and encouraging local people and private investment to run educational institutions at different levels. Since the middle of the 1990s, local governments and educational authorities have focused on separating kindergartens from their attached enterprises and institutions, and encouraging private and other social resources to run preschool institutions.

70 See Table 3.
Restructuring Kindergarten System

Kindergartens attached to enterprises and institutions – a welfare model

The welfare model of kindergarten prevailed in the middle of 1970s with a dramatic increase in the number of kindergartens run by enterprises, institutions, factories in urban areas and by communes and village communities in rural areas. During 1974 and 1976 the number of kindergartens increased from 40,267 to 442,650.\(^1\) The number in 1976 was 11 times that of 1974, while those run by educational departments increased only 3 times, and those of run by non-educational departments and communities increased around 12 times. The government ruled at that time that all institutions, factories, and enterprises with over 300 employees should set up a daycare centre to serve the children of the employees. These centres were usually located within the area of the sponsored work unit, and usually included nursery classes for children under the age of three. The welfare nature of these daycare centres was embodied in the following features:

- This type of daycare centre serves mainly the children of enterprises' or institutions' own employees.\(^2\)
- Centres were set up as welfare for the institutions' own employees. The parents pay a small amount for their children who go to the kindergartens, while the remaining operating costs are paid for by the sponsoring institutions.
- According to the national law, a mother has the right to take three months' maternity leave with full pay. The nursery classes in such daycare centres enrol children from three months old, and mothers have the right to go to the nursery classes to breast-feed their babies during their work time. Most of nurseries have a special room for breast-feeding.

\(^1\) See Table 3.

\(^2\) Recently, due to a decline in the birth rate, the number of preschool aged children in most areas, especially in urban areas, has decreased. Many kindergartens attached to enterprises could not be filled, if they only enrolled children of their own employees. See more discussion later.
Chapter 3

- A flexible schedule for children, according to their parents’ work timetable (ex. shift work), is often available.

Since the planned economy ideas of the Liberation, kindergarten education was regarded as a pure welfare undertaking for society. It was thought natural that the government and enterprises should bear the full responsibility for the children of state-employees. The parents were charged much lower than the actual cost of kindergarten. In addition to the fees paid by parents, kindergartens had to contribute 30-40 yuan monthly for each child, plus the expense of maintaining houses and buildings and getting additional equipment. Thus, a kindergarten could be a heavy financial burden for the sponsored enterprise. Under market economics such arrangements are considered unreasonable and are also regarded as against the law of economic development.

Lack of enrolment has also recently become a common problem for many kindergartens run by non-educational departments in urban areas in China. The kindergarten attached to Qingdao International Sea Transportation Inc. is a typical example. In 1995, 60 children were enrolled, only 8 of whom had parents working in the company. The remaining 52 children were from outside of the company who enjoyed the same welfare treatment as those company children. The company engaged 12 staff and spent more than one hundred thousands yuan yearly to support the kindergarten. Beijing No.2 Experimental Kindergarten, Shanghai No.1 Kindergarten, and Hangzhou No.1 Kindergarten had also the same situation. None of them served only “native” children. Opening kindergartens to other children has, in fact, marked the disappearance of welfare from early childhood education.

Furthermore, the single-child policy implemented from the early 1970s has brought a decline in the birth rate. The difficulty of getting place in kindergarten no longer exists in most areas in China. On the contrary, a glut of kindergartens became a serious problem in many

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73 Yuan: The Chinese unit of currency. The official rate of exchange in 1997 was approximately 1 US dollar = 8.3 yuan.
75 As mentioned by a couple of directors I interviewed.
76 Li, J.J., 1995.
regions. Thus, reduction of the number of kindergarten was put on the agenda of local government and educational authorities, which was led to competition between individual kindergartens. A kindergarten administrator told me:

_In the past, every year when a semester began I had to hide to avoid parents who wanted to send their children to this kindergarten through the “backdoor” (后门). I also often received a lot of “notes” written by my friends, my relatives, or even my neighbours. All these notes asked me to reserve place in kindergarten for the children they recommended. It was also common that parents had to line up for registration of their children to the kindergarten. It even happened that people came and formed a line outside the kindergartens gate in the night before the registration day, because the numbers of the applicants were always more than the actual number of enrolment. But in the last couple of years such things seldom happened. For instance this year, the number of children who applied for enrolling into our kindergarten is obviously less than before, we were even forced to advertise for the first time._

By 1997 Beijing had closed two kindergartens run by the Educational Department, and it has been suggested that after year 2000, this type of kindergartens will be cut down from 16 to 10. Non-educational department run kindergartens, especially those attached to institutions and enterprises, are likely to suffer further cuts, because it is commonly assumed that kindergartens run by educational departments usually have higher educational quality and better staff and material conditions than those run by non-educational department.

This is no doubt that the structural transformation of kindergarten is regarded as an important policy issue. With questions such as: How to accomplish this transformation? What policy support will come from

77 Interview with the head of Pinghu No. 2 kindergarten, 1997.
78 According to the head of Beijing No.1 Experimental Kindergarten.
the government? What are the strategies to be applied at local level by individual organizations? It is not surprising that different organizations and kindergartens respond to the new situation in different ways. Since the mid-1990s, a “system of contract” has been adapted in many kindergartens attached to the organizations or institutions.

“System of contract”

In recent years, due to the market economic policy and the financial difficulties of many enterprises, the funds allocated to kindergarten have not been augmented. Enterprises for their own sake will no longer sustain the “cloth-wrapper” of a kindergarten. As a result, many small-sized enterprises have closed the kindergartens they sponsored. These small-sized kindergartens usually have had fewer children, worse physical and material conditions, more unqualified teachers, and fewer possibilities to maintain themselves without the support of their sponsored organizations. There are also kindergartens run by enterprises with better economic situation, which still maintain the status quo, some of them have retained the welfare model to benefit their native employees, and some of them have changed the managerial strategies in order to conform to the economic transformation and social change. 79 For those medium-sized enterprises, casting off the “cloth-wrapper” can be done by separating kindergartens from their enterprises. This means that the enterprise still keeps the ownership of kindergartens (the locations, buildings, basic installations), but the running of these kindergartens (kindergarten management) is contracted out to individual persons. In some cases, the contractors have to turn over a certain amount of “contract money (fees)” (承包费) to the enterprises yearly. The essence of the contract system is, in fact, to separate the management function from the ownership. Economic management is divorced from personnel management. As Li stated:

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79 For example by enrolling children from outside of the enterprises for extending the enrolment of children, since more children means more money, by raising kindergarten fees, and so on.
The contract system claims that the enterprises should take responsibility for providing the basic condition for running the kindergartens (such as the local and houses), the renewal of equipment, guarantee of maintaining kindergarten staff’s employed status and their medical insurance, and helping the kindergartens digest the surplus staff members; it also claims that kindergartens should assume the sole responsibility for their profit or loss and should improve educational quality by carrying out the “director responsibility system”, the “system of personal responsibility”, the “system of staff appointment”, and the “system of rewards and penalties”.

Shanghai No.1 Kindergarten has implemented the contract system with its sponsored institution since 1993. The contract had given more power to the contractor (i.e. the director) in managing the kindergarten’s affairs. In financial management, the kindergarten assumes responsibility for its profits or losses. The kindergarten even has to collect money for paying staff’s salaries by themselves. In staff management, the “system of teacher appointment” has been carried out since 1995. The director makes contract with individual teachers every two years according to the outcome of teacher evaluation.

However, in some cases, this system of contract does not mean complete independence. On the contrary, the kindergarten and its attached institution have been tied in many ways. For instance, in Shanghai No.1 Kindergarten, the teachers’ salaries were paid by the kindergarten from part of the collection of child care fees, but the specified amount of the teacher’s salary was set by its sponsored University, and the kindergarten was not supposed to pay more to the teachers although it might possible in terms of their good economic condition. The kindergarten is still one of the semi-institutions of the University, and “the University wants to keep a kind of balance among its semi-institutions and among its employees.”

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81 Interview with the head of Shanghai No.1 Kindergarten, 1997.
Chapter 3

Theoretically, under the contract system, a director is the legal representative person of the kindergarten. In many cases, however, the directors don’t take legal responsibility directly but have the sponsored institutions as their “legitimate agents”. For Shanghai No.1 Kindergarten, the University is a “back-up”. In fact, the implementation of staff engagement system has given the director power in selecting teacher. Yet, the staff members are not employed directly by the kindergarten but by the University. When a teacher is fired by the director, the University has to “clear up the messy situation” (收拾残局) for the kindergarten, in this case, that is, to make a re-assignment or “self-digest” (自我消化). The director explained the meaning of “self-digest” with an example: a teacher who was evaluated as “unqualified” was assigned to work at the University Hotel as a waitress after she was fired by the kindergarten.

The contract system, it seems to me, is a kind of interim form – or dual system – between state-owned and private owned systems, with a separation of ownership and management functions. The Chinese government strategy is “implementing a socialized early childhood education”, which means encouraging early childhood education from various public funds. “But”, as an educational official said, “when the social insurance system has not been perfectly constructed, when public capitals (social resources) have not reached a sufficient level, it is not sensible and possible to shift early childhood education wholly onto the public and individuals.” The implementation of the contract system is thus regarded as an interim stage in this transformation process.

The contract system has become more and more popular in urban areas, especially in large and medium-sized cities. It is thought of being a benefit both to enterprises and to kindergartens. On the one hand, the enterprises or the institutions do not lose anything except the available site, houses and equipment; and they are able to escape from investing more money in the “bottomless pit” of running the kindergartens. On the other hand, the risk the kindergartens bear is smaller than for private kindergartens, since they have actually the

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82 Such as the welfare treatment of teachers’ -- housing, retirement, medical and unemployment insurance, etc.
83 Interview with an official at Zhejiang Provincial Educational Committee, 1997.
enterprises or institutions as the “base” which helps them avoid responsibilities, especially in personnel management.

Meanwhile, as responding to the market economy system, kindergartens have also been seeking the proper economic actions to support themselves.

“Making extra income”

The transformation of the kindergarten from welfare model into market competitive model is also characterized by entrepreneurial actions of the kindergartens. “Making extra income” has provided the purpose, as well as the strategy. “Making extra income” in Chinese can also be called “creating income (创收)”. The latter is more vivid in explaining this kind of economic action. The strategy of “creating income” was put into practice in non-productive organizations (e.g. those educational and academic organizations and other governmental institutions) through commercial or other economic activities to make extra money, for instance, renting out houses, opening shops, or starting training courses, etc.

In kindergartens, there have been different ways in “creating income”. The most common way is through charging extra fees such as “supporting fees (赞助费)” or “fees for collecting funds (集资费)” from the parents. “Supporting fees” is, in principle, supposed to be used in the construction work of kindergarten, that is to build, maintain or repair kindergarten houses, and it is not allowed to be shared by the staff. But in fact, as kindergarten already has this “extra” money for construction, other money is thus available for increasing staff’s income. As a director said: “Money is moved from this pocket to that pocket, and changes its name at the same time.”

There is no official position on the legitimacy of such extra fees, nor a general standard for the amount of fees. The “Regulations” have not expressly provided relevant clauses concerning “supporting fees” which leaves a room for local variation. But as I understand it, the government is tacitly consenting to this kind of economic action by kindergartens, since such financial supports will lighten the burden of

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84 Interview with a head of a kindergarten in Beijing, 1997.
the state. In the 1997 interviews, unlike the situation in 1995, both directors and parents were quite open in answering to my question about “supporting fees”.

The number of supporting fees differs greatly from kindergarten to kindergarten, and even from family to family. Almost all directors I interviewed had mentioned that parents were told that the supporting fees should be paid voluntary, which means the kindergarten should not force the parents to pay this kind of fees, and the parents have the right to decide how much money they will pay in accordance with their family economic conditions. But in fact, there was actually a “base line” for the amount the parents should pay. In the kindergartens I have looked into, the base lines varied from 2,000 to 10,000 yuan\(^85\) for each family, and there was no upper limit. Ningbo English kindergarten charged each child for the “collecting funds” 20,000 yuan. According to the director, this money would be given back to the parents when their children left the kindergarten after their kindergarten years. The kindergarten was just gaining the security of insurance.

Whatever the names for this kind of payment and the different reactions to this economic action, this action provides, in a more positive sense, opportunity for parents’ involvement in the kindergarten development. While under the old welfare system the parents only played a role as consumers, the new system claims that they also play a role as investors and shareholders in education. These changes have affected the relationship between kindergarten and family, as well as between teachers and parents. A common view among teachers, which reflected the socialist economic system and ideology, used to be that they didn’t work for parents but for society, for the state or for the government. Today, while still seeing themselves as having advantage over the parents in knowledge and experience of educating children, kindergarten staffs have also made efforts to heed the opinions of the parents, to promote cooperation with the parents, and to bring the supporting role of the parents into full play in the education of their children.

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\(^85\) Commonly, kindergartens charge the children’s families for the “supporting fees” only once for the whole three years in kindergarten, and this money be paid before the admission.
“Making extra money” can also be done by other actions. For instance, some kindergartens, usually those located in “good” sectors of an area, rent out their idle rooms to gain the rents. Beijing No.1 Experimental Kindergarten could have about 500,000 yuan of rent income each year. This money was used to pay the kindergarten staff’s bonus mainly, as well as the additional part of the administrative expenditure. Some kindergartens also open shops by themselves, but no case in my investigation had followed such a practice.

Starting evening art courses for children is also another way taken by kindergartens. Indeed, kindergartens already have many available sources such as teachers, places, teaching materials, professional experiences, and so on. Parents of single-children place much stress on moulding their children’s temperament, which is regarded being beneficial to their quality and ability, and are thus willing to send their children to such courses. Kindergartens charge the children for attending to these courses.

There are surely many other strategies being adopted by various kindergartens in their action of “making extra income”. The related loose economic environment and policy of today’s China provide the kindergarten administrators with the great opportunity to display their initiative. On the other hand, this situation also calls for more competence, more knowledge and more moral concern by these people.

3.3 Private Kindergarten

Private education is a new phenomenon in China with important consequences for both economy and culture. However, defining the concept of private education is quite difficult in China’s context today. The Chinese term for private education is minban (民办 people-run), which has a broad implication. In fact, since the 1980s, several types of non-government school models have emerged reflecting the complicated economic system. For instance, there are educational

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86 Four cases in my study supported this argument.
87 See more discussion in Chapter 6.
institutions “run by non-government agencies but aided by government”, “state-own but maintained by voluntary agencies” that are run through “educational saving”, run by private companies or enterprises, run by individuals. There is stock system of running schools, and so on. All these belong to private sector.  

During the last ten years, the number of private kindergartens has also greatly increased. At national level, the number of private kindergartens has increased from 18284 in 1994 to 24643 in 1997. In Shanghai, the first private kindergarten was opened in 1989, by the end of 1995, the number of private kindergartens had reached 19, and the children enrolled reached 2948. The shortage of state funds in early childhood education, the great interest and need of quality kindergartens in society, the quick development of private economy, and the dramatic increase in concentration of private capital provide material and ideological conditions for the privatisation of kindergartens. What are the attitude, posture, and strategies of the government in this process? Official documents explicitly “welcome and encourage”, “give full support”, “maintain the right direction” and “strengthen regulations” regarding private education institutions. The Chinese government envisions an integrated educational system with public schools playing the leading role and private schools -- set up by all sectors of the society -- developing in concert. In order to ensure that private schools are able to grow smoothly and soundly, the State Education Committee issued “Regulations Governing Private Education” in 1997. These Regulations officially legalize private education and emphasize that all registered private educational institutions, their faculties and staffs are licensed as government-

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89 See table 3.


Restructuring Kindergarten System

approved educational institutions. Local governments are supposed to give support (mainly policy support) and provide supervision and guidance to private education institutions. Policy support means a kind of policy gradient. The government gives preference to private owner of kindergarten (e.g. in the tax system, buying lands, and so on) compared with other private businesses.

There are private kindergartens run by private enterprises. In a booming economy, many non-government agencies and individuals devote themselves to the development of private education. A number of private entrepreneurs think that funding a kindergarten is a proper way of doing public affairs and it will also contribute to the establishment of a good image of their enterprise. In addition, the growth of knowledge about child development, the need of universalising early childhood education by the society, and the demand for quality kindergartens by parents have provide the ideological and material conditions for these enterprisers to make their decision about investment. There are also private kindergartens run by overseas Chinese who are enthusiastic in promoting China’s educational undertaking. For these overseas owners, the more important thing seems to be to apply their ideas and knowledge (of western influence) in kindergartens so as to achieve their ambitions.

More recently, shareholder system of running kindergarten has emerged in China, following the growth of stock market. A stock system kindergarten is an early childhood educational unit run by a number of citizens who have the legal qualifications. In administration, such kindergartens implement the “system of director responsibility” under the leadership of shareholders who are responsible for collecting funds for kindergarten. Compared with other types of private kindergarten, this type of stock system kindergarten has more possibilities for obtaining funds from all circles of society.

There has been a relative uneven development of private early childhood education in different regions in my study. In Zhejiang Province, for example, more than 100,000 preschool children, i.e.

92 Data from interview with an official at Zhejiang Provinicial Educational Committee, 1997.
10% of the total children enrolled in kindergarten, attend private kindergartens. In Wenzhou, a medium-sized town in Zhejiang with a high level of privatisation, the number of private kindergartens had reached 40-50% of the total number of kindergartens. But in Pinghu, a small-sized town of Zhejiang, there were no non-state kindergartens until 1998. A broad and general comparative analysis cannot be made in this research because of the lack of sources. The empirical and theoretical research on the private sector of education in China has not been followed up because of researchers’ lack of access.

Most private kindergarten are boarding kindergartens, providing good quality of living and educational circumstance and materials, and charging highly as well. Private kindergarten is, in many people’s understanding, a kind of “noble” kindergarten, since the high fees they charged are not available to ordinary people. For instance, the monthly fees for each child of Ningbo English Kindergarten was 860 yuan, which was more than a half of the monthly income of an ordinary family. For most people, sending their children to this kind of kindergarten is unrealistic. The head of Ningbo English Kindergarten told me that over 90% children in this kindergarten had parents who owned private enterprises, or were the bosses or managers of large companies (i.e. “rich” people). Furthermore, there has been a suspicion of contempt against the “noble” pattern in organizing children’s daily life and their education in these “noble” kindergartens. The relative closed circumstance of living, favourable material conditions, and children’s sense of superiority have often been criticized as a disadvantage for the socialisation of children. In contrast, the lower ratio between staff and children, more autonomy and flexibility in administration and curriculum, higher income of the teachers, and ample teaching materials and toys for the use of teachers and children were commonly regarded as an advantage for these

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94 Data from interview with an official at Zhejiang Provincial Educational Committee, 1997.
95 While I was talking with several old colleagues in China, they also mentioned the gap in both empirical and theoretical studies on the development of private sector of education of China. This is, according to them, partly because of the difficulties in getting research funds to investigate this field, and partly because of negative responses from these private educational institutions who not wish to be looked into by the researchers.
Restructuring Kindergarten System

private early childhood educational institutions.\textsuperscript{96} A major problem is the arbitrariness of internal administrative operation among many of these private early childhood institutions. There is evidence of profiteering in running kindergartens, charging improper fees, concealing, pocketing and embezzling funds, and infringing children’s and staff’s rights and interests.\textsuperscript{97}

In the following sector I will present my visit to a private kindergarten in China.

\textbf{Ningbo English Kindergarten}

December 1, 1997, a typical hazy winter day in the lower reaches of the Yangzi River, I started my trip by taking a long-distance bus from my hometown Hangzhou to Ningbo.

Ningbo, one of China’s coastal cities opened to the outside world, is located in the middle of China’s coastline and in the south of Yangtze Delta. Ningbo has witnessed great economic development, especially since the policies of reform and opening up to the outside world were implemented. It has now opened a nation-level economic and technological development zone, Ningbo tax-free zone and Daxie development zone. Its GDP reached 90 billion yuan in 1997, and its total industrial output reached 201.9 billion yuan. People’s living standards have improved markedly. The annual average income of each resident in the urban area reached 9,096 yuan, fourth in China, just behind Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Shanghai.\textsuperscript{98}

A couple of days before this trip, I met one of my old colleagues, the vice-chairman at the Department of Education at Hangzhou University where I had studied and worked for 10 years. I talked to him about my reason for travelling to China of this time, and mentioned that I still had not got access to a private kindergarten. He told me he had a friend who owned a trade company in Ningbo and founded a kindergarten a couple of years ago. He made a phone call to this friend at once but was not able to reach him. He thus wrote a brief letter of


\textsuperscript{97} Ibid. p. 24.

instruction for me, and promised to contact this person the following day.

50 minutes later I arrived at Ningbo. The new constructed high way linking Hangzhou and Ningbo shortened at least a half time of the travel. At the bus station I made a phone call to my colleague’s friend, the chairman of the board of a private trade company. I was told by him that he was on an important meeting and could not accompany me on the visit to the kindergarten, but he said he had already informed the director of the kindergarten about my visit. It would be no problem that I went there on my own.

The time was about 10:00 o’clock in the morning, I was standing in front of the kindergarten gate. Before me it was a three-storey light grey building. I did not see a single child. The whole building was very quiet. The person sitting in reception room guided me to the director’s office on the third floor. The vice director welcomed me, not warmly but courteously. She told me that the director was coming back soon, and I was expected to wait in the office. During the time I was waiting for the director, I attempted to talk to the vice director, but she seemed to be very careful with her words to answer my questions. I had a feeling that my visit was not expected, at least by her. I could not figure out the reason at that moment, but I hoped the situation would be better when I met the director.

The director came into the office about 10:30. She apologized for keeping me waiting, and frankly told me she was a little bit confused with the purpose of my visit. I explained to her the purpose of my project and briefly described the focus of my interview questions with her, and with teachers and parents. She seemed to be little more relaxed than she had been a couple of minutes previously. She told me she would like to arrange two teachers to be interviewed by me, but it would be unlikely for me to see parents, since it was a boarding kindergarten (the parents came to pick up their children only in weekends). After I held to my wish to meet some parents and asked her if I could come back in Friday’s afternoon, she said: “Well, I don’t know, ... It’s quite difficult. The parents, you know, they are quite busy, they are businessmen. ... It’s a little bit difficult...”

The followed interview with her went smoothly. According to her description, the kindergarten was founded in 1995. It grew out of the Ningbo Jiangbei District Cultural and Educational Bureau
Kindergarten. In 1995 a private trade company signed the contract with Jiangbei District to take over the kindergarten and it was re-opened as a specialized private boarding kindergarten in which English language teaching was prominent. It is the first large size private boarding kindergarten in Ningbo. In 1997, there were 120 children who were divided into seven classes, one nursery class for children of the age from 2.5 to 3; two junior classes (for children of the age of 3-4), two middle classes (for children of the age of 4-5), and two senior classes (for children of the age of 5-6). There were 54 staff: 18 teachers, 21 assistants, 5 administrators, 2 doctors, 5 service personnel in kitchen, 2 security personnel, and a cleaner. The kindergarten has better material conditions than ordinary kindergartens. The director told me that they had 12 pianos, 15 computers and 15 audio devices (for the use of English teaching). On the first floor of the building there was a mini-theatre with simple light equipments, and an indoor swimming pool with constant temperature. Each room contained air-conditioning. According to her, the Company had invested 4.2 million yuan in the construction of these installations. Indeed, it was the kindergarten with the best “hardware” among those kindergartens I visited in China.

In answering my question about why they called it an “English” kindergarten, the director said:

*English is our characteristic. That means we take English teaching and learning as our emphasis in our curriculum. The time for English teaching is almost a half of the total teaching hours. Since you know, the competition has become sharper and sharper today. The existence of kindergarten is very much dependent on the sufficient number of children, and only when the kindergarten holds its distinguishing feature can be possibly to draw the interest of parents. Private kindergartens have no patron in authority (power), the distinguishing feature is thus becoming more important for us than for other kindergartens. ...Our choice of English teaching is based on two considerations. First, there have been great interests among many parents, who wish their children to have foreign language
training as early as possible. Today, the most popular foreign languages are English and Japanese. Second, it was believed that the early childhood age is the best time for learning languages ...

The English language learning in this kindergarten, according to the director, stresses spoken language. The goal of English teaching is to train the children to have a good command of at least 200 English simple spoken sentences. They also encourage pupils to take the national English gradational examination for children between 8-12 years old, when they graduate from the kindergarten. This kindergarten is one of the three educational organizations taking the English gradational examination in Ningbo. To achieve this goal, the kindergarten has adopted a series of strategies, for instance engaging professional English teachers, inviting foreign teachers to lecture, using English in daily life, and so on. The director spent about 30 minutes describing these to me.

I was interested in knowing how the children’s life looks like during their stay in the kindergarten; in what aspects the kindergarten differs from ordinary kindergartens; and the director’s own experience of being the chief of private kindergarten. In response to my first question, the director showed me the school timetables, and I was permitted to make copies of them. Table 4 is the translation of one of the schedules.99

The structure of the timetable is similar everyday. By the schedule we can see, besides the ordinary educational subjects (i.e. Chinese language, math, general knowledge, physical education, fine arts, and music), English teaching and computer knowledge teaching are important. As the children stay over-night in the kindergarten, it is also very interesting to see the activities children have during the evening. The director told me that after dinner the children were supposed to be organized in groups to have some play or games, often such plays were connected to teaching subjects. The living activities has not been shown on the schedules, but it is not so difficult to image the children’s life in these interval time which we could not see on the

99 The details of schedules differ everyday from Monday to Friday, and I just choose the schedule for Thursday.
Restructuring Kindergarten System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Senior class 1</th>
<th>Senior class 2</th>
<th>Middle class 1</th>
<th>Middle class 2</th>
<th>Junior class 1</th>
<th>Junior class 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00-8:45</td>
<td>Free activities</td>
<td>Free activities</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
<td>Free activities</td>
<td>Free activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00-9:25</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30-10:00</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00-10:50</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
<td>Free activities</td>
<td>Free activities</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00-10:50</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
<td>Free activities</td>
<td>Free activities</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30-11:50</td>
<td>Chinese &amp; general knowledge</td>
<td>Chinese &amp; general knowledge</td>
<td>Chinese &amp; general knowledge</td>
<td>Chinese &amp; general knowledge</td>
<td>Cognitive games(^{100})</td>
<td>Hand-work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00-12:20</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Fine art</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Fine art</td>
<td>Hand-work</td>
<td>Hand-work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30-13:00</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:30-14:00</td>
<td>Cognitive games</td>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>Cognitive games</td>
<td>Cognitive games</td>
<td>Constructional play(^{101})</td>
<td>Constructional play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:00-14:30</td>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>Cognitive games</td>
<td>Cognitive games</td>
<td>Hand-work</td>
<td>Constructional play</td>
<td>Constructional play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:30-15:00</td>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>Cognitive games</td>
<td>Cognitive games</td>
<td>Hand-work</td>
<td>Constructional play</td>
<td>Constructional play</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Thursday timetable for Ningbo English Kindergarten.

schedules. "There are some educational activities that do not appear in the schedules, since it is a boarding kindergarten, the children have much more flexible time. The teachers are expected to use these time to organize some extra teaching activities", the director told me.

If the children in a boarding kindergarten normally stay five days a week in a rigid collective circumstance, what are the advantages and disadvantages of this reality? On the one hand, collectivism has occupied a prominent position in Chinese early childhood education, and has been regarded as a proper strategy for children’s socialisation. It is believed that the collective life in kindergarten provides an effective environment for correcting the spoiled behaviour of single-children, and it is necessary for developing the children’s competitive spirit and readiness for their future. Children in boarding kindergartens are claimed to follow a rigid daily schedule. Without parents’ shelter and help, children are trained to take care of

\(^{100}\) By cognitive game it means the game stresses on training the cognitive aspect of the children.

\(^{101}\) By constructional play it means the children use a sort of special material such as LEGO to do some constructional work.
themselves in many life details. Compared to the children in other ordinary kindergartens, “our children are more competent in this aspect,” said the director.

On the other hand, as the director also mentioned, children in boarding kindergarten have less opportunity to come into contact with different types of people and social phenomena, social values and social events. It is true that they live in a relative closed circumstance in kindergarten, having the relationship only with the same persons and experiencing almost the same “events” everyday. Watching TV could be one of the ways to “see” and “know” the outside world, but in this kindergarten the children are allowed to have 45 minutes a day watching children programs or English teaching videos. “The outside world in their eyes is the same as the fairy tales world. ... They even don’t know what their parents are doing everyday, and what their jobs are”, a teacher said to me later. “We have been trying to provide the children with more opportunities to go out to see the outside people and things. For example we have organized a series of visits, short journeys, and other types of outing during the semester”, the director explained.

In my interview with the director, she also talked about the latest period of her personal work experiences when I asked her how she made the decision to be engaged as the director of this kindergarten. She told me that she had worked as a director at a boarding kindergarten attached to an army unit before she became the director of this kindergarten. In 1995 when the kindergarten was being established, she saw the advertisement for kindergarten personnel. “I was very interest of this, and I made contact with the Company at once, and was interviewed by them. Both sides were satisfied with each other. But, in the end, I was not engaged because the army unit wouldn’t let me go. In 1997 the former director of the Kindergarten retired, and the Chairman of the company board recalled me and tried to get contact with me again. As it happened, the army unit was going to relieving the garrison, so I was permitted to ask for leave this time.” In commenting on her personal experience of being the director of a private kindergarten, she said: “Private kindergartens are more flexible and less binding. So I could be given free play to my plans and my ideas.” By binding, she meant mainly in curriculum part. “Of course we have to let them (the board of directors of the company)
know our plan on curriculum.” When the subject of our talk shifted to the fees the kindergarten charged and other financial administration affairs, she seemed to be not so willing to dealing with these issues. “The kindergarten fees are stipulated by the Municipal Pricing Bureau. ... As for the things related to financial management, we just comply with the decisions of the Board.”

Since it seemed to me I was unlikely to have the opportunity to meet the parents, I asked her to give me some information dealing with the situation of the parents. According to her, there had been a quite visible shift in parents’ origins. In 1995 when the kindergarten was opened, the majority of the children’s parents was those “new rich” farmers who lived in the nearby regions, and also non-native contractors. In her words, “They were such people who had money but no higher cultural (educational) quality, and their children seemed to be not trained enough at home.” After 1996, the number of the parents who have received higher education has increased. During the recent years, it has become more and more common that the intellectuals are “going down to the sea”. “They make lots of money ... Their children have also quality. ... These parents have usually higher claim on us.”

The interview took about 55 minutes, and after that she told me that she had arranged two teachers to see me in the afternoon. While waiting for the teachers, I went around the kindergarten. The garden seemed to be no difference from other kindergartens I had visited. It was equipped with play and sport apparatus, and a sand pit. I still had not seen a child since the children were on their noon nap.

The interviews with two teachers in the afternoon started with the same interview questions I used in other kindergartens, but I put some extra questions in our later conversations, which focused on their personal experiences of working as a teacher in private kindergarten. The first teacher I interviewed had not worked in any other kindergarten before she came in this kindergarten. She was employed by the kindergarten directly after she graduated from Zhejiang Infant

102 Most of them were doing private business, not just doing farm work, according to the director.

103 “Going down to the sea” means doing business or being businessmen. Chinese liken being in business to jumping to the sea, seeing business action is a sort of adventure, which means wealth and danger exist simultaneously.
Teacher Training School in 1995. In describing her personal impression on working in private kindergarten, she said:

I still have the close contact with my old classmates. Most of them work in non-private kindergartens. We often exchange out experiences and other information. ...(Compared with them), I feel much pressure. I have longer working hours than them. The things here are more trivial, for example we have to help the assistant when children take shower. Our responsibility is much bigger, especially when the children are sick.\textsuperscript{104} ...We don't have the free medical service like the other (those who work as state-employed teachers) have. (Instead), We are paid with 60 Yuan per month as medical support by the kindergarten. Many other kindergartens allot dwelling houses to the staff, but we have no such benefit. ... Such pressures, you know. ... But my salary is much higher than all of them. Most of them have only the half of my salary, so they even admire me. ...If I don't want to change my career (in the future), I will still choose working in this kindergarten. Besides, now everyone is talking about "reform", those kindergartens (e.g. non-private kindergartens) are surely going to change. It is a tendency (of the society), right?

Another teacher had worked in a primary school before she was engaged as a teacher of art by the kindergarten. She graduated from the Department of Art at Zhejinag Teacher Training College in 1990.

\textsuperscript{104} Like in other boarding kindergartens, this kindergarten employed two doctors taking charge of medical service for the children, for example making general health check-up, providing vaccination service, as well as taking care of sick children. It is usual if children are not seriously ill during their stay in kindergarten, they are supposed to get medical treatment form the kindergarten doctors first, and are allowed to stay in the kindergarten. The sick children's parents will be informed but it is not necessary to pick them up from the kindergarten to home. Even when children are seriously ill, it is also the kindergarten doctor's responsibility to send the children to the hospital, and inform the parents immediately. The teachers have also the responsibility to give the sick children special care during the time.
In explaining why she chose this job, she said: "It was my auntie's (who works at Ningbo Teacher Training College) idea. She told me that this kindergarten was very good. High quality, high salary, a bright future, it's good for me." She had the same feeling like the former teacher about the great pressure of work.

_**I have to give the art lessons for four classes, totally 16 lessons a week. Besides, I have been teaching for a special group, which consists of those children who have prospects in art. It takes me four hours a week. I am also the person in charge of decorating the surroundings of the kindergarten. ... Compared with my old work unit, here we have much better "hardware" condition. The "software" condition here is also OK. We work more actively, since we have less sense of security, less backing and more competitions. ... My monthly salary is 1600 Yuan in which half is bonus, which is closely related to our work attitudes and quality. We all have to work hard.**_

In response to my question about how they looked at the "noble" character of private kindergarten, both teachers thought that this phenomenon was difficult to avoid. A teacher said:

_**They (the children) have the sense of superiority, since their parents are rich. The worse thing is that they sometimes make comparison of whose parents are richer. 'My dad drives a Mercedes.' 'My dad has a Volvo'. Or 'my shoes cost 500 Yuan'. 'Mine 800 Yuan'... But we tried to cultivate in them the habit of simple and plain living here. No one is allowed to dress in their own clothes; they have to dress in the uniform. And we say to them often that their parents' money is their parents', not theirs.**_

Sitting in the bus on the way back to Hangzhou, I thought a lot. Since the beginning of the 1990s, there had been a great increase of the number of private kindergarten. This has become a new social trend.
Chapter 3

But what I had seen and what I had heard through other channels were the facts that the children from ordinary families still have little access to these private kindergartens. The government was expected to reform the system of the early childhood educational institutions by making various policies and adapting various strategies including the policy of encouraging various social agencies to invest in early childhood education. The aim was to reduce the burden of the state and state-own enterprises and to promote the process of universalising the kindergarten education in the future. If placing the hope merely in these “quality” kindergartens, the needs of common people would never be met; the goal of the reform would never be achieved. Perhaps, as it was argued, this was now just the period of transition. In a long-term, more “ordinary” private kindergarten would be set up for children from ordinary families.

3.4 Conclusion

As economic development has been seen as the most important task of the nation, as the pattern of marketisation has covered the most part of current economic life of China, and as the function of economy plays the major roll in society, the law of economic development is regarded as a fundamental criteria in judging all aspects of social life, and a crucial principle in guiding all social actions. Under such social climate and reality, the structure or the system of early childhood education has been adjusted. The previous welfare model of kindergarten, which had been regarded as one of the outcomes of a socialist system, is expected to be transformed into a new model to meet the demand of the marketisation of the society. The state has adopted a series of strategies in promoting this transformational process, for example by policies to encourage collective and private investment in early childhood education. The local governments and the individual organizations have also sought different measures to find ways to innovate in the kindergarten educational undertaking, for

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105 According to the educational official in Zhejiang I interviewed.
106 Still have the question of how to identify the “quality”, see the discussion in the final chapter.
Restructuring Kindergarten System

instance by carrying out the contract system and other kinds of management reorganization to help the kindergartens getting through the "weaning" process (from their attached enterprises).

Like other reforms in other social fields, the process is painful for many kindergartens, especially for those that have been under the shelter of the enterprises for a long time. It requires a shift of recognition by the administrators, the teachers and the parents from the customary one of affairs run by the state or by their "work-units", to a more competitive, participated and active one. Different kindergartens and different people have been experiencing these in different ways with different effects. The related issues raised by many kindergarten managers and teachers are: at state level, how to maintain the steadiness of the strategies, how to make the explication of the policies, and how to take into account of the different conditions and situations in different areas; and, at local level, how to work with the relationship between the educational action and the entrepreneurial action in managing kindergarten's affairs, how to realize the goal of the quality of early childhood education, how to train the staff to meet these new demands of the new situations? It was believed that these are the new projects that need to be carried out by various forces in society.
Chapter 4
Director Responsibility System

4.1 Decentralisation and Financial Reform – Background of the System

Reform toward decentralisation in educational administration in the 1980s came with the national economic reform, which featured more decision-making power for the local government, and autonomy to peasants and workers under a responsibility or contract system. These systems aim to motivate peasants, workers and other individuals who, it is claimed, have much more say in decision making and whose interests are directly related to their efforts. Educational administrators wanted the same autonomy and the decision-making power that had been given to peasants, workers and local government officials.

The implementation of “household responsibility system” in agricultural sector in later 1970’s marked the beginning of the national economic reform. Land was shared out to each family or part-family groups\(^\text{107}\) according to the number of family or family-group members. Each household should make a production contract with the village committee, take full responsibility for output quotas, deliver tax grain or money to the village according to the contract, and share the bonus and profits within their household. A positive outcome brought about by this system was to be the raising of peasants’ income and productive efficiency, which would provide labor and material basis for the development of village industry.

Following the pace of rural reforms, the reform of industrial and commercial enterprises in urban areas also came into focus. From the responsibility or contract system to the more recent encouragement of private or joint-stock enterprises, China is undergoing a privatisation and marketisation process in national economic structure. All of these

\(^{107}\) i.e. individuals related by blood, marriage, or adoption.
have provided an ideological basis and practical experience for educational reform at an administrative level. Doubtless, reform of the economic structure and education interact. The former provides physical resources for education and creates the conditions for restructuring education. It also places new demands on education and inevitably brings about corresponding reforms of education, which in turn serve the economy.

China’s educational system has had a centralized administration. The former State Ministry of Education formulated important national policies and coordinated the development of education in the whole country. Below the Ministry of Education, each of the twenty-seven provinces and three municipalities had an education bureau, with departments for kindergarten, primary, secondary, and higher education; for planning and finance; and for personnel and student affairs. Each prefecture (city, district, county, and township) within a province had an office of education that runs units for education, planning, finance, and personnel.

While this system was very effective in implementing the central government and party’s policies and had been convenient for the Ministry of Education to control, the system failed to take action in response to the initiatives of teachers and administrators at individual school level. Furthermore, for a long period of time after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, government expenditure on education has been low compared with other developing countries. Teaching was one of the lowest-paid occupations, there was a shortage of school buildings and equipment, many existing school buildings were in poor condition, and there were hardly any funds for non-personnel expenditure.

Due to the poor quality in the educational system overall, a strong feeling arose that this kind of education could not help with China’s drive for modernisation, which is assumed to require the participation of every citizen. The demand to reform the educational administration system became even stronger. As a result, several changes started a decentralisation process.

108 For example, during the 1967-1985 period, total government expenditure on education averaged 2% of GNP, and 7.7% of the total national budget. In the same period, general education expenditure averaged 1.6% of GNP and 6.2 of the national budget. Data are computed from World Bank, 1991.
Reform in education was officially marked by the announcement of a central decision\textsuperscript{109}, in which the financial reform of basic education was a key part of a larger education reform agenda followed by the Chinese government since 1985. In contrast to earlier education reforms that focused on curriculum, teaching methods, and quality,\textsuperscript{110} the 1985 reform was the first reform of its kind in Chinese education that called for a fundamental change in the \textit{tizhi} ("system") of education, focusing on structure, finance, and administration.\textsuperscript{111}

4.2 Director Responsibility

The "responsibility system" was adopted in China's educational sector in the beginning of the 1980s, first in higher education, then in secondary and primary schooling, and finally in the field of kindergarten education. Under the "director responsibility system", the head of a kindergarten is in charge of the school's daily administration. Specifically, the director has the power to hire and dismiss school administrators, including his or her own vice-director; to hire and fire teachers and staff; to make decisions on administrative affairs; to supervise teaching activities; to reward or punish and evaluate teachers and staff; to make decisions on the use of school funds, and finally, to work on "making extra income" for improving the house condition of school and augmenting teachers' salary.

According to \textit{Regulations for Kindergarten (trial)}, issued by the State Education Commission in 1989, "The kindergarten shall institute the director responsibility system. The director shall be in charge of the overall work of the kindergarten under the leadership of the owner and educational administrative department."\textsuperscript{112} Formally, their responsibilities comprise:

\textsuperscript{111} "Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Reform of the Educational Structure", 1985.
\textsuperscript{112} See Appendix.2.
Director Responsibility System

- implementing laws, policies and rules of national and local departments of education,
- leading work on education, hygiene, health and safety in their kindergarten,
- responsibility for forming and carrying out policies for the well-being of the children,
- guiding, examining and evaluating staff’s work with rewards and punishments,
- organizing cultural and professional study, managing equipment and funds which belong to the kindergarten,
- organizing and guiding parental involvement\(^{113}\)

However, there are distinctions among the categories of responsibility of kindergarten director due to the distinctive categories of kindergarten; the distinctions between kindergartens in different areas, of different types, at different levels, and of different sizes; the distinctions between responsibility in theory and in practice; and the different meanings of explaining the policy, and thus different ways of implementing the policy. In the following I will present the major aspects of the process of implementing the responsibility system in kindergartens.

4.3 Disbandment of Party Committee in Kindergarten

In all state socialist societies, Party and State have been closely entwined, with a dominant role for the Party, and party and state organs in one body. In China, the situation was the same even within every individual institution. Before the structural reform started, leadership in China’s school was dominated by the party secretaries of the party branches who were the most powerful persons and appointed by higher-level communist authority. As Hunter and Sexton wrote:

*The Party’s role is not confined to government or politics as narrowly defined in liberal democracies. Its*

ideological and administrative roles extend into almost all aspects of life, including education, industry, commerce and the military. There are Party branches in almost all institutions, including factories, offices, shops, schools, colleges and army units. In the early years of the PRC, the leadership envisaged that the Party would determine policy, and government officials would carry it out. ... Roughly speaking, every element within the Chinese government is shadowed by a corresponding Party organization.\textsuperscript{114}

Chinese used to call the party secretary of a unit (organization) the “first chair” (一把手), and the chief of administration of a unit (e.g. principals) the “second chair” (二把手), although the latter’s grade in the rank of post was probably higher than the former. Theoretically, in administrative relationships, there has been the principle of “the lower level should be subordinate to the higher level”, but in practice, since Mao Zhedong made his speech in the Ninth Congress of the Chinese Communist Part in 1969, “strengthening centralized Party leadership” had been seen as the “life-line” of all works of the society. What was called “centralized Party leadership” could be expressed in two aspects: at the administrative and the ideological level. From the Central Committee to local individual organizations, the party branch of every organization had the actual and final decision-making power on daily work of this organization. At ideological level, the party was “the core of leadership of the whole Chinese people”, and, “all our works should be done around the central tasks of the party, and serve the party.”\textsuperscript{115} The party’s control was exerted via ideological indoctrination\textsuperscript{116} by every party cell\textsuperscript{117} through studying the documents of the Central Committee of Chinese Communist Party, criticism and self-criticism, and exposure of other “comrades”.

The political role of ideology reached a high point of intensity during Mao’s period. There had been the slogans such as “the

Mao’s speech at the Ninth Congress of the CCP, 1969.  
i.e. ideological and political education.  
Party branch or Party group in each organization.
correctness or incorrectness of the ideological and political line decides everything” and “ideology and politics are the commander and the soul.” Education was to be primarily political and social, rather than economic. The aim of education was thus to serve “proletarian politics” and to create a “new socialist person.” The fact that ideological correctness was of supreme importance gave the party secretary the power to oversee all activities in the school to assure that they were in line with the Party’s doctrines. Thus, a principal usually had no say in any decision-making concerning school management. His/her job was to implement the decisions made by the school party branch, and to do the day-to-day operational work under the leadership of the party secretary.

One of the most important measures of reform in school leadership was the separation of the party secretary’s power from the principal’s power, which drew a distinct line between the duties and responsibilities of a secretary and those of a principal. As a fact, since the late 1980’s, the power of the party secretary and the function of party cell in enterprises and business organizations, as well as in cultural and educational spheres (such as schools), have been weakened through depoliticisation and “demobilisation”,118 by tacit consent of the central government. Deng Xiaoping once said that the major political task of China was to develop economics.119 As economic development has been adopted as China’s highest policy priority, the Chinese Communist Party is nothing other than the “Chinese Economic Development Party”120.

The aim of Deng and his reform allies was to reduce the range of politicization, expand the space available for private life and allow greater autonomy for intellectuals and other professionals. In practice, this meant less attention to organized political education; less emphasis on political criteria in recruiting people for specialized training or professional jobs; less

119 Deng’s speech after his visiting south China in 1992.
political interference in economic decision-making; a decline in the visible manifestations of political ideology; and an effort to encourage greater intellectual and cultural freedom under the slogan of "let a hundred flowers contend".\textsuperscript{121}

According to Pei\textsuperscript{122}, the mid-1990s is a crucial juncture in China's transition from a hard-line communist regime to a somewhat softer one. Furthermore, the commercialisation of state and public life under the condition of marketisation is also an important reason for the decline of Party's control over the civil society of China.\textsuperscript{123}

\begin{quote}
The introduction of market reforms since 1978 has brought about far-reaching changes not only in China's economy but also in the nature and structure of society. ... The structure of society in post-Mao China has become more stratified, differentiated and complex. The mechanisms and institutions of social control have become out-of-synch with these rapid social changes.\textsuperscript{124}
\end{quote}

It is true that the more privatisation and individualisation of a society, the less possibility there is for top-down ideological and administrative control within the society.

It has become more and more common that the party committee no longer exists within a kindergarten. The exploration I made supports this argument. Among kindergartens I visited, there were five that did not have their own independent party branch but had a joint branch with several kindergartens or attached to other departments. Two cases of my study had a situation where the directors (or vice directors) themselves were concurrently the secretaries of party

\textsuperscript{121} Benewick, R., & Wingrove, P., 1999, p. 23-24.
\textsuperscript{124} Hunter, A., & Sexton, J., 1999, p.73.
Director Responsibility System

branch. Two kindergartens had no party branch because of no party members in these two kindergartens at present. All these give the impression that the function of the party leadership has been weakened, fading away from kindergarten daily life. A director explained a party secretary's responsibility to me in an interview when I asked her about the role of party secretary in today's kindergarten:

> As I understand, the work of secretary of party branch in kindergarten is to assist director and to play a supporting role in implementing director's plans and decisions. For instance, if a teacher has some complaints over director's decision -- usually something dealing with money -- the party secretary should talk to her and try to prevail on her to accept the director's decision.\(^{125}\)

The party secretary's work is to organize party members' study of political documents, to recruit new members into the party from among teachers and staff, and to help the principal resolving school personnel's ideological or practical problems. This indicates that the role of party secretary in an organization has been transformed from a decision-maker into an assistant of the principal. In some cases, a director him/herself can also concurrently be the party secretary. This is not regarded as something dealing with centralized or over-centralized power but a sign that it is no longer necessary to have a special post for party secretary in an organization.

Although the role of party secretary as a supervisor is mentioned by some central leaders in their speeches, in practice, the party secretaries act as interpreters, defenders, and even "cleaners" of a directors' work. The disbandment of the party committee in kindergarten also indicated the weakening of political and ideological control in practice, which has eased directors' minds and has also created a favorable condition and a considerable scope for giving full play to their power and responsibility in their actual works.

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\(^{125}\) Interview with a head of a kindergarten in Shanghai, 1997.
Chapter 4

4.4 Financial and Economic Arrangement

The most important work of a director under the system of “director responsibility” is to make a reasonable and effective financial and economic arrangement for the kindergarten. Kindergarten in China is regarded as the first stage of basic education but is not involved in compulsory education. Thus, kindergarten education receives less financial allocation from the state. Only kindergartens run by the department of educational committee can get a small amount of allocation from the department of educational committee at provincial, municipal, township or county government levels. This financial allocation is given mainly to pay kindergarten’s personnel expenditure. Other non-personnel expenditure of kindergarten such as repairs, improvement of teaching facilities and teachers’ bonuses or extra benefits is raised by kindergartens themselves through collecting kindergarten fees, extra supporting fees, and through money-making activities. Kindergartens of the remaining three categories get no allocation from the government, but are funded and supported respectively by local communities, enterprises or institutions, and private owners.

Kindergarten fees

Kindergarten fees differed greatly among the kindergartens that I studied. The greatest distinction was shown between regions, and was in a direct ratio to the size of the cities. From small towns (e.g. Pinghu) to big cities (e.g. Beijing and Shanghai), the kindergarten fees were increased from 150 yuan to 350 yuan of each child per month, while the medium-sized city of Hangzhou charged 200-250 yuan monthly. Ningbo English Kindergarten, a private, specialized, and boarding kindergarten, charged 860 yuan per child monthly. Kindergarten charges normally consisted of three parts of fees: “allowance fees for child care” (托补费), “fees for management” (管理费), and “board expenses” (餐费).

\(^{126}\) i.e. staff’s basic salaries and some kinds of subsidy.
In describing the economic situation and arrangement of the kindergarten, the director of Beijing No.1 Experimental Kindergarten explained the accounts for me: each child had to pay 330 yuan per month, in which 100 yuan were “boarding expenses”\(^\text{127}\), 80 yuan was called “allowance fees for child care” which had to be turned over to Beijing Municipal Educational Committee, and the remaining 150 yuan were “fees for management”, kept by kindergarten itself for administrative expenses. There was a total of 233 children in the kindergarten, so the total allowance fees for child care a year was 223,680 yuan, and this money was turned over to Beijing Municipal Educational Committee, but finally was totally returned back as “allocation funds” to the kindergarten to be used as personnel expenses to pay the basic salaries of the staff. In addition, the kindergarten had rented out two rooms overlooking the street for shop fronts,\(^\text{128}\) which made it have about 500,000-odd yuan “created income” yearly\(^\text{129}\) which, with the extra “supporting money” paid by the parents, raised the kindergarten’s income to over 1 million yuan per year. The director seemed to be very proud as she reported these figures to me. Having the same category as Beijing No.1 Experimental Kindergarten, Pinghu No. 1 and No. 2 Kindergartens were charging only about 150 yuan monthly for each child. In contrast, Beijing No.2 Experimental Kindergarten, as a kindergarten attached to a university, had fees at the same level as Beijing No.1 Experimental Kindergarten. Obviously, the regional distinction has been influenced in kindergarten charges.

Before the system of director responsibility, kindergartens had to turn over all fees to their sponsored institutions, and the latter made a budget for all expenditure, including teachers’ salaries, the kindergarten’s running costs, acquiring furniture, equipment, toys and teaching materials, and the maintenance of the houses, etc. Under the old system, directors had extremely limited power in making any decision by themselves concerning the kindergartens’ economic

\(^{127}\) This is higher than other ordinary kindergartens since besides the lunch and snacks, the kindergarten also provides children with dinner. The parents usually pick up their children at 17:30 after the children have had dinner.

\(^{128}\) The kindergarten is located at a quite busy section of the city that is more easier to rent out the house.

\(^{129}\) Including rents and the money of sharing out the profits.
arrangement. Under the system of director responsibility, the kindergarten director's major responsibility is to "make a reasonable arrangement of these kindergarten fees and collect extra money as much as possible within the limits permitted by policy."\(^{130}\)

**Teachers' income**

One of the most important tasks of kindergarten directors is to fix the salaries of kindergarten staff. The Chinese wage system is complex. A person's income consists of two parts: basic salary that is a combination of a file salary and fixed subsidies by the state, and a structural salary. A file salary is fixed according to his/her professional title and post, and it varies little from region to region and among the categories of kindergarten. The so-called "fixed subsidies (固定补贴)" have a multitude of items such as the commodity price subsidy, food subsidy, traffic subsidy, subsidy of length of service, and so on. The subsidies differ from region to region, and the intention is to eliminate differences between regions by giving subsidies in different levels. People who live in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai receive more subsidies than those who live in small towns, because, for instance, the living expenses in big cities are much higher.

The so-called structural salary has become an important part of one's income under the current wage system in China. It constitutes bonuses and benefits which are fixed according to the economic situation of the institution, the person's performance and achievement in work, the end-of-year bonus, the Spring Festival bonus, and the National Day bonus, etc.

The National Education Committee has established a national standard for kindergarten teachers' wages. All types of kindergarten are supposed to fix teachers' basic salary according to this standard in spite of different categories of kindergarten. However, in practice, there is significant distinction in teachers' incomes. This is chiefly because of the great difference in levels in bonus system. In present

\(^{130}\) "Regulations for Kindergarten", see Appendix 2.
China, bonus has become a more important part of income of a person. The bonus part may be larger than the basic salary.

The teachers' bonus in an individual organization relates to the economic situation of this institution. The staff in Beijing No.1 Experimental Kindergarten, according to the director, had an average basic salary of 800-odd yuan, with a bonus of over 500 yuan monthly. That means the bonus made up around 40 per cent of the total income of a teacher, and teacher's monthly income has reached around 1300 yuan. As an institution attached to university, Beijing No.2 Experimental Kindergarten had another situation. The director told me that in their kindergarten a teacher's total monthly income was around 1,000 per month, though these two kindergartens were at the same level and in the same yuan, which means 300 yuan less than that in Beijing No.1 Experimental Kindergarten region.

This difference might be caused by two reasons. First, in the university kindergarten director's words, "we have too many mothers in law (婆婆多)". In Chinese traditional marriage and family system, when a girl was married, she had to move to her husband's home and live together with all husband's family members. The relationship between the mother and daughter-in-law thus often became a serious and sensitive family problem. The mother-in-law was supposed to control the daughter-in-law in all family affairs, and the latter had absolute no power in family. Today, the Chinese people like to use the word "mother-in-law" to describe a person, a group or an organization that has dominant power over the others. For the kindergarten, there are two higher authorities: the university (the General Affair Department and the Department of Education of the University), and the Beijing Municipal Educational Committee. Both have control power over it in administrative and professional work respectively. The allocation funds from Educational Committee firstly go to the University, and the latter then allocates money for the kindergarten. Second, under the condition of regular fees for childcare, a great part of kindergarten income is from the parents' "supporting fees". As a kindergarten attached to the University, a large part of the enrolled children are "native" -- their parents or grandparents work in the

131 According to the evaluation made by Beijing Municipal Educational Committee, these two kindergartens were fixed as in the category of first class and first grade, and thus are supposed to charge the same amount of kindergarten fees.
University -- who are not supposed to be charged for this kind of "supporting fees", which means less income for the kindergarten.

Hangzhou No.2 Experimental Kindergarten has the same situation like Beijing No.2 Experimental Kindergarten. Both organizations are attached to teacher training institutions, though at different levels. As Experimental kindergartens, they bear the responsibility of providing students of pre-school teacher training programs with a place to do their practice and research. This is regarded as advantageous in promoting pedagogical and curriculum development in a kindergarten. Being in a favored position, they choose the "best" teachers from the graduates of these training institutions. As a result, their popularity is raised among society, which guarantees them sufficient enrollments.

The distinction of teachers' salary between regions was even bigger. The average wages of kindergarten teachers in Shanghai, Hangzhou, and Pinghu were, respectively, 1000 yuan, 800 yuan and 550 yuan. Even though there were distinctions in price index and cost of living index between regions, the gap of teachers' income not only existed, but also tended to widen.

When I was interviewing the kindergarten administrators and asking them the questions dealing with the "director responsibility system" and kindergarten administrative work, I noticed that almost all these administrators would like to spend their time to describe the situation of teachers' income for me. My understanding of this phenomenon is both positive and negative. On the positive side, I would like to see this change as an action of raising teacher's social status that has been discussed for a long time in China. Undoubtedly, the social status of a person is decided by his/her economic status to a great extent. Teachers, in Mao's time, had been determined in "the stinking ninth (臭老九)" category, only one grade higher than landlords, rich peasants and capitalist roaders who were on the bottom of the category list. Now teachers were "the fragrant third", standing shoulder to shoulder with workers and peasants. Teachers' annual average salaries had been raised from 559 yuan in 1978 to 7000 yuan in 1998 at national level.\(^\text{132}\) In my interviews, most teachers seemed to be quite satisfied with their incomes, and many of them had mentioned their pleasure of being more respected by the society than previously. On the negative

side, as kindergarten moved to "create income" or "generate funds", directors were expected to take on tasks of which they had no experience or had not been trained for. As interest grew in buffering their kindergartens against the decline in state and enterprises' support, the directors has deflected their attention away from the issues of curriculum towards fund-raising. Increasing teachers' income became the major concern of the directors, so that improving kindergartens' material and equipment conditions, and encouraging and organising teachers' advanced professional study were relegated to a secondary position in the director's work.

**Non-personnel expenditure**

As kindergarten directors under the responsibility system were supposed to have more administrative power, they are required to be more competent at overall-planning and the "rational" use of the funds. As conventional expenditures, renewal of equipment, teaching materials and toys, and maintenance of buildings generally make up a great part of non-personnel expenditures, kindergarten directors are usually busy with evaluating, applying, and balancing funds, which are never believed to be sufficient.

When I asked the vice director of Beijing No.2 Experimental Kindergarten about her own understanding of the "director responsibility system", the director answered my question with a wry smile:

> Since our kindergarten is funded by the University, my power is to make decisions on how to use these money. Besides, begging for money from above (i.e. the University) is also one of my responsibilities as a director, thus, making reports to the above authority and asking for money is the most important work I have to do every year before making a budget for the coming year.

The work of grading and classifying kindergartens carried out by educational authorities at province, municipal, township, and county
levels has pushed the work forward concerning kindergarten quality. Higher ranking means higher fees for kindergartens. Kindergarten directors are keen on putting their efforts on promoting the “modernisation” of kindergarten, which brings two aspects of meaning: the modernisation of equipment and of ideas, or in other words, of hardware and of software. In hardware, large and colorful out-door motion apparatus and computers are their first concern, but the insufficient funds usually creates an embarrassing situation. To resolve this problem, they have applied all kinds of strategies, including “execute the criminal first and report to the emperor afterwards” (先斩后奏), that is, acting first and reporting afterwards. In this case, they divert the funds from teachers’ salary to buy new equipment, and then report this to the sponsored institutions and ask for extra funds to pay teachers’ salaries.

Furthermore, promoting hardware is more visible and short-term. Many directors are keen to make their efforts on this work, and thus do not provide teachers with more opportunities for improving their educational knowledge and practice. It is true that many teachers interviewed have complained that their chances of exchanging experiences with other kindergartens teachers or being sent to attend advanced professional study are much less compared to the past.\textsuperscript{133}

The implementation of the responsibility system calls for directors with keen insight, great resolution, flexibility and so on. Most kindergarten directors had not received the specific administration training before they took on a director post. This lack of knowledge soon put them in a position of “exhausting their whole bag of tricks”, and being at a loss when more difficult problems arise.

4.5 Staff Management

The new system of teacher appointment was gradually implemented in kindergarten circles after the middle of the 1990s. Under this system, a kindergarten director enjoys greater autonomy in staff management than previously. In hiring, the director or the leader group can decide

\textsuperscript{133} The only exception was Beijing No.1 Experimental Kindergarten, where sufficient funds made them ambitious to travel abroad to “learn from the experiences of foreign kindergartens.”
whether to offer a teacher a contract or not, and the teacher has the right to accept it or turn it down. This power in hiring is intended to allow the director to form a teaching staff whose selection is based on merit and who can work cooperatively and effectively. Actually, most teachers already in the kindergartens were rehired, only a small number of teachers were not rehired. For those not rehired, some are sent to the kindergarten service work (a kind of self-digest). Some become unemployed, yet they have the right to seek job opportunities while staying in the kindergarten for three months with part pay.

In a system where egalitarianism has dominated for decades, where jobs have been assigned and guaranteed for one’s entire lifetime, this change is great indeed. Since the establishment of the new China, the teacher occupation had been seen as a state- or permanent-job. And now that the “iron rice bowl” (铁饭碗) is broken, it is not easy for Chinese people to accept this new situation mentally. As a matter of fact, it will directly affect the living conditions and even the very existence of unemployed teachers. China does not yet have a well-structured market economy system that allows competition for employment opportunities based on merit of the person. China has not established a comprehensive system for dealing with the problem of unemployment. Moreover, some teachers who are dismissed have nowhere to go. Thus, to avoid causing great anxiety and instability, kindergartens have chiefly hired the teachers already in kindergarten, making special efforts to retain the better ones. Furthermore, as a matter of fact, most directors have not dared to fire any teachers and staff, since the Chinese people are extremely good at building Guanxi (关系), so that when one teacher is fired, many people are involved, and the director is afraid of giving offence.

In comparison, hiring is more easily done. The key principle of hiring is forming a responsible, high-quality, cooperative, and effective teaching staff. But in practice, it is also associated with

134 In rural areas there are also local community or village paid teachers who are employed temporarily.
135 A Chinese term that literally means “personal connections” and refers more broadly to the personal ties between individuals based on such things as a common birthplace, shared educational or military background, or mutual acquaintances. Guanxi plays a major role in politics, economics, and social life in China, as well as in Taiwan and other Chinese cultural areas.
problems. Due to the limit of authorized size of staff set by the higher-level authority and the difficulty in firing teacher, kindergarten directors seldom have opportunities to hire "good" teachers from outside, thus adding "fresh blood" into the staffs, and enhancing the quality of the whole group of teaching staff. As a director in Beijing said:

In theory, we have the power in choosing good staff and dismissing poor ones, but as a matter of fact, in comparison to the trouble brought by this, I'd rather put my effort on training and educating those available teachers we already have, even if they are not good enough.

It should be noted that kindergartens implement the policy of director responsibility in different ways. The finding from my investigation is that kindergartens in big cities,\textsuperscript{136} being independently organized, implemented this policy in a more thoroughgoing way and were bolder in practical operation than those kindergartens in small towns\textsuperscript{137} and those attached to institutions or organizations. In interview with the vice director of Beijing No. 2 Experimental Kindergarten, she said:

Administration is our weakness. We have not had much reform concerning our administrative work during these years. On the one hand, we are more conservative in our work compared to other kindergartens, since we are restricted by the University in many affairs, especially dealing with the personnel and financial matters. But on the other hand, it is easier and more comfortable for us as administrators, since we bear less risk under the "umbrella" of the University. Actually, our kindergarten has not been facing much challenge until now in least.

\textsuperscript{136} i.e. Beijing and Shanghai in my investigation.  
\textsuperscript{137} i.e. Pinghu.
I investigated nine kindergartens, of which one in Beijing, two in Shanghai, and one private kindergarten in Ningbo had gone forward at this field. The appointment contracts were signed by the directors and individual teachers once a year or every two years. Beijing No.1 Experimental Kindergarten has applied the director-staff contract system since 1995, and has already fired 5 teachers. The director also admits that this had been a difficult work. None of these fired teachers could soberly accept this decision. Ultimately, it was the personnel department of the district government who mediated to find a way out of the trouble. It helped the sacked teachers to get other jobs through administrative intervention. The kindergartens in Hangzhou and Pinghu (middle and small towns) had not yet exercised director's authority in staff management.

4.6 Evaluation of Teachers

The “iron rice bowl system” made no distinction between good and poor, or between reward and punishment. Regardless of the quality of one's work or the efforts one puts into the work, all teachers earned the same amount of money. Egalitarianism had been the characteristics of Chinese socialist economy and had long been accepted by the Chinese in their daily life. Under the system of egalitarianism, everyone was supposed to have a job, to have the same salary, and to be treated equally. Two aims of Chinese egalitarianism were to safeguard the basic needs of people and to maintain the stability of the society. Chinese people vividly name this fact as “eating with a big bowl” — everybody would have his bit however much food there was in the bowl. Thus the whole society lacked a sense of crisis and competition.

The system of “director responsibility”, especially the increased power of kindergarten directors to decide the use of kindergarten funds made it possible to break the egalitarianism tradition. The director responsibility system enabled the directors to reward teachers who have been successful in evaluation or have been successful in

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different kinds of professional competitions, through giving them extra bonuses.

The evaluation of teachers is normally made once per semester or per year. The forms of evaluation at different kindergartens are similar. There is usually an evaluation group consisting of director, vice director(s), class-leaders\textsuperscript{139}, and a number of representatives of teacher. Generally, there are three procedures in teacher evaluation: self-assessment by individual teachers, mutual assessment by groups, and final assessment by directors. Teacher’s self-evaluation is based on a summary report by teacher her/himself, which she is supposed to hand over to the director. Checking up teacher’s teaching plans, and observing a half-day teaching activity organized by the teacher is one of the tasks of evaluation group. The final assessment is made through the director giving mark to each teacher based on the ideas and comments summed up by evaluation group, combining with the content of teacher’s own report.

Evaluation concentrates on two aspects: ideology and professional attitude, and professional abilities and skills. The former is concerned with teachers’ personal character and morals, their attitudes to children, and so on. The latter is concerned with teacher’s performance in organizing teaching and daily activities, such as teaching methods, time arrangement, flexibility and liveliness in teaching process, children’s responses and the practical effect, etc. A common pattern of teacher evaluation used frequently is a “teacher’s work assessment form”, worked out by individual directors themselves. These assessment forms seem to be similar in content among the kindergartens I visited. They usually include three aspects of teacher’s performance: political behaviour and attitudes toward their work; teaching competencies; and basic skills.\textsuperscript{140} Each part is followed by a certain number of sub-items.

In principle, under the responsibility system, directors can reward or punish kindergarten staff by monetary means. Teachers’ income is linked to their performances. This acts as an incentive for teachers to assume more responsibility and to try to do a better job. To a certain

\textsuperscript{139} There are three levels of class according to children’s age - junior class, middle class, and senior class; and there could be several groups at one class level.

\textsuperscript{140} e.g. skills for painting, playing instruments, and singing.
extent, this action is fairer than before, but in practice, it has not always been effective and convincing as it was supposed to be. There is still the phenomenon of egalitarianism. Even evaluators themselves (the members of the evaluation group) think that the validity of the evaluation is problematic, since the criterion and index of the evaluation are "feeble", "soft" and "springy" without perfect assurance. Especially it is more difficult in evaluating teacher’s ideological character and morals. Teachers also feel that such evaluations are formalist, without any practical value. In some teachers’ words: "It is just like making a gesture to give people the impression that we have done an evaluation as we have been asked.” In fact, both the evaluators and the teachers would like to see the relations between evaluation and teacher’s wages being looser rather than closer. As a director said: “People are always sensitive dealing with the matter of money, in which a trivial difference could bring about a great fluctuation within people ... It’s better for me to take my time in considering other works for kindergarten’s development than in settling such disputes everyday.”

4.7 Conclusion

In the process of market reforms in education, the themes of individual motivation, micro-economic change, the virtues of competition, and fiscal restraint all have their parallels in educational restructuring. The introduction of market competition has involved a devolution of financial, staffing, and policy issues to individual educational institutions. More and more, Chinese kindergartens have become self-managing along the lines of small-sized businesses. The assumption is that once the market context has been established with the appropriate incentives and market disciplines, competition between educational institutions will serve to raise standards.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, along with the reform process of decentralisation in school and university administration, kindergartens have also begun to adopt a “director responsibility system”. Under this system, kindergarten directors have been given more power in

141 Interview with a head of a kindergarten in Beijing, 1997.
finance, economical arrangement, staff management, curriculum and teaching, construction of equipment and installations of kindergarten. However, due to different geographic, economic, social and cultural conditions, as well as the different external and internal factors of the institutions, different kindergartens implement the system by different strategies and in varying degrees. A positive outcome of the reform is the increased income of kindergarten teachers. Furthermore, along with the establishment of dynamic management systems and competition mechanisms, the work of kindergarten management has changed.

However, the case studies indicate that kindergarten administrators are commonly feeling that their reform actions are like “fighting in isolation” with limited social concern and policy support. Indeed, the contemporary economic, political and social contexts affect the content, process, and outcomes of the kindergarten reform in fundamental ways. Changes in the Chinese political economy require education reform, but education reforms without accompanying political, social and economic changes are very difficult to accomplish. It is unlikely that individual schools alone can resolve the problems occurred in the process of structural reform. The major issues at present are the insufficient policy and strategy support from government, both at the central and local levels, and from the educational authorities. The unclear statement and explanation on goals and strategies of reform are a result of the absence of related research and a scholarly foundation for decisions.

Following the idea of Deng’s “crossing the river by feeling for the stones underfoot,” the present reform of Chinese kindergarten is unavoidably a groping process, which is characterized by unevenness in the development among individual institutions, uncertainty of their environment and of their future by staff, as well as short-term mentality of the administrators. At the same time, as the growing interest in buffering their kindergartens against the decline in state and enterprises’ support, the directors has deflected their attention away from the issues of curriculum towards fund-raising. As increasing teachers’ income became the major concern of the directors, the improvement of kindergartens’ material and equipment conditions, and teachers’ professional improvement were relegated to a secondary position. However, structural solutions are relatively easy to initiate
under the right political conditions, but they are not substitute for the hard work, skill, and commitment needed to blend different structural changes into a successful reform effort. In other words, changes in structure must go hand in hand with changes in culture and in the individual and collective capacity to work through new structures.
Chapter 5
Kindergarten Educational Activities

China has a long history of education, and Confucius’ name has always been related to this history. Confucianism as a school of thought developed in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (770-221 B.C.), and had been basically characterized as a “philosophy of life”, reflecting the traditional Chinese outlook on life, ethics, and morality. Confucius was the most famous philosopher in China’s history, and is also called “the first teacher” who had great influence on traditional Chinese culture and education. The development and characteristics of the Chinese educational system, including preschool education, have been greatly influenced by this tradition.\footnote{Besides Confucianism, there are surely other traditional philosophies, religions and schools which also have influence on Chinese society. However, Confucius ideas have had the greatest impact on the Chinese traditional educational ideas and models. Meanwhile, as space is limited, it is impossible to give concern to the influence of all schools and philosophies in this thesis.}

For a long period of time, China has been highly centralized, has had stable political, economic and ideological systems, and has been isolated from other countries. As a result, a “centralizing” mode of thinking gradually formed in the nation. The cultural chauvinism in pre-modern China, which led to a closed-door policy, brought about the rejection of modern sciences and advanced foreign technologies, and the exclusion of western ideas. Since the beginning of the 20th century, along with the invasion of the Western forces and especially with the establishment of Western educational institutions in China, Western philosophies and ideas entered China. In early childhood education, Dewey’s progressive ideas were welcomed by the Chinese
kindergarten educators. His influence continued until the Liberation.\textsuperscript{143}

Since 1949, on its political demand, communist China had defined to all noncommunist ideas as “reactionary”, to be resisted and criticized. In education, the Western models were replaced by the Soviet model. Post-Mao China has taken the principle of “developing the country’s economy” as its lifeline, adjusted its internal and external policies, and has pursued a series of reforms. After the open-door policy, along with growing international political, economic and cultural exchanges, many Western ideas came into China and impacted Chinese traditional and socialist culture. The current nationwide debates about “internationalisation” and “globalisation” reflect the complex interaction of Chinese tradition and Western influences in a new historical epoch. In addition, the current industrialisation, urbanisation and marketisation of Chinese society have brought changes in people’s lives; and values, attitudes, moral concepts, and aesthetic standards have also been transformed along with this process. All these have been of profound significance for educational reform in present-day China.

5.1 Characters of the Classical Educational Model in Chinese Kindergarten

The classical Chinese educational model stressed teacher-centered, subject-based and speech-stressed lecturing and a memory-based and imitation-privileged learning.

Subject-based curriculum

It has been the tradition that in education Chinese people take it as an honor to have great learning,\textsuperscript{144} and thus they lay stress on knowledge.

\begin{itemize}
\item[143] Dewey and his influence on Chinese education before the Liberation will be discussed in chapter 6.
\item[144] The Great learning was attributed by the Neo-Confucianists, though with no real proof, to Tseng Tzu, one of the chief disciples of Confucius. It was considered by them to be an important manual for the learning of Tao: Its opening section reads: “The teaching of the Great Learning is to manifest one’s illustrious virtue, love the people, and rest in the
teaching and learning. This trend in education is a result of the influence of Confucianism tradition. Confucian doctrine "a good scholar will make an official (学而优则仕)" had been the life faith for Chinese people for thousands of years, and impelled innumerable young people to spend their whole life in great learning. It was also believed that the early experiences of a person would play the key role in constructing his personality and moral quality. Thus, early learning was praised highly by Confucianism, and to reach ethical and moral perfection was assumed to be the loftiest realm of life. In early childhood education, for a long time, The Confucian classics such as "the Book of Family Names (百家姓)" and "Three-word Canons (三字经)" were the learning materials of young children. It was believed that so long as one remembered and could recite the classics, one was a person of great learning.

The high value placed on great learning led to a pedagogical model stressing subject-based instruction in Chinese kindergarten education. As a remedy for traditional teaching which was limited in moral education and the humanities, the modern kindergarten curriculum added general knowledge about the society and nature, physical training of the children, aesthetic and art education. Since 1950, following the Soviet model, the contents of kindergarten curriculum have generally been arranged around six subjects: language, math, general knowledge (a combination of social and natural sciences), music, art and physical education.

Chinese educators mean two things when they use the term curriculum (课程). On the one hand they mean the knowledge, skills and experience that teachers use in teaching and children use in learning in school in its broadest sense; on the other, they use it to refer to the detailed specification of the subjects taught and learned in school. It is the latter definition that is most frequently used, reflecting

highest good. The ancients who wished to manifest illustrious virtue throughout the world, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their own states, they first regulated their own families. Wishing to regulate their families, the first cultivated their own selves. Wishing to cultivate their own selves, they first rectified their own minds. Wishing to rectify their own minds, they first sought for absolute sincerity in their thoughts. Wishing for absolute sincerity in their thoughts, they first extended their knowledge. This extension of knowledge consists in the investigation of things. See Fung Y.L., 1948, p. 181-182.
the tendency of many teachers to adhere closely to the published syllabus documents. Stressing comprehension and the systematisation of the subjects taught in school has been an outstanding character of China’s education, and kindergarten education is no exception. It is very popular for most kindergartens to take lessons (classroom instructions) seriously, which consist mostly of direct teaching of knowledge and skills.

Chinese language, particularly oral language, and simple math, are regarded as preschool academic skills. They have been an important part of the kindergarten curriculum. In language teaching, rhymes, stories, picture telling, and more recently, cassette tapes and TV programs are used by kindergarten teachers. Math study includes identifying and understanding the numbers 1-10; matching numerals to numbers of objects; combining and dividing of numbers within 1-10, adding and subtracting numbers to 10, as well as concepts of time and space. Music and art activities have also been important parts of the Chinese kindergarten curriculum. Singing and dancing, drawing and painting, making things out of clay, paper or other materials are the major contents of art education. Teachers pay attention to the quality of the results, and frequently give children specific directions or instructions during these activities.

**Memory-based and imitation-privileged learning**

“Having wide learning and a retentive memory” (博闻强记) has been regarded as the sole way to reach the level of great learning in traditional education. As a result, mechanical instruction and memorizing became the traditional method of teaching and learning. Even today, children are frequently expected to recite stories and poems during their kindergarten years, and the teachers judge a child in accordance with the result of their performance in these activities.

Repetition and imitation are two general methods using by kindergarten teachers in their teaching, especially in language study and skill training. In these classroom activities, children are usually

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Chapter 5

asked by teacher first to listen to the teacher’s instruction, to pay attention to the teacher’s demonstration, and then to copy the teacher’s work stroke by stroke, detail by detail, as best they can. Through a number of repetition, children are finally able to attain the demands of teacher, that is performing exact what the teacher has performed. The Chinese pedagogic philosophy is that only by mastering the form, one is able to come up to the level of creativity; the underlying idea of this is that through the structure, one can then finally achieve the freedom.

Teacher-centred educational process

Traditional education gives much attention to the leading role of the teacher in teaching and learning process, which is believed to be the guarantee of a successful education. The teacher’s mission is to instruct, teach, and direct children, and the child’s duty is to receive, accept, and agree with the teacher’s ideas. The teacher-child relationship is like an older-younger relationship. Both teachers and children are not supposed to cross the line but to obey the rule. The way of communication in class is one-directional, i.e. from teacher to child. A classroom discussion is not on an equal basis, but asking and answering with unequal status.

The teacher’s dominating role in classroom life is an outcome of the mentality of revering authorities in Chinese traditional culture. The idea of revering authority has deep connections with the rigid social stratification of the clan system in Chinese feudal society. According to Confucianism, certain relationships were of paramount importance, that were the so called “Five Cardinal Relations (五常)”, namely, the relationships between sovereign and subject, between father and son, between elder and younger brothers, between husband and wife, and between friends. After the East Han dynasty (A.D. 25-220), the concept of the “Three Bonds (三纲)” gradually emerged as the dominant ideology for the political system as well as for the family. The core of the bonds was to establish and confirm the father’s absolute power over the son within a family, and this father-son relationship was one of the basic human relations that could be extended to the relations outside the family, for example between ruler and ruled, between leader and mass, between superior and
subordinate, between master and disciple, and between teacher and student. In emphasizing on teacher’s authority, people usually use an old idiom: “If someone has been your teacher even just for one day, he would still be respected as your father for whole your life (一日为师，终生为父).”

The patriarchal system in China is characterized by children’s respect for and compliance to adults. In daily life, parents and teachers usually tell the child what to do, but do not explain why; the child is expected to accept adults’ authority without question, whether the adults are right or wrong. Questioning and challenging adults decisions are not encouraged in the family and in school, since these actions are regarded as being not respectful to the elders; on the other hand, since it is believed that adults have more experiences and knowledge than children, they know what is the best for children and are thus able to make the best decision for children. As a result, many children grow up following others slavishly without any sense of being critical and independent.

According to the Chinese traditional view of children, children are not born knowing how to behave correctly and it is unlikely that they will recognize correct behaviour through unsupervised play with peers or through a process of “self-discovery” or “self-actualisation”. Adults thus are expected to play a central role in their socialisation. Furthermore, the educational system of China has been greatly influenced by the Soviet model since the Liberation. In Soviet pedagogy, it was held that educational process was directly determined by the educator’s actions, and teachers thus should take a central position in educational process to explain, demonstrate and impart knowledge to the children in a planned way. In these cultural and ideological contexts, a teacher-centered model of teaching in Chinese kindergarten education has been stressed and maintained. In kindergarten activities, the teacher’s leading role is characterized by a rigorous discipline in classroom, teacher’s strict control over

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147 In a broad sense, it can also extending its meaning to people’s respect for and compliance to any authorities.

children's action, as well as over structured programs, and teaching plans.

5.2 From "Classroom Lessons" to "Educational Activities"

The introduction of Western ideas in philosophy, psychology, child development, and early childhood education has had great repercussions in China. Many foreign books and articles have been translated into Chinese, introducing different pedagogic ideas and curriculum models. Through the theories of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Freud, Piaget, Dewey, and Montessori, Chinese educators have tried to find ways to improve their own insights into kindergarten education. People have studied abroad and returned with new knowledge, ideas and experiences about early childhood education. They have become a new force in research and experimentation in this field.

Curriculum reform has always been a major concern of Chinese educationalists. This is chiefly because of the specific understanding of the concept of curriculum by Chinese. As I have mentioned earlier, knowledge and skills, or more exactly to speak, the subjects taught in school have been regarded as the core of curriculum by many Chinese educators. It is thus in this context that Chinese educators generally have given special consideration to what knowledge should be taught, and how to teach this knowledge. Common people like to use "to read books" (读书) for "to go to school" (上学), the underlying meaning of this is that school is the only place to systematically pass on knowledge and skills, and only book learning is the most valuable educational resource.

During the 1980s, studies on the kindergarten curriculum focused on the following shortcomings and weaknesses of the traditional models:

- The goals of kindergarten curriculum were established centrally, with little concern to local conditions and the levels of development of children in particular kindergartens.

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• Different subjects were taught separately, with little concern for the relationships among them in a teaching situation.
• Organizing patterns of the curriculum were simplistic, with too much emphasis on large group lessons and a neglect of children's play and other small-group or individual activities.
• Educational activities were mainly done by lecture and demonstration, with too little room for discussion and children's exploration.
• An absence of systematic evaluation of the kindergarten curriculum, with too much attention to teachers and children's performances in classroom.\(^{150}\)

In response to these problems, a series of curriculum experiments have been carried out in a number of kindergartens.\(^{151}\) The most popular two experiments were “The Integrated Curriculum Model (综合课程)” and “The Activity Curriculum Model (活动课程)”.\(^{152}\)

In 1983, Nanjing Experimental Kindergarten carried out a project of “Integrated Model of Curriculum” in cooperation with the Educational Science Institute of Nanjing Normal University. This model is based on Chen’s unit-model which was prevalent during the 1920s and the 1940s in China, itself influenced by Dewey's progressive philosophy. The new program presents an integrated model of curriculum that has three aspects:

- Integrated content – organizing educational activities around the themes close to the child’s life, with each theme followed for a period of 2-4 weeks.
- Integrated methods – selecting various activity patterns and methods included play, game, group lesson, physical activities, observation, labor, discussion, excursion and


\(^{151}\) According to Yu, Y.P., 1994, there have been about 10 new programs introduced so far.

\(^{152}\) In my licentiate degree thesis (1996), I used the terms “Comprehensive Education” and “Activity areas Education”, here I am adopting Wang' and Mao’s translations, which are more suitable than mine.
visiting suitable to the content of themes and the developmental level of the children.

- Integrated process – considering physical, cognitive, emotional, moral, behavioural, and ability aspects of children as a united process in organizing educational activities based on understanding child development as a process of which the elements cannot be treated separately, or in isolation.¹⁵³

The purpose of this model was to support the interactions among educational resources in different areas and bring into play their potential functions, so that to achieve integrated educational effects. It also encouraged the idea of centering on a child’s life. The significance of this project relates to its new underlying ideas: to promote children’s development in an all-round and harmonious way, and viewing the aims, content, methods, and processes of kindergarten education as a whole.

The “Activities Curriculum Model” project was conducted in Nanjing Gulou Kindergarten with the collaboration of Nanjing Normal University.¹⁵⁴ This research project was influenced by the High Scope curriculum model¹⁵⁵, which emphasizes children’s knowledge constructed through their own explorations and activities. The aim of this project was to overcome the traditional patterns of teaching with the teacher’s dominating role in instruction and where little attention was given to a child’s initiative. The design of this project gave much attention to the interrelations between children and their environment, as well as the interactions between children and teachers in educational activities. Child development, according to this project, was resolved into three categories: physical development, cognitive development, and social development, consisting of nine


¹⁵⁴ According to my licentiate degree thesis this project was conducted in Dong Fang Hong Kindergarten in Guangzhou in 1989. However, in fact, it started at Nanjing Golou Kindergarten, according to Wang, J.H., & Mao, S.Y., 1996.

items: health and physical ability, habits, self-protection, thinking, language, sense perception, emotion, morality, and personality. The Activity Model consists of three types of activities:

- **Activity centers** – Ten activity centers designed for a class including cognitive, reading, arts, blocks, doll house, science, music, quiet, sand, and water centers. Children's activities within the centers constitute the most important part of this model. The teacher's role is to provide educational settings in which children may interact with their environment according to their own wills, interests, and progressive rates. The teacher observes, evaluates, and helps individual children with their activities through interacting with them to promote their development during the action process.

- **Activity in semi-groups** – The whole class is divided into several groups for activities in different areas such as math, science, social studies, art, cognition, and morality. The teacher selects the topics and arranges the group activities.

- **Activity in class** – Some large group activities are planned for the whole class, including special collective activities and daily life activities. The purpose of such whole class activities is to provide children with opportunities of gaining collective experience and cultivating their spirit of collectivism. The teacher plays the role in these collective activities as initiator, organizer and commander, and the children as participants, co-operators and actors.\(^\text{156}\)

The ideas embedded in both these projects have broken with the traditional curriculum of subject-based, teacher-centered, speech-led and imitation-privileged model, and taken children’s initiative and their active participation into the educational process. More attention was given to the experience-based and action-stressed activities of the children. It was the first time that using the term “educational

activities” to replace “classroom lessons” in kindergarten education was suggested. Since then, various projects on the integrated and activity models have been carried out in different parts of China, and various ideas, experiences, and theories have been developed in different kindergartens.

The promulgation of the “Regulations for Kindergarten (trial)” has had an important position in promoting the kindergarten reform and the associated ideological changes. The “Regulations” issued by the State Educational Committee in 1989 were the first formally promulgated decree on kindergarten education after Mao. According to the “Regulations”, the national principle of educational development should turn in the directions of modernisation, the future, and the world. In the section on educational work, this document identified the ideological principle, aims, and requirements for kindergarten curriculum, and it also called for early childhood educators to change their views on kindergarten education and child development. Moreover, the “Regulation” gives special emphasis to the importance of children’s initiative and participation in educational process, and the function of children’s play, games and activities in the learning process. The term “educational activities” is used frequently. As an official document, the “Regulations” were immediately and widely disseminated throughout the country, and kindergarten educators were asked to “study”, to “understand” and to “carry out” its “spirit”. Since then, the term “educational activities” has gradually become the “official language” used by teachers in their teaching plan, reports, and even daily talking, instead of the old notion of “lesson” or “lecturing”.

What are the actual differences between these two notions? Different teachers gave me different answers reflecting their different understanding, thinking and focuses. The following table is a summary of their explanations, based on the interview data:

157 See Appendix 2.
Kindergarten Educational Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom lessons</th>
<th>Educational activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normally in classroom</td>
<td>Multiple choices of place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching in subject branches</td>
<td>Integrated model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress on imparting knowledge and skills</td>
<td>Emphases on the development of children’s ability (mainly the way of thinking, creativity, and problem solving, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually in large group</td>
<td>More opportunities in small-group and individually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking and demonstrating by the teacher</td>
<td>More discussions, plays, experiments, and games by the children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The consciousness of subordination of the children</td>
<td>The consciousness of participation of the children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children share the toys and learning materials with group-mates</td>
<td>Every child has one “stuff” on hand to act with if condition permits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control, order and discipline</td>
<td>More freedom and own-choice for children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: The major distinctions between “lessons” and “educational activities”.

Teachers differed in their understanding of the term “educational activities”. Some teachers focused on the methodological aspect of the notion, giving much concrete and detailed interpretations to changes of method, material, and mode in organizing their educational works. Some teachers paid more attention to the ideological aspect of the notion, stressing the aim, function, and significance of implementing the idea. No matter what their interpretation is, the use of this new term has encouraged them to re-think the nature of children, the notion of child development, and the adults’ role in the socialisation of the children.

All teachers I interviewed liked telling me how they had implemented this new idea into their daily works, and what the effects it had had in their practice. Unlike primary and secondary education, kindergarten education is less affected by the requirements of higher levels of schooling and therefore has higher degree of freedom in organizing curriculum. This has become the advantage for kindergarten teachers who have great autonomy in applying different
Chapter 5

theories, selecting various teaching materials, and choosing suitable methods in their educational practice. In turn, this autonomy has provided them with opportunity and space to realize their ideas and ambitions.

The director of Beijing No.2 Experimental Kindergarten introduced me to the on-going research projects done by the teachers in that kindergarten. She, a Master of Education, gave me the impression that she had the ambition of reforming the kindergarten to become one of the best kindergartens in China, through its close relationship with the Department of Education and the Department of Psychology of the University. The kindergarten enjoyed priority in getting new ideas and information, as well as professional supervision from these academic institutes. All teachers in this kindergarten, according to her, were graduates from kindergarten teacher training colleges, and even all assistants were graduates from vocational schools at upper secondary school level who had the competence to renew their knowledge and accept new ideas. These positive factors, she felt, had brought about a great advance in their work.

In a classroom for junior class age children (3-4 year-olds) the traditional pattern of classroom arrangement had disappeared. Children were not asked anymore to sit on chairs in rows. Instead, they were divided into four semi-groups and each group had a large table, the children were supposed to sit around the table during a collective activity. All around the room, different activity areas were fixed up such as reading area, doll play area, shop area, hospital area, constructive activity area, animal area, plant area, painting area, music area, and so on. The aim of this design was to provide children with much opportunities to "act with something" or "do something" on their own during their kindergarten days. It was assumed that the learning process could be conducted not only by teachers talking and children listening, but also by doing.158 Figure 2 and 3 in the following are an illustration of the old and new classroom arrangement patterns:

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158 Which is learnt from Progressivism, and developed by Chen Heqing, see Chapter 6.
In the new pattern of classroom arrangement the teacher’s desk was moved to one side, and a movable blackboard replaced the fixed one. This change seemed to me to be very meaningful. First, as teacher’s position in classroom has been moved from the central to the side, as children are not expected anymore to keep watch on every detail of teacher’s action, as the dominate communication model has
Chapter 5

transformed from a mainly teacher-children into a more children-children, the indication has been giving that the relationship between teacher and children has changed from a teacher- or adult-centered model into a children-centered model. Second, as the corners of the room have been arranged with different areas for play, children are not expected to sit calmly and in rows for long periods of time listening to the teacher; and the initiative and active participation of the children is encouraged in educational actions. Children are no longer seen as the passive object of learning, but the active subject of educational process. They are not passively receiving the knowledge and accepting the ideas given by the teacher but exploring the outside world by themselves in a more positive way. Furthermore, as the larger-sized group has been divided into several semi-groups with smaller size, the teacher is expected not to spend much time in doing demonstration before the whole group but to go around and pay more attention to the individual needs of the children. Children are allowed to have a certain freedom in working on their own. The indication is given that the pattern of training has shifted from a rigid collectivist and passive one to a more flexible, individual and diversified one.

5.3 From “Respecting Teacher” to “Respecting Children”

In 1996, modified “Regulations for Kindergarten” were issued by the State Education Commission. They added "respecting and loving infants" to item 25 of the old vision of the regulation, and moved it from the section "Education in Kindergarten" to "General Principles". This move indicated the special concern to a correct attitude towards the status of children and the relationship between teacher and children.

The term “education” in Chinese is jiao yu (教育). The first character jiao carries the literal meaning “to teach, to educate, and to guide”, and is also used in one of the expressions for teacher: jiao shi (教师), that is “teaching master”. A Shi is “master”, but also, in other contexts, an “example, pattern, model, or even idol”, an extended definition consistent not only with the Chinese notion of learning, but

159 See Appendices 2 and 3.
also with someone dealing with morality and conduct. The Chinese character 教 “jiao” can be divided into left and right two parts. The left side of 教 is 孝 (xiao), means “filial obedience”, which is comprised of the strokes for 老 (lao) “elder” or “senior”, placed above the strokes for 子 (zi) “son”, as Karlgren puts it, the character shows “son beneath old man”. The character 教 (jiao) embodies Chinese traditional hierarchy/seniority idea, in which 教 (jiao) contains the meaning of “filial obedience” which shows the relation of elderly above their descendants, the master above son-disciple, and the teacher above the student.

“Having esteem for teachers and respect for elders” -- has been a consistent virtue of the Chinese nation. It is undoubtedly one of the positive components of Chinese traditional culture. It reflected a mentality of great reverence for intelligence and knowledge since, traditionally, teachers and elders are the symbol of intelligence and knowledge. However, this notion has also its negative aspect, which is complete submission and blind compliance of the children to the teachers and elders. In addition, the code of inter-personal relationship in Chinese traditional culture is “restraining the self” (克己) which is a highly desirable trait in Confucianism. Self-expression or the striving for autonomous behaviour on the part of the children are discouraged or suppressed as selfishness. In child-rearing practices, a fundamental concern is to inhibit open emotional expression of hostility or aggression towards authority or even peers.

In earlier relationships between teacher and children, it was expected that the teacher should restraint herself not to be rude to or angry with children. The task was to convince children by reasoning. On the other hand, children were expected to restrain themselves to respect the teacher’s authority. In kindergarten, it was typical for

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teachers to request that children restrain their own desires and needs, and comply with the teachers' rule. Children's free actions during classroom time were not allowed. A good boy or a good girl, in teachers' view, should be honest, tolerant, easily occupied, always listen to the teacher, and not ask strange questions. Those children who maintained their own opinions, dared to criticize the teacher, or had dissident ideas were regarded as naughty or mischievous. The relationship between teacher and children was not equal; the teacher always placed herself above the children, and the children were not supposed to talk back to the teacher. This pattern of passivity is expressed in the Chinese phrase for obedience – Ting Hua (听话 -- listen to talk).  

"Respecting the teacher" takes for granted that children should comply with what a teacher requires, and the teacher should control all the elements of classroom, even games. Teachers conducted their educational actions strictly according to their detailed plans, and placed their emphasis on how to teach not on how children learn. They are always ready to ask questions, but are not used to listening to children's questions or to being interrupted by children's opinions and explanations. Teachers use lecturing and demonstrating to provide knowledge or information rather than discussing ideas with the children and exploring the answers together. Educational activities were regarded as a one-way transmission process rather than a two-way communication progress.

The new "Regulations" claim a shift from "respecting the teacher" to "respecting children and loving children". Since then, there has been an extensive discussion about the new principle of "respecting children" in major popular professional journals of early childhood education in China. Many kindergarten teachers have participated in this discussion, presented their experiences, expressed their understandings, as well as raised new issues from their practice. "Respecting children", according to their interpretations, means

166 Such as Preschool Education – Beijing Municipal Education Committee, Early Children education – Jiangsu Provincial Education Committee, Infant Education – Zhejiang Infant Teacher Normal School, etc.
respecting children’s needs and desires, their personalities and emotions, and their age characters and the levels of their development.

A teacher in Shanghai No.1 Kindergarten illustrated how she had tackled the idea of “respecting children” in organizing a music activity in which the children were supposed to learn a new song. A conventional model of organizing such activities generally consists of three major stages: teacher demonstrating and explaining – children imitating and repeating – a final performance by the children. She said:

For many years we had been taking this mode as the only model to all our “song lessons”. Children were asked to do simple repetition and passive imitation in which they seldom got the chance to express their own feelings and desires. Now I am trying a new model in our music activities. First, I sing a song and tell them briefly what it is about, and then I play this song again or maybe several times with a tape recorder. During this time I would say nothing, I think it is necessary to leave them alone and give them time and space to listen, to feel, to experience, and to comprehend the music and the text by themselves. After this, we would have a brief group talk about what we had heard and felt. It was amazing that every time they would tell me something very interesting that I had never thought of or found out by myself. It also happened often that some children learned to sing quicker than others. If some children wanted to show before the class, I just let them do, and this could also be used as a kind of demonstration, the distinction was these demonstrations were done by children, not by me, therefore the children might be more interested.

A teacher in Hangzhou No.1 Kindergarten also told me how she worked differently in organizing children’s painting activities. Instead of demanding that children draw and paint according to a theme fixed by teacher, the children now have more freedom in deciding what they
Chapter 5

want to paint, what colors they want to use, as well as more opportunities for them to observe and discuss.

The teachers I interviewed presented their various experiences and thinking about what teachers can do with “respecting children” in kindergarten. In summery, their responses were:

- Equality between teacher and children – this has been mentioned by most of these teachers. By equality they meant the relationship between teacher and children should be more like friends, trusting and understanding each other. There should be more discussions with children in making decisions related to them, and not compelling children to accept the teacher’s ideas and arrangement, nor suppress their desires and needs. Praise and encouragement should be taken as the general methods in treating the children.

- Teacher should find out the situations and characteristics of every child in class, and treat them individually, that is, distinctively but equally. Some teachers said that it often happened that teachers paid more attention to these “well” and “poor” behaved children, and lost sight of those children at “medium level”. “Respecting children” means every child should be respected and treated equally regardless of their distinctions of sex, age, family background, economic background, intelligence, ability, and personality.

- “Respecting children” should dialectically be understood as: loving children but not spoiling them; giving them more freedom but not abandoning discipline and order; being more democratic but not completely giving up centralism; meeting the needs and desires of individual children but not forsaking collectivism, etc.

This way of interpreting “respecting children” by teachers reflects values and attitudes that are deep rooted in Chinese traditional culture. The idea of Zhong Yong (中庸) or Doctrine of the Mean has played a crucial role in constructing the view. The real meaning of Zhong
Yong, according to Fung Yu-Lan, is neither too much nor too little, that is, just right. The harmony of a society can be achieved through Zhong Yong.

In personal conduct as well as in social relations, there are medium points which serve as right limits for the satisfaction of the desires and the expression of the emotions. When all desires and emotions of a person are satisfied and expressed to the right degree, the person achieves a harmony within his person which results in good mental health. Likewise, when all the desires and feelings of the various types of people who comprise a society are satisfied and expressed to the right degree, the society achieves harmony within itself which results in peace and order.

A kindergarten is like a small society in which there must be a medium point for every one to maintain their proper position and where their desires and emotions will be satisfied and expressed to a proper degree. There must be a right degree for “respecting children”. Too much control and suppression is not good for the necessary expression of emotions and desires of children. On the other hand, not will too much freedom and choice bring about a satisfactory child. Any action of going to extremes will bring about chaos. In the relationship between teacher and children, it is important for teacher to find out the “medium point” of this relationship, or in other words, to seize the right degree of their action with the children and to keep balance.

However, more concern for children’s needs and desires has affected teachers’ practical action with the children and has created a more democratic atmosphere in today’s Chinese kindergartens. Consultation, discussion and cooperation between teachers and children have increased. This is not only reflected in a changed ideology but also in the demands of society. Many teachers have mentioned that the change in modern family structure has brought the

168 Ibid. p. 172-173.
change of parents’ view on children and their relationship with the children in family circumstance. Today’s parents do not follow the traditional patriarchal style in family child-rearing. In contrast, they are more open, more enlightened, and more reasonable in handling the relationship with children, and this has forced the kindergarten teacher to adjust their attitudes and actions towards the relationship between teacher and children.

5.4 “More Freedom and More Free Play”

Items 2 and 3 of the new “Regulations” state that “Kindergarten is the institution serving the children from age of 3 to age of 6. Kindergarten is the component part of basic education and the preparatory stage of school education.” And “The tasks of kindergarten are to carry out the policy of combining care and education; to offer education promoting all-round and harmonious development of the children’s bodies and minds.”169 As an educational institution, the Chinese kindergarten is more like a primary school than a playground. Educational activities are centered around the curriculum, and many teachers perceive classroom instruction as the most important part of the kindergarten’s daily life. In some kindergartens classroom instruction is similar to that in primary school.

As kindergarten education is seen as the preparatory stage of schooling, teachers are forced to pay attention to the learning habits and abilities of the children, as well as to the extension of their knowledge and skills. Children’s play and games are usually not regarded as a proper way of constructing their knowledge, or their learning abilities and habits. The director of Hangzhou No.2 Kindergarten said:

_The fact of the kindergarten being more alike a primary school has been criticized for a long time, but it seems still to be a problem. It is believed important to link up these two educational stages (i.e. kindergarten and primary school) to maintain the coherence of the_  

169 See Appendix 3.
development of children, but how? The fact is that kindergartens are always asked to move closer to primary schooling, not the other way round. ...The primary school teachers can complain about our children being not well prepared, since they are too active and excited in classroom lessons. They cannot pay attention to teacher's lecturing; they are slack in classroom discipline; they are lacking in basic knowledge and skills, and so on. But we are never supposed to ask them to change their system and come close up to our system in term of maintaining a coherence between these two stages.

Chinese people see play as being conflict with learning, and thus as time wasting. There is an old saying in China: “Riding a hobby saps one’s will to make progress (玩物丧志).” If a person spends a lot of time in his hobby or play, he will have less time to learn or to “read books”, thus he will never attain the realm of “great learning”. When Chinese parents pick up their children from kindergarten, they like to ask them what they have learnt or what the teacher has taught today, but seldom ask them what they have done in play and games. The function of play, by Chinese people, is to relax one’s mind and body and to enliven one’s life, it is seldom thought of in terms of the needs and instinct of the children. Play is still not recognized as fostering the development of children. Belief in play as a key mode of early childhood learning, and the concept of learning as a self-initiated and self-regulated process has not been a feature of Chinese early childhood education system.

Piaget’s theory of development is not unfamiliar to many Chinese kindergarten teachers. It has been introduced in teacher training programs, and has appeared in textbooks of the psychology of child development. To apply this theory, many kindergarten teachers make an effort to complement play with pedagogical or educational meanings. Play and even games are thus resolved into small steps, well planned and prepared, and carefully organized by the teachers. Children’s free play and games, organized by themselves, have not been regarded as being an important part of kindergarten educational
activities and even an important part of their life, but a kind of "useless action" of children when they are having break.

However, the important role of play in children's development has been clarified in both "Regulations", though children's free play is still absent from consideration.

Play is an important way to carry out all-round development education. Children's play shall be selected and guided in accordance with the age characteristics of the children. Kindergarten shall create favorable play conditions (time, space and materials) for the children. The functional multiplicity and variability of toys shall be emphasized. Teachers shall respect children's desire to choose the forms of play and encourage them to produce their own toys. Teachers shall provide proper guidance for children in their play and keep them joyful, thus promoting the overall development of children's ability and personality.  

Most of the teachers I interviewed seemed now to be more aware of the function of play and the importance of children's free play in their development, particularly for those of at kindergarten age. The demand of "giving back to children their childhood" has frequently been mentioned in different kinds of early childhood education journals in China during these years. Teachers have recognized that play is not only a basic and important activity for preschool age children, but is also a primary vehicle for, and an indicator of, the development of the whole child. It is also argued that kindergartens would be more educative if children were given greater freedom in them. In practice, many teachers have put their efforts into changing the traditional mode of educational activity in kindergarten. Taking "activities" instead of "lessons" or "lecturing" is a positive attempt to put more elements of play into teaching and learning process, so that children can learn in a more active, relaxed, and democratic way. The teachers are also asked to focus on creating and building a good play

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170 See Appendix 2 (item 24) and 3 (item 25).
environment for children, providing children with enough time and proper space, and various and variable materials with which to play.\textsuperscript{171} Pre-school teachers have been asked to study more about child development and the importance of sensory stimulation and cognitive learning. A number of experiments have been carried out in some urban areas. For instance, the Chongwen District Educational Bureau in Beijing runs a small kindergarten as an experimental school where children are offered more space and more freedom to follow their own emotions and to develop and fulfil their own interests.\textsuperscript{172}

However, since the limitation of material condition\textsuperscript{173} and the common fact of large classes in most urban kindergartens in China, to apply more children's free play and games in kindergarten daily life seems not to be realistic. At least, from the formal daily program of kindergarten, I have not found a remarkable change between the new schedule and the old one. The only change is using the term "educational activities" now instead of the term "lesson" (or class) of the past. In the following I will present two daily programs for kindergartens, one is quoted in Miller\textsuperscript{174} (Table 6), who visited the Chinese kindergartens in the mid-1980s; another is from Pinghu No.2 Kindergarten's daily program which I collected in 1997 (Table 7).

The programs in other kindergartens I visited were very much the same as for Pinghu No.2 Kindergarten.\textsuperscript{175} From these examples, we can see that time was tightly structured, the activities and play were highly organized, and collective or group activities were given prominence. In an observation of outdoor play at Pinghu No.2 Kindergarten, I saw the children moved, as a group, from one activity to another. As the last child in one group reached the bottom of the slide, for example, another group was at the slide area and the first of the group was ready to climb the ladder. The whole kindergarten appeared to follow a carefully orchestrated pattern, and every individual child was expected to play their part. The only time that could be used as "free play" by the children was the ten minutes

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Li, S.L., 1994, p. 13.
\item Information was given by the head of Beijing No.1 Experimental Kindergarten.
\item Such as small classroom and outdoor space for activities, too few toys and other materials available for children.
\item Miller, P., 1988:56.
\item Except Ningbo English Kindergarten – a boarding kindergarten with English as its feature.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Table 6. An example of daily program for kindergarten in the mid-1980s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:00</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30</td>
<td>Arrival time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00</td>
<td>Outside for a walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30</td>
<td>First Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00</td>
<td>Second Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30</td>
<td>Third Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
<td>Outside (may be limited to 20 or 30 minutes in winter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Wash hands, prepare for lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30</td>
<td>Slow walk outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Nap time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:00</td>
<td>Outside for physical education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:30</td>
<td>Snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:00</td>
<td>Outside or inside to play with toys or to do art activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:30</td>
<td>Wash and prepare for supper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:00</td>
<td>Supper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:30</td>
<td>Return home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Daily program for Pinghu No. 2 Kindergarten in 1997.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:00</td>
<td>Teachers on duty arrival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:20</td>
<td>All teachers arrival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00-8:00</td>
<td>Children arrival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30-8:20</td>
<td>Morning talk and activities in classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:20-8:50</td>
<td>Morning exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00-9:30</td>
<td>Educational activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:40-9:50</td>
<td>Wash hands and snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00-10:30</td>
<td>Educational activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:40-10:50</td>
<td>Wash hands and prepare for lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00-11:40</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:40-12:00</td>
<td>Outside for a walk or inside for free play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:15-14:30</td>
<td>Nap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:30-15:00</td>
<td>Get up, wash, and snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:10-16:00</td>
<td>Organized play or outdoor activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:00-16:30</td>
<td>Leave</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

176 It has to be noted that in China some kindergartens provide breakfast and dinner for children, and some do not.
177 It was not typical having three classes a day in kindergarten, but it could be the case in Miller's study.
breaks between each group activity, though the children were also supposed to go to toilet during the breaks.

The problem of limited space for children's activities is quite common in the kindergartens I visited. All buildings are designed with from three to five storeys to make full use of the limited grounds. Typically, there are two rooms. One is used as a classroom and the other as a bedroom. A washroom with running water and toilet facilities is also available. In the kindergartens I visited, the sizes of classroom differed from place to place, but none was more than 30 square meters and filled with 30 to 40 children in general. The children were thus seldom allowed to have individual activities in classroom, instead, they were usually asked by the teachers to do the same thing at the same time and to be well disciplined and organized. The shortage of outdoor space in many kindergartens was even more serious. In Beijing No.1 Experimental Kindergarten, Shanghai No.1 Kindergarten, and Pinghu No.1 Kindergarten, the children had no option but to do the morning exercise in turn due to the limitation of outdoor spaces.

The Kessen group of eight American scholars visited a number of kindergartens in China in the middle of the 1970s, at the time of the end of Cultural Revolution. They wrote:

The indoor play we saw also was highly organized. Unstructured play in the Chinese kindergarten (with American visitors present) seemed not to imply that the child is free to pursue his choice among activities. Rather, in our circumscribed observation, it meant that within an assigned activity, the child might play freely. The children were seated at their desks or tables and given boxes of colored pencils and sheets of paper; they were then free to draw whatever they wish. Or they were given colored plasticine, small blocks, scissors and colored paper, or squeeze toys and dolls, the group typically being supplied with the same materials at the same time. Free play often involved friction or windup toys. Because there were so few

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178 In some cases could be a common washroom for several classes.
Chapter 5

toys, the teacher would often wind up the toys and have the children simply watch as the chicken laid its eggs, the Ping-pong game began, or the siren of the fire truck whirred.\textsuperscript{179}

What has changed after 25 years is that in many kindergartens, the equipment, facilities, and other material conditions have improved. In my visiting, I saw the outdoor activity places in most of these kindergartens were equipped with new, colorful and large sports and play apparatus; in classrooms, quite a lot of toys, articles for painting and drawing, books, and other kinds of stuff for play use were piled at these activity areas. Many teachers I interviewed mentioned that in organizing children’s group activities, they were able to ensure that every child had at least one “stuff” on hand. However, in many cases the children were still supplied with the same materials and expected to do the same thing at the same time.

The limited space and large class-size require order and conformity in organizing children’s daily life and activities in classroom and even in outdoor place. In maintaining order and conformity, the teachers rely on the strict discipline through the means of Guan (管理, governing). Guan in Chinese has the meanings of “taking charge” or “being in control”. To get the effect of Guan, teachers use frequently the technique of “comparing and appraising” in class, which is thought of being an effective method to affect and control children’s behaviour. In essence, to do comparing and appraising is a process of classifying. Through comparing and appraising the children’s behaviour, children themselves are classified in dualities (such as good and poor, right and wrong, successful and failing, etc.). These criterion are made by the teacher, and are heavily based on the teacher’s own personal taste.

A widely used technique is public correction and criticism, not just for misbehaviour but also for poor performance. “But we seldom singled out those misbehaved individual persons in public, still less for punishment. Instead, we focus much on analyzing the event itself, and explaining it for all children. When we criticize a child’s misbehaviour, we don’t mention that child’s name, we just say

'someone' or 'some people', that's enough, since I think we have to carefully handle the self-esteem of children at these ages”, a teacher told me. On the other hand, positive reinforcement for good behaviour is used extensively in kindergarten. Teachers praise and recognize the children who are doing well, often pointing out “the best ones” in class. Modeling and commending good behaviour of children are also used often by teacher in the everyday life of kindergarten. Children receive rewards, for example small red stars or flowers made of paper, for helping teacher or other children, answering questions actively in class, behaving well in group activities, or doing successfully on assignment, an so on.

Some early childhood educational researchers and experts have suggested that there has been too much emphasis on regimentation and control, which results in a loss of liveliness among children in many Chinese kindergartens. A teacher in Pinghu No.1 Kindergarten stated her points:

Certain order and discipline in classroom are necessary. I cannot imagine the situation in my class, with 39 children, without any order and discipline. It would be chaos. ... Guan should not necessary be understood as negative. If Guan is done in a more reasonable way, for example more flexibly, lively and democratically, we don't have the reason to refuse it. ... Perhaps people just don't like this word, it sounds too rigid and too strong.

Such arguments can also be found in the conversations with other teachers I interviewed. Their claim of order and discipline in classroom is not regarded as being opposed to encouraging children to have more freedom. On the contrary, it is believed that order and discipline is the crucial guarantee of achieving a real freedom of the children. The concept of freedom is relative, and there are always distinctions between its form and content; between freedom in ideal and in reality; and between individual freedom and freedom for all. In

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180 The discussions of Guan have appeared in Chinese magazines and education journals, which suggest that a shift in official views on preschool discipline and order should be necessary.
Chapter 5

a collective environment, only under the order and discipline, freedom can reach its optimum state (realm). As I have mentioned earlier, Chinese people are used to look at things in a dialectical way, which is a reflection of the deep-rooted traditional Chinese philosophic idea of Zhong Yong. Modern Chinese are more pragmatic and realistic than their forebears. They are clever in deriving "effective (useful) elements" from different kinds of theories and ideas, from past and abroad, to make own use of them by constructing a new balance in their belief and value system.

5.5 Conclusion

The promulgation of the "Regulations for Kindergarten", as an official policy document, has had an important role in promoting educational reforms and the ideological changes among preschool educators. Reform focuses on restructuring kindergarten curriculum, encouraging an active participation of the children in educational process, improving the relationship between teacher and children, concerning the individual differences and personalities of the children, and constructing a democratic education. Changes have occurred in teachers' classroom actions, for example the adoption of multiple ways in organizing children's activities instead of a conventional form of classroom instruction; the replacement of a new pattern of classroom arrangement for the old one; the attempt at giving more considerations to children's individual and free play, and so on.

However, unlike structural reform, the process of ideological remolding and transforming is more protracted and arduous, reflects a tension between traditional and modern cultures, Eastern and Western spirits, socialist and capitalist ideological elements. The system of educational ideas reflects this cultural and ideological reality in which changes and continuities co-exist. In the process of transforming from a teacher-centered, curriculum-centered, and classroom-centered educational model into a child-centered, activity- or experience-centered, and society-centered model, Chinese preschool teachers assume a prudent and dialectic attitude. On the one hand, this attitude reflect deep-rooted cultural values which give privilege to observing balance and neutrality according the principle of Zhong Yong in
handling different relationships and contradictions; and on the other hand, it reflects the limited resource (both material and personnel) in kindergarten setting which allows them few alternative to carry out a more liberal model of education.
Chapter 6
Chinese Views of Child and Child Development

The issues of what a child should learn in kindergarten, of how to look at the adult’s role in the socialisation of the child, of why more expectation should be given to play and the role of the child in educational process are, in the final analysis, questions dealing with how to view a child, childhood and child development. The study of the Chinese notions of child, childhood, and child development can help to establish an understanding of the state of Chinese kindergarten education in the 1990s based on an interpretation of the ideological, philosophical, and cultural contexts.

6.1 Family Banded and Gender Separated Notion of Child

In pre-modern China, children were viewed as being at the nexus of family reproduction. They were both the transmitters of family values from one generation to the next and the means by which families perpetuated themselves. In addition, the concept of child was distinguished by the gender. Male child had been given meaning with close relations to concepts like “the family interests” and “family line”. The boy was seen as a person who would carry forward the family tradition and bring honor to his ancestors: they were the carriers of the patrilineal name, the connection between dead ancestors and descendants yet unborn. Thus, each boy was taught in his childhood according to Confucian principles and the ideas of loyal behaviour to the ruler and his family without considering his own personal will and interests.

The female child was more like “the ruled” or “slave”, who were not an heir, at least not in any ordinary sense. Their role in reproduction was crucial, but they did not reproduce their father’s lineage, since a girl was not expected to carry forward the family name to the next generation, and was not even regarded as a member of her birth family.
after she got married. She became a kind of outsider to her father’s family. She had no right to participate in the family’s formal sacred and ceremony activities, and she was even forbidden to go to the family ancestral hall. From her childhood, she was prepared to serve as a bride in someone else’s lineage. She was expected to learn needlework, to accept and acquire the ideas and skills of obeying her husband and serving her parents-in-law. It was also usual that an early-teen-age girl was taken into the family as a daughter-in-law. Girls were trained early in the “three submissions and four virtues” (三从四德), which required women to submit first to fathers, then to husbands, and finally to sons, and to be good in moral character, language, deportment, and needlework.

Both boys and girls, however, were seen as passive objects. They were in subordinate position in the family and had no expectation of being developed individually or personally. Traditionally, feudal education took “filial piety” as the point of departure, and “loyalty” as its end-result.\textsuperscript{181}

6.2 Modern Education and the View of Child

From “family property” to “social being”

After the Opium War (1840-1842), China was reduced to the semi-colonial and semi-feudal society in which the tradition coincided with the intensification of Western influences along with the invasion of capitalist forces. Changed social circumstances in the wake of the decline of feudal dynasties and the penetration of foreign forces in the second half of the nineteenth-century helped to establish new direction for social policies (especially welfare policies) concerning children. Poor and homeless children started to receive attention. Founding hospitals, foundling homes,\textsuperscript{182} and public schools and daycare centers

\textsuperscript{181} He, X.X., 1990, p. 149.

\textsuperscript{182} Most were funded by foreign missionaries.
for poor children (funded by the local communities or philanthropists) were established during this period.\textsuperscript{183}

Though such institutions assisted poor and abandoned children extracted from family, and existed merely in urban areas of China, belief in integrating these children into society at large was as important as safeguarding their fragile lives. The child, who had been identified merely within the bounds of family, was given new meaning as a social being. Children had always played a role in Chinese culture as symbols of renewal, but modern Chinese society placed particular emphasis on the role of children in a concrete social context – namely, as potentially useful or dangerous social elements in flesh and blood.\textsuperscript{184}

During the late-nineteenth-century and the early-twentieth-century, there had also been a rapid increase in missionary schools and colleges founded by Westerners. With these educational institutions came advanced military and industrial technology and Western political, philosophical and educational ideas. Many aspects of Chinese culture were subjected to the irresistible impact of the West. Through periods of resistance, compromise, and acceptance, China responded to this Western penetration in various ways. For example, the introduction of the early psychological theories, Froebelian and Pestalozzian ideas,\textsuperscript{185} and progressive education ideas into the Chinese kindergarten curriculum engendered a close association between early childhood education and child development. The notion of child was given new meaning with more consideration given to the child’s relatively independence and to patterns of development of both body and mind of the children.


\textsuperscript{184} Ibid. pp. 262.

**John Dewey’s influence in China**

Progressivism’s influence on Chinese education began in the early of the 20th century. Chinese scholars travelled to the US, studied in the universities, and were influenced by John Dewey and the American progressive education movement.\textsuperscript{186} Dewey’s influence became even greater when he visited China over the period of 1919-1921. For more than two years, Dewey travelled extensively in China and lectured on social and political philosophy, philosophy of education, ethics, and the main trends of modern education. Although he visited many nations and regions during his lifetime, Dewey spent more time in China than any other foreign country. It has been claimed that China was the foreign country on which Dewey exercised his greatest influence, particularly in the field of education.\textsuperscript{187} China became, according to his daughter, the country nearest to his heart after the USA.\textsuperscript{188} From the 1920s to the 1940s, Dewey’s pragmatic educational theory dominated the Chinese educational field. Nearly all his educational works were translated into Chinese, and his influence became apparent in Chinese educational literature.\textsuperscript{189} The Chinese educational system went through significant transformation based on the American model and Dewey’s ideas.\textsuperscript{190}

The emphasis given to Dewey’s ideas at that time was not fortuitous. His visit came at a very significant moment in Chinese history. When the Opium War in 1842 revealed the decay and decline of the feudal dynasty and heightened its social crisis, many Chinese intellectuals recognized the need to learn Western science, technology and ideas to reform the old system of education, which was

\textsuperscript{186} See e.g. Spodek, B., 1989: 32-33.


characterized by a Confucian tradition that emphasized elite education rather than popular education, memorisation rather than reasoning. Once they had rejected the past models, intellectuals were eager to search for Western ideas that might be relevant to China. By the turn of 20th century, the more westernized elements in China took control, and the moment of transition from the old to the new arrived with the outbreak of the famous May Fourth Movement in 1919, a nationwide student movement opposing Japanese imperialism and domestic Chinese corruption.\(^1\) In every sphere of social activity the old order was challenged, attacked, undermined, or overwhelmed by a complex series of processes – political, economic, social, ideological, and cultural – that were set in motion in China as a result of the penetration of the dominant, expanding, and powerful countries of western Europe and America.\(^2\)

Since many of the leaders of the May Fourth Movement had studied abroad, they turned to philosophers of education in other countries for ideas and models to rebuild China. Dewey was then welcomed by those Chinese intellectuals as the great apostle of philosophic liberalism and experimental methodology.\(^3\) Some of his key ideas such as “education is life,” “school is society,” and “learning by doing” were familiar at all levels in the Chinese educational world. Indeed, Dewey became “the highest educational authority in China”.\(^4\)

Many Chinese intellectuals supported reforming children’s education as the first step toward resolving the social and political problems of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Clopton and Ou,\(^5\) Dewey’s influence on Chinese education was characterized by the following facts. First, Chinese educational aims were reconsidered in the light of Dewey’s thought in the 1920s. While the old educational aims emphasized military

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\(^5\) Ibid.
education modeled after the Japanese pattern, the new goals embraced the aim and spirit of American education – “the cultivation of perfect personality and the development of democratic spirit.” Second, the national school system was reformed according to the American pattern – the 6-3-3 system\(^{196}\) – and governed by a set of principles advocated by Dewey including promoting the “spirit of democracy,” “developing individuality,” “promoting education for life,” and “facilitating the spread of universal education.” Third, child-centered education predominated in the revision of the curriculum. Fourth, new methods of teaching in accord with Dewey’s pragmatic theory were initiated. Fifth, experimental schools multiplied. Sixth, student government was widely extended as a mode of school discipline. Seventh, literary reform was encouraged, with elementary school textbooks written in the vernacular being adopted. And finally, Dewey’s essential ideas were advanced and adapted in practice by his former students and disciples in China, most notable Hu Shi, Tao Xinzhi, and Chen Heqin, who became famous educators in China and made great contributions to the development of modern Chinese education.

Despite great controversy surrounding Dewey’s influence in China,\(^{197}\) and even if his progressive philosophy did not have the wide-ranging influence on the developing republic that some of his students had envisaged,\(^{198}\) the significance of Dewey’s influence in promoting modern Chinese education at that specific historical moment cannot be denied. Dewey’s ideas did have a major influence on many Chinese educators and helped to shape new ideas of education and teacher education.

\[\text{...(A)long with the “inputting” of the western bourgeois educational ideology into China, the child-centered approach had spread extensively in the circle of early childhood education. Although this idea belongs to the category of bourgeois liberalism}\]

\(^{196}\) Six years’ primary education, three years’ lower secondary education, and three years’ upper secondary education.


\(^{198}\) Keenan, B., 1977.
ideology, it is based on the theory of natural right of human being, which has had special progressive significance in opposing the feudal ethics and morality, and the feudal autocratic system of education of old China.¹⁹⁹

In early childhood education, Dewey’s influence had a major effect in changing people’s views of children and of child development, and also in accepting the idea of democratic education, which had mainly been given expression through changes in kindergarten curriculum and teaching methods. Traditional Chinese schools had been criticized for overemphasizing rote learning of ancient texts and not incorporating physical activities into the curriculum. Dewey’s progressive and democratic educational ideas played a catalytic role in transforming the ideology from seeing the child as a passive object or a “minimized-adult” to viewing a child as a relatively independent individual with regular patterns of development. It was argued that Dewey’s ideas represented a forceful and revolutionary criticism of the empty formalism in old education, although they were not constructive enough to replace the traditional, teacher-centered, discipline-oriented education.²⁰⁰ Dewey’s ideas, which emphasizing children’s interest, needs, activities, freedom, initiative, and individual development, had been the theoretical grounds in promoting the transformation from viewing the child as an object of educational process to the child as a subject of education.

Dewey’s ideas also formed the basis for the establishment of progressive kindergartens in the 1920s. These kindergartens evolved in parallel to American progressive kindergartens and were influenced by them. They used child development knowledge in creating curricula, much like their American counterparts, and saw the social life of the child as the subject of education in kindergarten.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ He, X.X., 1990, p. 149.
Contributions of earlier Chinese educators

In the search for more democratic forms of education, educators in China began reassessing their own purposes and practice. While giving great emphasis to introducing Western educational ideas into China, many Chinese educators had also been aware of problems brought by "total westernisation" in education. It was argued that kindergarten education in China suffered from three diseases: the disease of foreign influence, of wealth and rank, and of expense. By these it meant that kindergartens were imitating Western ideas and values and emulating an affluent lifestyle; and kindergarten education was not accessible to those who could not afford the high tuition fees. As Chen criticized:

At present, almost all Chinese kindergartens just followed American model. The children in kindergarten are listening to American stories, watching American pictures, singing American songs, playing with American toys. The teachers of the kindergarten are using American teaching materials and methods. We should not deny any American stuff, but we have to be aware that our children are not American children, and we have our own history, circumstance and conditions. Something that is useful in America, will not be necessary to be useful in China.

A number of earlier Chinese early childhood educators turned to improving kindergarten practices by considering China's conditions, using Chinese toys and Chinese stories, and trying to find a Chinese model for the kindergarten curriculum and teaching methods. They attempted to absorb the democratic educational ideas of the West, and explored the realities of Chinese education to identify infant educational theories and methods suited to Chinese conditions.

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Chapter 6

Chen Heqin (1892-1982), the best known of early progressive Chinese educators, was the most famous representative in this field. Chen studied in the United States from 1914-1919. On his return to China, he was invited to be a professor of child psychology at the Education Division of Nanjing Southeast University. In 1923 he established Nanjing Gulou Kindergarten as the experimental base for the application of his ideas.

He criticized traditional Chinese early childhood education for seeing children as minimized adults. "It is a mistake to see children as the same as adults, to think their character and inherent quality as the same as the adults', the only difference is that their bodies are smaller than the adults’." 204 "A child is not a 'mini-adult', his mentality is not the same as the adult's. Childhood is not only the probationary period for becoming an adult, but also has its own value. We should respect children's personalities and characteristics, and cherish their naivetes." 205

Chen's educational experiments included creating a unit-based kindergarten curriculum, 206 with learning activities centred around a theme that would be the focus of the program for several days or a whole week. He experimented with teaching children to read within a language experience framework. He taught reading, writing, science, social science, and music within a flexible framework and in the context of play activities. He paid special attention to music education and taught singing to 3- and 4-year-olds. He also devised new kindergarten equipment and studied its effectiveness. He framed learning activities in the context of children's lives and paid special attention to physical and outdoor activities. Chen attempted to adapt the American progressive education philosophy to the Chinese context.

Chen Heqin was also involved in the reform of kindergarten teacher education. He established the Jiangsu Early Childhood Education Normal School in 1940. Teacher training was offered in the context of "education through life." Chen developed his own curriculum that

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205 Ibid. p. 8.
206 The units of kindergarten educational activities were designed and organized in accordance with general knowledge about children's daily life.
consisted of three subjects: spiritual education, general education, and professional education. Each subject was taught in relation to kindergarten education. Textbooks were used flexibly and teaching was not restricted to texts. The slogan of the school was “teaching by doing, learning by doing, progressing by doing”. It reflected the progressive philosophy and formed the basis of his kindergarten education. Education was to be a result of living, and formal education for potential kindergarten teachers was integrated with their practical life experiences.

Chen was not the only one who attempted to build a new system of Chinese early childhood education through combining Western pragmatist ideas into Chinese practice. A number of other Chinese educators such as Zhang Xuemen (1891-1973), Tao Xinzhi (1891-1946), and Zhang Zongling (1899-1976) also played a role. They explored ways of promoting early childhood education more scientifically and with a Chinese special character during that period. Zhang Xuemen had been engaged in practicing Chinese early childhood education throughout his life, which he based on his consistent holding of the “child standard”. He argued that the aim of early childhood education should be to take children as the center of education, fulfilling the physical and mental development, fostering their fundamental abilities and habits for gaining experiences, and adapting themselves to their circumstance. He had also been engaged in the construction of Chinese preschool teacher training. He was the principal of the Beiping (Beijing) Preschool Education Normal School, founded in 1930. The school curriculum was based upon progressive education philosophy and stressed the relation of theory to practice, the importance of teaching skills and independent thinking for kindergarten teachers and the importance of teachers becoming involved in the social life of the community.

Zhang Zongling was the first male kindergarten teacher in modern China. He followed Chen in the early period of his educational

According to Spodek, this school was somewhat more traditional compared to Chen’s, although both based on progressive philosophic ideas. See: Spodek, B., 1988: 103-117.
Chapter 6

practice devoting himself to the study of psychology of child development and the establishment of kindergarten curriculum. He raised the clarion call of “Liberate children!” based on his criticism on the phenomena of trampling on the child’s mental development under the feudal ethics of old China. He argued that in the China of that time the heaviest oppressed groups were women and children who had no social status. He then held that the “four ropes” binding to children must be removed, they were:

- the strip seal on children’s mouths: both at home and at school the children had no opportunity and right to express their feelings and opinions;
- the handcuffs and fetters: both parents and teachers chained the children to “read books” without giving them the freedom to play with their hands and feet;
- rigid regulations: children were claimed to yield to the stereotyped program and the stiff order and discipline of kindergarten without acting and thinking on their own;
- the sharp knife for cutting “buds”: the food stuffs and other educational materials were not suitable for children, who, therefore were cut back, just like “buds”.

Zhang presented four alternative strategies in educating the children: 1) cultivating children with the spirit and ability of revolution; 2) encouraging children to go out and use their hands to discover and rebuild the world; 3) fostering the ability of the children and giving full play to their talent; 4) encouraging the children’s spirit of inquiry.

Like Zhang Zongling, Tao Xingzhi also raised a call: “Liberate the creative power of children”, which, according to him, could be achieved by working for the following five aspects:

• liberating children’s mind: the feudalist society was full of superstition, prejudice, misinterpretation and reverie that hindered children’s creativity. To liberate children’s mind is to untie these ropes and to free them from the old ideas;
• liberating children’s hands: the traditional Chinese education laid particular stress on book learning and neglected children’s practical activities in which they could also learn how to handle practical problems by themselves. Learning by doing was more important;
• liberating children’s mouth: in the old China children were expected to listen to adults but not to question them. However, only questioning could be a prerequisite for children’s creativity;
• liberating children’s space: it is important to provide children with the opportunity to go out in Nature and to come into contact with society. Only by extending children’s life space could their horizons be broadened;
• liberating children’s time: freeing them from the structured school timetable and giving them more time to do the things they want to do.213

Tao’s policy was to universalise kindergarten education. He said: “Primary school education is the foundation of national reconstruction, early childhood education is the basis of this foundation. Primary education should be universalized, and so should be early childhood education.”214 He thought that early childhood (before 6 years old) was the crucial period for the development of personality, intelligence and physique. Furthermore, since the establishment of the early childhood educational institutions in the late 19th century, most of these institutions had been distributed mainly over the big cities and served the children from higher and middle class families. This was criticized by Tao who thus advocated making early childhood education accessible to the children of the masses of workers and peasants. In order to fulfil this ambition, he founded the

first village kindergarten (1927) and the first labour kindergarten (1933).\textsuperscript{215} From the 1920s, the universalising of Chinese kindergarten education was the most important part of Tao’s educational practice, though his wish only came true in a small region, by his own efforts. Tao suggested a universalised early childhood education in terms of the needs of child development, but not only to meet the demands of the societal development. His proposal also contained the idea of equality of access to education between classes and between genders.

The practices and theoretical constructions of these earlier Chinese early childhood educators contributed to the establishment of new perspectives on children and child development. These earlier Chinese educators played a vanguard role. In the process of bringing about the transitions from seeing children as family and social accessories to viewing them as independent individuals; from seeing children’s access to education as a kind of gift by the society to viewing children receiving education as a right to fulfill the need of their own development; and from seeing children as passive objects of educational process to viewing them as active and positive subjects of the process.

Their contribution to Chinese kindergarten education embraced two aspects: Firstly, they maintained a child-centered approach, and claimed that educators should pay attention not only to teaching, but also to learning and to arousing the child’s interest in learning. Tao Xingzhi said: “Democratic education is to teach people how to be a master, a master of himself, a master of the world”. He argued that only by “discovering”, “understanding”, “liberating”, “believing” and “becoming” children, could we teach children. He also thought that learning how to learn was more important than what was actually learned.\textsuperscript{216} Chen Heqin held that China’s educational aim should be “to teach to be a Man, to be a Chinese, and to be a modern Chinese”. \textsuperscript{217} Thus, educators were required to respect the individuality, initiative, and creativity of the child, and to take account

\textsuperscript{215} Huang, R. S. (Ed.), 1989, p. 25.
of children's different ages and interests. He advocated a "living" education where the chief principle was teaching children through play.

Secondly, these educators were influenced by Dewey's pragmatism, and believed that it was important to combine learning with doing and to educate children through their activities and daily life. According to Dewey, experience (especially direct experience) is a key factor in child development, which can be obtained only through the child's action and interaction with the environment. Tao thought that the traditional Chinese education could be described as teaching children to "read lifeless books and be a bookworm". He maintained that real life should be the center of teaching. Children should also use both their mind and hands in learning.

Briefly, during the period of transition from traditionalism to republicanism, the Western democratic and pragmatic ideas had a great influence on Chinese educational reformers. Kindergarten education had been transformed from the traditional model of adult-centered, classroom-centered, and cut off from real life into a more democratic model of child-centered, play-centered, and life-centered. However, these early Chinese democratic educationists implemented their ideas only to a limited extent. Nationwide, their ideas did not have an impact on the whole system of traditional education.

6.3 "A Good Child of Mao" – A Revolutionary Notion of Child

Marxism and Mao's thought as a theoretical foundation

Since 1949, Marxist philosophy has been taken as a governmental idea and applied throughout China. Marxist theory is general in the sense of dealing with the development of human society in a historical perspective covering several stages. According to classical Marxist theory, socialism is a "lower" phase of communist society and is supposed to prepare for the transition from capitalist class society to communist classless society. In The German Ideology\(^\text{218}\) and

Dialectics of Nature Marx and Engels discussed how Man’s personality is formed by education and upbringing. They also discussed the relationship between Man’s biological and social nature, mental corruption and alienation under capitalism, the possibility of full human development, and the function of revolutionary activity in personality development. They held that Man’s nature is decided by Man’s relations, i.e. the relations with Nature, Society and other Men. Man is inevitably enmeshed in a network of social relations that constrains his actions. According to Marxism, Man is human only in society, yet it is possible for him at specific historical junctures to change the nature of these constraints. In other words, these relations are dialectical in the sense that they are determined by, but also determine, how and what men produce. Since these relations are constantly changing, human nature is also changing all the time. According to Marx and Engels, class relations and revolutionary practice are the most important aspects of interaction with other human beings in a class society. Labour and class struggle are consequently determined by social relations. But they in turn determine these relations and form and change human nature. What really determines human will to change nature and society is the degree of contradiction or conflict and the level of consciousness of these factors.

As a socialist country, China adopted Marxism-Leninism as its guiding principle in the early three decades after the Liberation. Mao Zedong was seen as the major Chinese interpreter of Marxist theory and the first figure in Chinese history who developed Marxist theory. Although Mao did not write much about human nature, it is apparent that he was against the idea of one general form of human nature and regarded Man as a product of his social class. In his speech at the Yanan Forum on Art and Literature (May, 1942) Mao said: “Is there such a thing as human nature? Of course there is. But there is only human nature in the concrete, no human nature in the abstract. In a class society there is only human nature that bears the stamp of a


class; human nature that transcends classes does not exist.”

Stressing the same point Mao also said: “In class society everyone lives as a member of a particular class, and every kind of thinking without exception, is stamped with the brand of a class.”

For Mao, therefore the aim of socialist education was to serve the working class, and train the successors of that class. In 1957, Mao presented the Chinese socialist educational policy which has remained as the educational policy of the present government: “Our educational policy must enable everyone who receives an education to develop morally, intellectually, and physically and become a well-educated worker imbued with socialist consciousness.”

During the Mao era, “class status” was a very important issue. Although Mao’s ideas contained many dialectical materialist points of view, clearly reflected in On Contradiction, he considered class status to be a crucial label for a person. People who had been labelled landlords, rich peasants, bourgeois, petit bourgeois, etc. had virtually no chance of attaining a change in their class status, no matter what their present means of making a living might be. But he also gave concern to the importance of one’s present performance and believed that education and environment could affect people’s development. He said: “It is necessary to determine class status. Although bad people are in the minority, they nevertheless occupy some of the crucial departments and are in authority... In undertaking class determination in factories, our purpose is mainly to find out those Kuomintang secretaries, generals, reactionary officers, escaped landlords, and landlords, rich peasants, counter-revolutionaries and bad elements.”

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222 Ibid. pp. 32.
Chapter 6

“Small red guards of Chairman Mao”

In the mid 1960s, Mao coined the phrase – cultural revolution – to describe a movement aiming at transforming the entire educational and cultural scene, which, he believed, was lagging behind socialist advances in the state ownership of industry and business and in the organization of communes. While he anticipated that the Cultural Revolution would prove a sudden, decisive affair, in the longer view he envisaged a series of cultural revolutions in the progression towards communism. The previous 17 years (1949-1966) of education was defined as revisionist, which ran against socialist construction and the communist goal. The guidelines of the Cultural Revolution were described as the following: Education must serve politics and be combined with productive labor, course lengths should be cut, teaching materials transformed, and the schools placed mainly under the control of the revolutionary students, with some representatives of revolutionary teachers, administrative staff and workers. According to Mao, the Cultural Revolution was a world-shaking event that would test the mettle of socialists. Its work would eliminate class distinction in China, and it should be carried through to the end.

Concerning the issue of class status of a person, the question arose as to whether a person’s revolutionary worth should be judged by their deeds or by their class background. During the Cultural Revolution, class origin theory or blood theory was privileged. Parents’ class status were inherited by their children by using the term of “family background”, which could determine if one had the opportunity of receiving an education and getting a good job. The so-called “individual political examination” (政审), which mainly focuses on a person’s class origin (family background), was used as a fundamental measure in deciding whether or not a person had the qualification to have a job, join the army, or go to the universities.

Furthermore, the students were classified into two categories: “the five reds” (红五类) and “the five blacks” (黑五类), the former consisted of the offspring of workers, poor and lower middle peasants, soldiers, and revolutionary cadres and martyrs; and the later the offspring of

227 According to Marxist theory, there is no class in communist society.
landlords, rich peasants, reactionaries, evildoers, and Rightists, and the persons in power who took the capitalist road were added as well. It was even summed up in the maxim: "If the father is a hero, the son is a good chap; if the father is reactionary, the son is a bad egg". Only the students who were in the category of "the five reds" could join the revolutionary group named "red guards" (红卫兵). The children in primary school and even in kindergarten had their counterparts named "small red guards (红小兵)" and "extra small red guards (小小兵)" respectively. The textbooks for kindergarten were also flooded with these kinds of political terms. However, the blood theory was proscribed as "ultra left" in the late Cultural Revolution. Zhou Enlai, the Premier of the State Council during 1949-1976, came out in favor of the "red by performance" theory instead of the blood theory by remarking: "One cannot choose one's parent...But you can rebel against your own family".

Such theory of the unique importance of class origin obliterated the aspect of human nature in development. In addition, in arguing what knowledge is, Mao said: "Ever since class society came into being the world has had only two kinds of knowledge, knowledge of the struggle for production and knowledge of the class struggle. Nature science and social science are the crystallisation of these two kinds of knowledge, and philosophy is the generalisation and summation of the knowledge of nature and the knowledge of society." According to Mao's philosophy of struggle, the relationship between man and man, between man and nature, and between man and society had become relationships of hostility, antithesis and struggle. The mission of education was thus to bring this kind of relationship to light and to teach the experiment of struggle.

Everything in society was distinguished into the sets of two opposite categories: socialist or capitalist, proletarian or bourgeois, and revolutionary or counterrevolutionary. These were the only dimensions for judging a person or a thing. All western theories and ideas about education and the psychology of child development were

criticized as "bourgeois", since they were born and developed in the 
bourgeois societies and served the children of bourgeois countries. As 
a kindergarten administrator said to western visitors concerning the 
question of material conditions in Chinese kindergarten: "We are a 
socialist society. Perhaps American children need lots of material 
things in their kindergartens because they are preparing for life in a 
bourgeois society. Perhaps Chinese children need fewer things 
because they are preparing to live in a society where material 
possessions are less important."\(^\text{232}\) The goal of socialist Chinese 
kindergarten, as one teacher explained, was "to prepare the children 
for primary school and so they will grow into workers with socialist 
consciousness and become successors to the revolutionary cause."\(^\text{233}\)

One of the outcomes of the Cultural Revolution was personal 
idalotry of Mao. The Quotations of Chairman Mao was published and 
used like the Bible. "Everybody must carry with him a copy of it, 
study such quotations, and carry out work according to them?\(^\text{234}\) 
Kindergarten children were claimed to read aloud and recite the 
quotations, though they might not understand their meanings. They 
were also expected to sing revolutionary songs such as those of 
praising Chairman Mao. Songs about dogs and cats could no longer 
linger in the atmosphere of this socialist country.\(^\text{235}\) A child should 
"listen to Mao’s words, read Mao’s books, and be a good child of 
Mao".

The end of the Cultural Revolution marked the end of an age of 
distorted humanity. People’s attention was drawn back from political 
fanaticism to real life. Work, family, and education thus became the 
major concern of the common people. The post-Mao government was 
eager for economic construction of the country, confirmed the 
important role of education in production. The national entrance 
éamination of higher education was reinstated in 1977. The single 
child policy has been effectively implemented since the end of the 
1970s. All these have had an impact on the educational system, as

well as on people’s view about child rearing, education and development.

6.4 The Policy of Single-Child and Its Effect

The notions of child, childhood and child development have been rediscovered in the 1980s, due to greater public concern for the well being of the offspring of the single child family, and the greater affluence and entry of western ideas on child upbringing after the implementation of the open-door policy.

Since China initiated the single-child policy in 1979, single children have come into the Chinese society as a special population group and a new social phenomenon. More and more people realize that the phenomenon of single children is a matter of concern not only to parents, teachers, and laypersons, but to government leaders and psychiatric and social science researchers as well. On the one hand, traditional Chinese patterns and ideas of child rearing and education among contemporary Chinese remain discernible. On the other hand, new child-rearing and education attitudes and practices have emerged due to the single-child policy and other social changes.

A review of national policy of single-child

From the early 1970s, the Chinese government had become increasingly aware that the over-rapid growth of population was unfavourable to economic and social development. It decided to carry out family planning in both urban and rural areas. It integrated a plan for population development into the plan of national economic and social development. However, as there was still a lack of an understanding of the seriousness of the population problem, and the


government still had not worked out a clear population policy, family planning was not effectively carried out throughout the country.

At the end of the 1970s, Deng Xiaoping, the chief architect of China's reform and the opening-up to the outside world, made an in-depth analysis of China's basic national conditions on the basis of the experience and lessons of socialist construction since the founding of the People's Republic. He pointed out that to accomplish the goal of the four modernisations in China (i.e. modernisations of industry, agriculture, national defence, and science and technology), it was imperative to take into consideration the basic features of the Chinese environment, that is, the vast scale of the country, its weak foundation, its massive population and the low ratio of cultivated land. This argument included the need for the development of population to be coordinated with the development of the economy, society, resources and environment. The major contribution Deng made to the solution of China's population problem was: to study and deal with the population problem in the overall context of the national economic and social development and clearly point out that China's population policy was of strategic significance. In accordance with Deng's thinking, the Chinese government made it state policy to carry out family planning and population control and to improve the life quality of the population. This is incorporated in the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, thus establishing the important position of family planning program in China's overall task of national economic and social development. Consequently, family planning work entered a new phase of development.

China's family planning policy consists of these elements: late marriage and late childbearing, and fewer births with single-child families encouraged. Rural couples, who wish and have sound reasons to have two children, shall be persuaded to keep a period, such as four years, between two births. In ethnic minority areas, family planning is practiced with specific implementation goals and methods decided by the local provinces or autonomous regions. Therefore, China's family planning policy is by no means a compulsory single-birth policy. Politically as well culturally, birth has been the central component of population change in China since 1949. At the level of leadership policy formation, population policies are politically defined by the government and, as such, the economic and social desirability of
population policy target is politically motivated. At the level of the family, birth in China cannot be understood without considering the gender ideology of the Confucian family tradition.

**Acceptance of the policy by urban people**

Recently, the policy has been accepted by most urban residents who agree that there is no alternative for the government other than to impose population control. At the same time many think that there is no alternative neither for the family to have more children mainly due to the limitations in the economy of family, the time and energy of parents. Seven of the fifteen parents I interviewed had mentioned that they did not want to have more children even if policy permitted. Indeed, the budget of urban one-child families is stretched to cover the material needs of the only child plus a range of spare-time educational activities. Rather than being a solely economic phenomenon, the expenditure related to the only child should also be understood in the context of what Milwertz has termed “cultivation of the perfect only child”.

By this she means many urban parents devote a great deal of money, and focus a great deal of time and energy, on training their children to be bright, clever and intelligent through various strategies such as the form of music during pregnancy, toys and extra curricular activities.

It was also very interesting to discover, in the interviews, that many female interviewees look upon the single-child policy as a kind of advanced strategies for women’s liberation. They think they have benefited by the policy not only because they are able to escape from more childrearing task at home, but also they are able to concentrate more on their work, have more time to do things they want to do by themselves, such as to have some advanced studies, to develop their hobbies, to have fun with friends. Sun found:

*More and more workers are using their leisure time and earnings to improve their educational and*

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240 See also the latter part of this chapter.
technical levels, to take advantage of the mass media and to engage in creative work, sports and cultural activities. This suits the needs of modernized production and modern society. It will also influence social behaviour patterns and lead to a further decline in the population growth rate.\textsuperscript{241}

However, a number of parents still would like to have a second child\textsuperscript{242} if they are permitted. This is, according to their explanation, for the sake of the single-children themselves. It is quite common among the urban parents to argue that the single-children are usually too lonely at home. "They need some play partners after school. But, you see, it has become more and more rare that children get the opportunity to play with the neighboring children. In my childhood it was common that we had a lot of time to play with our neighbor’s children in the yard, since we lived in a large compound with a number of other families. Now people just live in apartments in buildings, and it has become unusual to call on neighbors. Nobody cares about the others, people don’t even know each other after living together for many years.” More than one parent had mentioned this. They would like to have a second child to limit this isolation.

\textit{Birthrate and the proportion of single-children in kindergarten}

Quantitatively, the single child policy has been a success in urban China where a majority of women give birth to only one child. Since it was initiated in the 1970s, the birth rate has declined each year. By the end of 1997 the birth rate dropped to 16.57 per thousand from 34.11 per thousand in 1969, and the natural growth rate declined to 10.06 per thousand from 26.08 per thousand at national level.\textsuperscript{243} The birth rates were respectively 7.91, 5.50, and 11.41 per thousand in Beijing,


\textsuperscript{242} Four parents in my study answered that they might want to have a second child if it was allowed, but none wanted to have more than two children. The remaining three parents had not answered the question or they said they had not thought about it.

\textsuperscript{243} Data from \textit{Statistic Yearbook of China}, Beijing, 1998.
Shanghai, and Zhejiang Province by the end of 1997. At present, population reproduction in China is based on low birth, death and growth rates.

The proportion of single children in kindergarten has also increased dramatically. During the 1980s, over 98% of children in kindergartens, especially in big cities, were single children. According to my investigation on the 9 kindergartens in China, there were only three children who were non-single children, in which two were twins, and one boy in Shanghai No.2 Kindergarten had an elder sister, whose parents had been fined for to give birth to the second child.

The fact that the majority of kindergarten children consists of single-children has brought a new situation for kindergarten teachers. Many kindergarten teachers feel the lack of their experience and thus the need of new knowledge about how to educate single children. On the other hand, while kindergartens are going to be closed due to the reduction of children of this age, the teachers also worry about being unemployed. Such awareness of crisis is not uncommon among the teachers I interviewed. However, the increased opportunities for social mobility, as well as the improved social security, insurance and pension systems of the country, have lightened their misgivings to a certain degree.

**Changes in family structure and parental role in child-rearing**

One of the outcomes of implementing the single-child policy has been the change in family structure. The family has been the preeminent institution in China. In Confucian social theory, the family occupies a central position. It is not only the primary group of society, but also "the prototype of all social organizations". In the word of Fung,
Chapter 6

“The family system was the social system of China”. Indeed, there was no major aspect of traditional social life that was not touched by the ties and influence of the family. In many ways, Chinese view themselves more as parts of a family unit than as free individuals.

Achieving a harmonious society was, for Confucianism, the main purpose of social actions. Thus, the family, the primary social reality for the Chinese, played an important role in achieving such harmony. In the past, it was common that grown children (especially male children) often lived with their parents, even if they were married, and had a duty to support them in old age. Based on Confucian beliefs of harmony and interrelatedness, the family was organized around a rigid hierarchy of age, generation, and gender. Elder men held the strongest power within the family, and the young and women were the least powerful family members. Each member of the family was theoretically dependent on those above them in the hierarchy for all their needs. The young, both men and women, had very little say in decisions that involved them, and were dependent on family elders for jobs, education, training, and marriage decisions.

The family system has undergone enormous changes in recent decades, especially since implementing the single-child policy. Family size and the structure of the household can be correlated directly to socio-economic functions. In urban areas where there has been the reduction of economic interdependence of the generations and on the domestic demands on labor, and where there has been institutionalized state and community provision for retirement and for servicing and sharing in the maintenance of the household, the importance of the household as a socio-economic unit has diminished. More and more urban young couples move from their parents’ houses after marriage.

251 Since the 1980s, the severe scarcity in urban housing had been considerable alleviated through a massive program of public-housing construction that brought an increase in living space for the urban families and increased the possibility for the new married couples to have their own apartments and move from their parents’ houses (see Jonathan
with two generations and three family members: two parents and one child. In my investigation of 15 kindergarten families, only one had a structure consisted of three generations. This change in family structure, combined with other effects of social, economic, political and cultural changes, has brought changes among family members, in the distribution of power within family, in views of childhood, and in patterns of child rearing. Since the Liberation, the male-dominant hierarchical system has disappeared, and the power structure of family has changed from a patriarchal to a more equalitarian relationship between parents and children.

In the traditional Chinese family, males occupied a higher status than females, and fathers possessed the most dominant position in the family. The father’s sphere of responsibility was mainly outside the home, whereas the mother’s was inside the home. Raising children was one of her main activities. In child-rearing, the mother was supposed to provide loving care and nurturance, and the father was to enforce stern discipline in the family. Such traditional roles are expressed succinctly in the Chinese proverb “strict father, kind mother (严格父慈母)”.

After the Communist revolution, however, Chinese official policies have favored encouraging women to work, raising women’s economic

Unger, “Urban Families in the Eighties: An Analysis of Chinese Surveys”, in Davis, D., & Harrell, S. (Eds.), Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era, University of California Press, 1993, pp. 25-49). Furthermore, since the middle of 1990s, there have been a series of reform concern housing policies, in which the major task has been the transformation from welfare to commercial housing. Under the welfare housing system, which existed nationwide since the Liberation, a person’s work-unit was responsible for allotting a dwelling house to this person. Many young couples who had less chance to benefit from the welfare housing system than those elder couples, now have the equal opportunity to buy houses on their own or with economic support from their parents. See, for example, Whyte, M.K., “Changes in Mate Choice in Chengdu”, in Davis, D., & Vogel, E. (Eds.), Chinese Society on the Eve of Tiananmen, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Council on East Asian Studies Publication, 1990, pp. 181-214; also see Wolf, M., Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985.


and social status, and thus more equality in the authority and the roles of fathers and mothers within families.\footnote{Hsu, J., “The Chinese Family: Relations, Problems, and Therapy”, in Tseng, W.S., & Wu, D.Y.H. (Eds.), Chinese Culture and Mental Health, New York: Academic Press, 1985, pp. 95-112.} Instead of seeing care of preschool age children as the major responsibility of the mothers', all parents I interviewed, regardless of their gender,\footnote{Total 15 parents in which four of them were male.} believed that there was no such rigid division style in their families. “I spend a lot of time with my daughter at home, since my work time is more flexible than her moms”, a father told me.\footnote{Interview with a parent in Pinghu, 1997.} In a discussion with another male parent on the traditional parental role of father’s control and mother’s warmth, he laughed and said: “In upside-down way now, maybe... Well, actually, no control. What did you say? ... Family rules for children, no, if there were... maybe something concerning to their behaviour such as being polite and so on.”\footnote{Interview with a parent in Pinghu, 1997.}

Parental attitudes toward child training show a great departure from the traditional pattern, characterized by a lower degree of authoritarianism in the younger generation than in the older. The departure is especially pronounced among the better educated.\footnote{See Ho, D.Y.F., & Kang, T.K., 1984.} Increasingly, total obedience to parents is being questioned. In many respects, Chinese parents appear to be behaving more like their Western counterparts.\footnote{Ho, D.Y.E., 1989.} While mentioning the distinctions between the old pattern of childrearing and the new one, a couple of parents made a comparison between their own actions of rearing child and their parents’ in their early childhood. They would like to see their action pattern as more “democratic”, by this they meant “more discussions with the child”, “more like friends”, “more time play with him/her”, “more fun and jokes”, “less rules”, and “less punishment” at home.
Changes of parents' view on child

Since the single-child policy, the single children population has grown rapidly. A large percentage of Chinese parents feel they lack experience in single-child rearing and training. Numerous studies have found that many parents look upon their single child as a great treasure. As the only successor of the family, the parents, particularly in urban areas, place high hopes on the only child, and thus have high expectations for the child's success. They expect their single-children to be “dragons” or “phoenixes”, the symbol of powerful king or queen in ancient China, which means standing out among their fellows.

In answering the question about how they, as parents, think of their children’s development and future, almost half the interviewed parents mentioned that they would like to see their children complete at least college education. Some of them even had outlined the specialized subjects and the careers their children should take in the future. One mother in Pinghu said: “I hope my daughter will not choose sports as her career... Science and engineering are too dry and boring. ... Anyway, she should be good in learning foreign language... She’d be better as a diplomat. I wished to be a diplomat when I was little. Unfortunately, I didn’t have the opportunity to make my wish become true.” Another mother in Beijing who was teaching biology in a middle school in Beijing told me that she wished her child to study biology in Beijing University or Tsinghua University, “I graduated from Beijing Normal University, I hope my daughter will be more successful than me... I like biology, and I think this subject is more suitable for girls.” However, in contrast to the traditional idea of stressing children’s role in continuing the family line, modern parents emphasize children’s success in schooling and their future career. For many urban parents, the value of family clan has become less important. Their wish is to see their children’s success not out of

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263 They are the most famous universities in China.
concern for bringing honor to the family or ancestors, but for the children’s sake.

However, it is still quite common that parents look upon the children as the private property of the family. They force their own views and values on their children, and make decisions for their children’s future. They push the children towards the goal they have designed for them, expected the children to receive a higher education, achieve a greater success, and reach a higher position than themselves. To accomplish this ambition, they would like to do everything that they think would benefit the future of their children. The educational attainment of single children has thus become a top priority for young parents who now devote more attention to their children’s talent training and schooling. As Cleverley has pointed out:

Especially in urban areas, there have been changes in attitudes towards children, including acceptance that educational activities in early childhood reap benefits later, and recognition that older children deserve more responsibilities and freedom. Greater opportunities for educational experiences appear in the demand for preschool services of good quality, and the employment of tutors by parents to teach extracurricular subjects such as music and art.  

Ten of the fifteen kindergarten children I investigated were attending one or more art training courses in the evening time or weekends. The most popular subjects were painting, piano and dancing. English language was also a concern for some of the parents. Among the remaining five families, four had planned to send their children to such courses in the future. Only one parent said he had no such plan, and even thought it was a stupid idea to take up children’s leisure time. “The most important for children of this age is to have a good physique. They need exercise and play”, he said.

The motives of these parents for sending their children to art training course seemed quite similar. They did not expected their children

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265 Interview with a parent in Beijing, 1997.
becoming artists, but to "mould their temperament", "heighten their qualities", and "be artistically accomplished". Some parents even thought it would be more important for girls to have such training, since "It helps to strengthen their self-confidence". As for how the children themselves felt and thought about these "extra" tasks, most of parents would like to believe that it was out of their own wishes and interests of the children, only a few frankly admitted that the kids did not like to play piano, "It's too dry and boring for small children to sit in front of the piano for 30 minutes or even one hour, and play the same music scores everyday." But, as one parent said, "I told my son it needs perseverance to do anything, and he will be thankful for that when he grown up."266

On the other hand, the traditional idea of "to have children is protection against becoming old" is fainter in urban residents' mind. A relative fixed salary and pension scheme for employees of most state, collective or even private enterprises means that parents will not be economically dependent on their children in old age. Compared to rural China, the economic dependency between parents and child has been less strong in urban areas and the need for labor in the family is significantly lower in urban than in rural China. The rapid development of a social insurance system and an increase in social services for old people have also brought about the changes in idea of seeing children as safeguarding their old age. The overwhelming majority of interviewed parents mentioned that they wouldn't like to live together with their children in their old age. The idea of not adding pressure to their children seemed to be very common among those parents. Most of them thought it would be an acceptable and reasonable solution for them to move to old people service houses when they are not able to take care of themselves. They would like to see the prospect of social service system of the country as very bright.267 Many of them had already started to make the economic

266 Interview with a parent in Beijing, 1997.
267 Devoting major efforts to developing public service and social insurance systems have been being the major concern of the central government at present dealing with the national financial policy. At the National Financial Work Congress, Li Lanqing, the member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the Vice Premier of the State Council, points out that the fundamental strategy of the national financial reform in the coming years will be perfecting further the systems of state revenue and expenditure, and quickening the establishment of the public financial system.
Chapter 6

plan for their old age, for example saving extra money monthly or buying pension insurance. For most urban parents, the idea of looking upon children as having their old-age livelihood assured has not been favored. On the contrary, they even think their children will face a grimmer situation in future since they believe that there will be more competition and challenge in society.

In most urban areas, the status of female children in single-child families has been greatly increased due to the single-child policy.268 The data from my interviewing with the parents also shows this positive change. A number of parents quoted a popular Chinese saying: "a girl is her parents' cotton padded winter overcoat" to explain daughters might be better or more "useful" than sons for parents, because they felt a girl would be closer to them than a boy not only physically but also emotionally and mentally. Looking upon the child as the economic and life security of old age care has no longer been expected by many urban parents. They now care more about the emotional dependence and spiritual care from their children in their old age. Some surveys also found that many parents, especially mothers, agreed to the statement that a girl is closer to the parents than a boy, even by those who had only a son.269

Modern marriage relationships and family structures have changed people's view on family value and the actual family ties between family members. This has had further impact on the gender ideology. The relative independence of the younger generation in economic and live space make it possible for young people to free themselves from their parents' control of managing their marriage and job assignment.270 Instead of the tradition of giving much value to "listening to parents", modern younger urban husbands are likely to be

According to him, the central government will greatly cut down the financial input to the field of management; greatly reduce the direct state investment in enterprises; and put the majority of national financial resources to the field of public service and social insurance system. See Zhejiang Daily, July 28, 2000.

268 Some investigations show that the single-child policy has brought back the treat to female infants life in rural areas. See, for example, Croll, E., Davin, D., & Kane, P. (Eds.), China's One-child Family Policy, The Macmillan Press LTD, 1985; also see Milwertz, C.N., 1997.

269 See Milwertz, C.N., 1997.

"listening to their wives". There is thus also a popular saying that sons usually "forget their mothers when they have got married", since they have to "listen to" their wives, and since the relationship between mothers and daughters in law have always been the problem within families. For these reasons, some parents, especially mothers, prefer to have daughters instead of sons. The results from other studies also show that women attach more importance to giving birth to a healthy child than to the sex of the child.

The raising of women's status in society after the Communist revolution and the more recent ideological change fostered by the single-child policy have had the impact on the view of Chinese people dealing with the gender issue. In most urban areas the traditional son-preference has diminished. Many young parents agree that "giving birth to a boy or a girl is equal". Nine of fifteen parents I interviewed are the parents of female children, and no one among them thought it was a pity to have a girl. "It really doesn't a matter for us that to have a boy or a girl. Both my parents and my husband's parents have no pressure on us. They love their granddaughter so much. Sometimes I even worried that they would spoil her." A mother of a girl in Beijing said. It was also quite common among these parents of female children that they agreed with the statement that "a girl is closer to her parents than a boy". Some of them would like to believe that a girl is easier to control than a boy. Traditionally, a good

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271 Chinese common people use the term "tracheitis (气管炎)" to describe the phenomenon of "wife keeps her husband under strict control (妻管严)", since the pronunciation of the former in Chinese is very similar to the latter. And it is argued that today's wives have more power in making decisions on family affairs and other things than the husbands, i.e. the latter are supposed to "listen to" the former.

272 As I have mentioned in chapter 5 that the relationship between the mother and daughter in law in traditional China was often a serious and sensitive problem of family. The mother in law was supposed to control the daughter in law in all family affairs, and the latter had absolute no power in the family. Today, the Chinese people like to use the words "mother in law" to describe a person, a group or an institution that has dominant power over the others. But in fact, in today's Chinese society, this direction of power distribution in family has changed, not in a total opposite way but in a reflection of conflict at a more ideological level between two women, that is, who gets more concern – the son or the husband.

273 See for example Milwertz, C.N., 1997.

274 Result from a survey made by Milwertz shows that there were 83.1 per cent of women who agree with the statement, with only 5.9 per cent disagreeing. See Milwertz, C.N., 1997.
child is described as one who listens to parents, follows directions, and behaves well in school. Girls are seen as following the rules more than boys and having better study habits. Boys are seen as more independent than girls, for instance in talking back and displaying defiance or disobedience, which is considered “making trouble for the parents”. This kind of agreement has also been found among some kindergarten teachers’ who pointed out that girls in their classes found it easier than boys to follow the classroom discipline and order. At this point, on the one hand, children are supposed to be taught to be more independent and decision-makers, and on the other hand, they are expected to be traditional children who follow adults’ order.

Based on the idea of equality between girls and boys, the parents of girls today have also emphasized providing the best material conditions and education opportunity for their daughters. All these nine kindergarten girls in my survey had been sent or planned to be sent to the extra art training courses by their parents. Some parents of girls even thought that to attend this kind of art training might be more important for girls than for boys, since “beauty and temperament are much important for girls, because these will provide them with more opportunities for access to success.” The implication is that the traditional cultural assumptions of gender still prevail, that is, as girls having less intelligent and talent than boys, they need more care and training to make up or counteract their own weaknesses if they want to be successful like boys do. Additionally, Chinese parents have been said, in general, to have higher expectations for their sons than daughters, especially only sons. In tradition, while there were more than one child and more than one gender in a family, it usually happened that parents and grandparents had different expectations for the children of different genders and treated them in different ways. While modern family has only one child, such distinction of parents’ attitudes and actions toward their children of different genders cannot be compared. At this point, it should be more positively argued that the only girls are given much importance by their parents in urban China today.

Interview with a parent in Beijing, 1997.
Are single-children special?

In China, a common perception is that single children are spoiled. According to Feng, a common concern among single-child parents relates to four areas of over-protectiveness and four major fears. The single children are over-loved, overprotected, over-cared for, and over-expected to achieve. At the same time, parents are afraid that their children will not be useful, successful, filial, or that they may have an accident.

During the 1980s a considerable amount of research comparing single children and siblings was conducted in China. Most of these researches focused on examining social and behavioural characteristics of single-children in China. It was concluded by some studies that single children generally developed less well than siblings in terms of their social and behavioural characteristics. Undesirable behaviours of single children seemed to emerge during infancy and remain an issue in early childhood. They were considered by their peers to be more egocentric, whereas siblings were considered to exhibit more of the positive qualities of persistence, cooperation and peer prestige. Some researchers also found that single children were


generally more dependent in decision making than siblings. While these studies found consistent social and behavioural differences, other studies also found no overall differences between these two groups and some even reported a “single children’s advantage” on certain social characteristics.

However, it has been common sense in Chinese society to describe single children as maladaptive in their social, moral and personality development, constantly more spoiled, more selfish, less independent and less emotionally adjusted. But most Chinese scholars do not view these problematic behaviours as irremediable, but as the result of a home environment that yields less than desirable socialisation. Researchers point particularly to the lack of home experience with other children and inappropriate parental styles of child rearing. Without the presence of siblings at home, the single child is able to attract all of the attention from parents and other adults in the household. At home, single children experience what has been called “4-2-1 Syndrome” – four grandparents and two parents funnel all of their attention to the single child. This special home environment may lead to a certain impoverishment of social perspective-taking, willingness to share and interest in helping others.

In response to interview questions dealing with the general characteristics of single-children’s behaviour, teachers and parents confirmed these statements. More than a half of the parents felt

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284 Eight of the fifteen cases.
their children were socially disadvantaged. The words such as “overbearing”, “wilful”, “finicky”, “selfish”, and “unsociable” were frequently used by them in describing the disadvantaged characteristics of their children. In explaining why their children suffered these disadvantages, some parents imputed the responsibility to the pampering action by the grandparents of these children. Five children in the 15 cases of my investigation had the experiences of living with grandparents before, in which four of their parents mentioned that their children were spoiled by their grandparents when they lived together. While compared to their own childhood, they believed that their parents showed more love and displayed more yielding attitudes and actions to the grandchildren than to them.

Many parents seem to be aware that the problematic behaviours of single-child are actually the result of the problematic behaviours of the parents (and grandparents) concerning childrearing at home. While being aware of the limitation of the home environment of the single children, parents thus look upon kindergarten as the proper place for providing the children with the opportunity to develop their cooperative consciousness and behaviour, as well as to correct their disadvantages on characteristics. Kindergartens provide single children with the opportunity to interact with other children and with teachers who have been trained not only to educate the children but also to correct the errors of single-children’s parents. Parents send their children to kindergarten, not only because they think that kindergarten offers a more stimulating and challenging environment, but also because they hope that the teachers will compensate for the overzealous attention and misguided indulgence that children receive at home. Thus, the primary function of the kindergarten is regarded as not only to give children a good start academically, but also to offer good citizenship training.285

While most parents noted the disadvantages of single-children, teachers identified the advantages. In appraising the characteristics and behaviours of the single children, a teacher said: “Today’s children (single children) are poorer in self-care and tractability, but on the other hand, they have generally better quality of intelligence

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A teacher in Shanghai also mentioned the distinctive characteristics between the single children of the 1980s' and of the 1990s': "The single children of the 1980s' were generally timid but Tinhua (listen to talk); the single children of 1990s' are usually bold and self-willed, they have strong personalities, dare to speak and dare to act." These are regarded as the result of the changed social environment that affected the ideas and actions of childrearing of the parents, who believed that children should have more competitive ability and self-confidence so that to be successful in their future life.

Like the parents, the teachers also believe that kindergarten is an appropriate place for correcting single children's poor behaviours. They gave examples to describe how the children performed poorly when they entered the kindergartens, and how they became more and more well-behaved, more cooperative, and less overbearing during their stay in the kindergarten. "The kindergarten has provided them with a collective environment, where they have learnt how to modestly decline, how to take care of themselves, how to share with and help the others," a teacher summarized. 287

The teachers are worried about the problem of the gap between kindergarten and family education. Parents are generally evaluated by the teachers as "lacking in knowledge about child development and child education". 288 They love their children, but they "cannot distinguish between love and spoiling". 289 Parents are used to pamper the children and take on what ought to be done by the children themselves. A teacher in Shanghai gave an example to describe how difficult it was to work with children:

I remember how hard it was when they [the children in this class] just started the junior class. They were not able to dress, to put on shoes by themselves, since their parents had taken all these things over at home. It was just like fighting in war for us after the noon nap, particularly during winter. We had to hurry to dress all the children, and to train them to do these thing by themselves at the same time. After five days' training in

286 Interview with a teacher in Hangzhou, 1997.
287 Interview with a teacher in Shanghai, 1997.
288 This statement has been argued by almost all the teachers interviewed.
289 Interview with a teacher in Beijing, 1997.
kindergarten, the children seemed to learn a lot, but after the weekend when they came back from home, everything seemed to be restored to the former state.

The teachers interviewed also commonly held that today's parents stressed intellectual development of their children more than on other aspects of their development such as abilities of life, of cooperation and communication with others. As a teacher in Shanghai told me: "The parents frequently ask me the questions like 'What's the subject you have today?' 'How was my son/daughter in the lessons?' or 'Why was my child not able to repeat the song (or the story) you taught them yesterday?' and so on. It is rare for them to try to find out the behaviour, ability, conduct and personality their children displayed in kindergarten." While kindergartens are expected to correct the mistakes and deficiencies of overindulgent parents, their role vis-à-vis the family is explicitly more political and ideological: as the representatives of society, kindergartens have the power and responsibility to socialize children away from a narrow identification with the family towards citizenship with good personality and ability.

6.5 Conclusion

Notions change their meaning in every historical moment, since the systems of ideas are constructed, given meaning and legitimacy within historical conditions. Ideas have no essential meaning but are made sense in their relation to other ideas as well as to the historical contexts in which ideas are situated. Changes in notions of child and child development in Chinese historical context reflect the changes in cultural character, and in social, economic and political power relationship, which also have brought about the process of reconstruction of these notions.

In the Confucius tradition, children were seen as passive objects subordinated to family and social value system. The concept of child development was defined in terms of the requirements and expectations of the family and society. Individual values and interests

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Chapter 6

were not considered. The introduction of Western psychology, pragmatism and progressive educational ideas in the beginning of 20th century had a great impact on Chinese traditional culture. Early Chinese democratic educationists were acquainted with Western educational ideas. They began to think of the child as an active subject in the process of learning. In practice, more significantly, they attempted to combine Western experiences with Chinese concrete conditions. A number of new types of kindergartens were set up, in which Western ideas and theories were applied in the practice of organizing curriculum.

During the period from the initial post-Liberation to the end of the Cultural Revolution, Marxism and Mao’s thoughts became the guiding ideology in educational practice, which emphasizing Man’s social nature and the class nature of education. The effect of education for child development was stressed. The single-child policy has achieved a great effect in population control of the nation, which also brought a great impact on the family structure, childrearing and education practice, and views of child development.
Chapter 7

“Kindergarten Education with Chinese Characteristics”
– Collectivism Education in Kindergarten Today

On a typical visit, my interpreter and I entered the classroom with a nod to the teacher and students, who responded with friendly smiles. Forty-six four year olds sat at wooden tables in orderly rows. With magic markers, the children were copying a wall picture of an elaborate dragon and phoenix. They seemed relaxed. They worked seriously, steadily, with warm intent. Although skillfully done, the colorful drawings were nearly identical. ... One by one, the children finished their pictures and brought them to the teacher’s desk. Before going out to recess, they waited on a long bench at the side of the room. Far from resenting the delay by those still at work, the fast students were poised in tender support of the slow ones. I felt strangely privileged to witness this silent, collective spirit of encouragement! ...

What a puzzle! Forty-sixty children sat still as mice. They performed in almost identical ways as directed by their teacher. Yet they listened attentively and did their tasks with care, involvement, and inordinate skill. No fidgets, no whispers, no touching each other. Nor did they “let loose” on the playground. How could this be? Why weren’t the children either listless, surly, pugnacious, or fretful, as they might well be in our Western schools? I saw neither restlessness nor aggression. The children were alert without tension, friendly, uncomplaining, quick with spontaneous humor and compassion, and generally
Chapter 7

delightful. Moreover, my observations agree with those of other Western professionals.\textsuperscript{291}

The above is a quotation from Sally Cartwright's writing on her impression of a visit to a Chinese kindergarten in 1988. Some other Westerner professionals who have visited Chinese preschools have also made the similar comments.\textsuperscript{292} What they have seen in Chinese preschools left a great impression on them. These are, doubtlessly, the "Chinese characteristics" in the Westerners' eyes. But how are the Chinese characteristics understood and described by Chinese professionals themselves? This chapter deals with these questions.

7.1 Political Implications of "Chinese Characteristics"

At the Convention of the 13th National Congress of Chinese Communist Party held in 1978, Deng Xiaoping put forward the statement that China is still in the primary stage of socialism, and expounded the theory of building socialism with Chinese characteristics. Since then, the notion of "Chinese characteristics" has been broadly quoted and used by Chinese in different fields in different ways. President Jiang Zemin reiterated this view in his report to the opening session of the 15th National Party Congress held in 1997 -- that "Socialism is the primary stage of communism and China is in the primary stage of socialism, that is, the stage of underdevelopment." The primary stage of socialism, in this context, doesn't refer to the initial stage that any country must experience for socialism but specifically refers to the specific stage that China must experience for the construction of socialism with backward productive forces and an undeveloped economy.

Jiang Zemin also elaborated three points in building socialist economy, politics and culture with Chinese characteristics in the primary stage of socialism:

\textsuperscript{291} Cartwright, S., 1999, p. 22-25.
\textsuperscript{292} For example the Kessen group, 1975; and the Tobin group, 1989.
Building a socialist economy with Chinese characteristics means developing a market economy under socialism and constantly emancipating and developing the productive forces.

Building socialist politics with Chinese characteristics means managing state affairs according to law and developing socialist democracy under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and with the people as the masters of the country.

Building a socialist culture with Chinese characteristics means taking Marxism as the guidance, aiming at training people so that they have high ideals, moral integrity, a good education and a strong sense of discipline, and developing a national, scientific and popular socialist culture geared to the needs of modernisation, of the world and of the future.

He added the aforementioned basic targets of building a socialist economy, politics and culture with Chinese characteristics and the basic policies are well integrated and inseparable. They constitute the basic program of the Party for the primary stage of socialism.

While the notion of "Chinese characteristics" has commonly been used within all walks of life in China, it has also become my concern to know how people in kindergarten circle think of kindergarten education with Chinese characteristics. To focus on this issue might not only reveal the features of Chinese kindergarten education, but also present a prospect for the Chinese kindergarten in the future. In fact, approving of "Chinese characteristics" reflects people's realistic attitudes towards the present conditions of China, as well as a yearning for a better and brighter future of this country.

Out of this consideration, I put the questions such as "What are your opinions on 'kindergarten education with Chinese characteristics'? What does it mean?" in interviews with both kindergarten teachers and administrators. The interviews showed that more than a half of the interviewees directly responded to the questions with the statement "stressing on collective activities and collectivism education", though different people gave different explanations of this statement. While some of them talked about the notions of collectivity and collectivism.

293 See Appendix 1.
at a more concrete level concern mainly the ways of organizing kindergarten activities, some of them understood them more abstractly within cultural and ideological implications. It was also pointed by many interviewees that stressing collective activities and collectivism is one of the most valuable traditions in Chinese education, and one that should be maintained and carried forward.

7.2 Collectivism in Cultural and Historical Context

Eastern culture has been described as having the characteristic features of collectivity, whereas the Western culture has many individualistic traits. In a collectivistic culture, individuals generally accept a collective idea as the guiding rule to keep themselves within the bounds of acceptable behaviour and to regulate their own actions, thus coordinating the relationship between the individual and the group. Ideally, the individual and the collective are not in conflict — what is good for society is good for the individual, and vice versa. But where private needs and desires are inconsistent with the greater social good, the individual must be ready to adjust and even make sacrifices.

Collectivism is also a doctrine in political and ethical philosophy which holds that the individual's actions should benefit some kind of collective organization like a tribe, the members of a certain profession, the state, a community, etc., rather than the individual himself. Under collectivism, the individual satisfies the needs of "group" or "society". Generally speaking, a collectivistic culture sets great store by public opinion and the overall effect of society. In a collectivistic culture the will, desire and value of the individual are not considered important. Individual development is subordinated to the approval system of society. A "seamless" integration of the individual into the group is considered a principal goal of the society. All forms of social training, indoctrination, and education have such integration as their core assumption and ultimate objective.

In Confucian tradition, the main purpose of social action was to achieve harmony, reconciling of differences into a harmonious unity. Society achieves harmony within itself, which results in peace and
order. To achieve peace and order in a group, *Zhong Yong* is needed to guide people’s thinking and action; at the same time, it also requires common goals and interests, and a collective “regulation for play” to maintain uniformity and identity of the group. All individuals, as the members of the group, should comply with the good and the regulation of this group.

Chinese people have a strong sense of belonging to a group, and concern for individual’s place in the group. In Chinese traditional society, each individual is part of a social hierarchy, and is conscious of his or her own position in this social configuration, and acts accordingly. This fact is echoed in various sectors of social sciences. Hsu, for example, discovered, from a psychological point of view, that the concepts of *self* and *personality* as distinct from society are foreign to Chinese societies. He showed that Chinese use of the word *Ren* (人) for “man” includes the person himself or herself plus the intimate societal and cultural environment that makes his or her existence meaningful. In Confucian paradigm of man, man is socially situated, defined, and shaped in a relational context. The “self” concept remains more interactive, more embedded in social role behaviour than in others. The experiential self in a Confucianist context tends to remain interactive and transactional. One is a belonging member of an entity larger than oneself. Rather than being concerned with the boundaries of one’s “individuality” or becoming distinct from one’s primary social attachments, as in the Western individualistic goal, Confucianist self-definition is found in the behaviour that unites one with others as well as in activities that distinguish the “we” from the “they”.

As mentioned earlier, the traditional Chinese family was a primary group in which people sought not only material existence but also, and most important, emotional life. The traditional family system was arbitrary, in which members were thrust into stereotypic categories

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that included assignment of status, role, and behaviour, and in which individual differences were not only disregarded but were essentially not considered as a viable issue. A harmonious and happy family relationship was an ideal shared among family members. In many ways, Chinese viewed themselves more as parts of the family unit than as free individuals, or in other words, family went before individuals. As part of the family, an individual is claimed to have the loyalty, responsibility and obligation to the family; and on the other hand, the individual's behaviour also represents the value and the collective qualities of the family, including the faults and virtues of the ancestors. If one family member accomplishes some extraordinary achievement or demonstrates virtuous behaviour, then the whole family "gains face" (有脸); if one member fails or shows unacceptable or deviant behaviour, the whole family "loses face" (丢脸).

Thus, in the Chinese social system, the consequences of individual family members' behaviour are shared by the whole family. The family members are judged as one by the larger society, and this collective presentation of the family to the outside-face is shared quality.

Since face is so important for the family, a child learns early in life to keep the approval of the family without asserting himself. This rule applies also in action within other social groups such as in classroom, in school, in work unit, or all kinds of organization.

Family socialisation practices were marked by special emphasis on the cultivation of collective consciousness and responsibility. The same strategy had also been used in China in the first phase of the People's Republic to shape the individual’s sense of responsibility towards the larger groups of the commune, district, and the country.

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299 Ibid. pp. 100.

300 Ho, D.Y.F., "Psychological Implications of Collectivism: With Special Reference to the Chinese and Maoist Dialectics", in EcKensberger, L.H., Lonner, W.J., & Poortinga, Y.
The term collectivism used to denote a political or economic system in which the means of production and the distribution of goods and services are controlled by the people as a group. Generally, this refers to the state. Collectivism is the opposite of capitalism or free enterprise, in which the means of production are owned by private individuals and the distribution is determined by free trade and considerations of personal profit. The concept of collectivism is derived from the social theory holding that the interests and welfare of the collective group are of greater importance than the interests and welfare of any individual. Modern revolutionary communism is a more extreme type of collectivism in which not only capitalistic enterprise but also most private property was abolished.

With the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, sweeping changes were introduced to the economic and political life of the Chinese. In the countryside, landlord domination was abolished by the land reform of 1951-1952 and agriculture progressed from individual small-scale farming to mutual aid terms and, finally, to the agricultural cooperatives in 1956. The peasants derived their income largely from state-owned land in the communes, supplemented by earnings from private plots and sideline productions. During the same period, the property of industrialists and businessmen in towns and cities was expropriated and taken over by the state. Moreover, nearly all urban workers became wage earners employed by the state. These early measures of social and economic reforms tied the people closely to the national efforts of socialist reconstruction, with the state acting as the main provider of the means of subsistence. The collective and the state used to be described as the “socialist large family”. Furthermore, the policy was defined that the individual and the family must be subordinate to the interests of the collective and the state.³⁰¹

The communalisation movement in the latter 1950s had greatly enhanced the value of collectivism in China. These new material relations had brought about changes of ideologies, which were anchored to state-inspired collectivism instead of kinship loyalty. In A Modern Chinese Dictionary, the definition of collectivism is stated as

³⁰¹ See, for example, Chen, S.Y., Social Policy of the Economic State and Community Care in Chinese Culture, Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham, Wiltshire, 1996.
the following: “an ideology advocating proceeding everything from the consideration of the collective; putting the collective interests over the individual interests, which is the fundamental spirit of socialism and communism.” At this point, the Confucian tradition that has long structured Chinese social life melded almost seamlessly with the Maoist revolutionary agenda to produce a culture in which collectivism has been the feature of Chinese social consciousness.

Besides a long-standing cultural tradition and the new material and political relationship under the communisation, giving importance to collective value has also reflected Soviet political ideologies. In the first decade of Liberation, China looked to the Soviet Union for appropriate models of socialist construction. “Learning from the Soviet elder brother” was encouraged, which involved wholesale copying of the running of economy, the establishment of heavy industry, the organization of cities, education, health and even the military. In education, the Soviet schooling system and pedagogical ideas were uncritically introduced into China. Universities, secondary schools, elementary schools and kindergartens were reconstructed along the lines of those in the U.S.S.R. In pedagogy, Chinese took Makarenko’s theory in guiding the classroom practice. Makarenko argues that collectivity is a prerequisite for individual development, thus, education should be carried out in the form of collective activities. The educational principle he proposed, namely educating children in the collective, for the collective, and through the collective, has had a widespread and profound influence on Chinese educational circles. In fact, throughout Chinese history, there has been a tendency to over-stress the belief that individual can only achieve all-around development as a member of a group or a nation.

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7.3 Collectivism in Classroom

Chinese culture and communist ideology complement each other in promoting an ethos of collectivity and group harmony in the preschool classroom. The educational practice of the Chinese kindergarten has mirrored the characteristics of collectivism. Children are organized and taught within a group focus to encourage membership in the collective. The promotion of selflessness and collectivism lies at the core of the preschool's mission. Even among the kindergarten aims, there has been a suggestion to teach patriotism and collectivism. It is believed that these values are far more easily taught in preschools than at home. In addition, in responding to correcting the disadvantageous characteristics of the single children, it is believed to be even more important that kindergartens should give full play to strengthening single children's collective sense and promoting their socialisation within the advantageous collective circumstances. The model of collective instructions and activities has been regarded as useful means. In a manual for teachers it states:

In the kindergarten we use the classroom as a big family to teach single children that they are members of a collective. We teach children to develop the habit of treating others equally, to be friendly, considerate, concerned, to mutually give in (谦让) to others, and to obey the rules of the group. We nourish their concept of collectivism through numerous daily activities. For instance, in kindergartens children are organized to play games like "doing a good deed for the collective" and to role-play important occupations like policeman, store sales personnel, liberation army uncle, nurse, and doctor. The kindergarten is the ideal place to teach children the concept of collectivity.\(^{305}\)

The concept of collectivity for Chinese has been inextricably linked to the notions of conformity and order. To the Chinese, a disorderly and spontaneous collection of children is not a group. Children doing

morning exercises or having classroom lessons are a group, but not children playing wildly in the courtyard after lessons. In fact, Chinese teachers emphasize order and common purpose and place children in situations where they can share the experience of discipline and control under the direction of a common leader. Group structure in Chinese kindergarten tends to be vertical and teacher-directed. The characteristics of conformity are displayed by the accepting of united ideas and the uniform actions of a group. It is not surprising to see in Chinese kindergarten the children follow quickly the teachers’ order, control themselves well, do the same thing at the same time without complaint, and wait patiently for their turn to play and to perform. It has also been the tradition in Chinese kindergartens that teachers make all the children in class go to the toilet together and at a regular time. However, if a child cannot wait, he/she is allowed to go to the bathroom when he/she needs to. The philosophy behind this is the belief that “as a matter of routine, it’s good for children to learn to regulate their bodies and attune their rhythms to those their classmates.”

In interviews with the teachers, almost all the teachers mentioned that group activities still occupied the major part in organizing children’s life in the kindergartens today. Even if there were time for free play, it was individual or small group activities designed by teachers. The large class size and the limitations of space and play materials were one of the reasons that the teachers gave the first priority to the group activity model in classroom. Most kindergarten classes are mandated to hold about 30-40 children, and each class has two teachers and one assistant working full time. A usual manner adopted in the kindergartens I visited was that two teachers took turn working with the whole class a half day and spending the other half day to prepare lessons or teaching materials. The responsibilities of the assistants are to look after the matters of children’s daily life, for instance, to be in charge of cleaning up the rooms, equipment and environment of the classes; to take care of children’s clothes and meals, and sometimes to join with teachers in organizing educational activities. In Chinese kindergartens, teachers are not supposed to leave children alone for any length of time or with any great frequency.

Structured group activities are regarded as an effective means of keeping children under control, to avert the conflicting behaviour between children and to maintain order in classrooms. "This is the reality, and this is our condition. We have heard a lot about the Western model of free activity, individual learning, and so on, but it is not realistic to introduce these wholesale into China, and it won't be necessary. We have our traditions, we have our conditions, and most importantly, we have great mass of good experiences of collective education," one Beijing teacher argued.

Furthermore, it is also believed that only in a structured and orderly environment can educational aims be realized, or the development of individuals be achieved to the greatest extent. As Makarenko argued, the continuing and consistent effect of a working collective creates many additional positive educational influences. Only a blending of the individual approach while setting and upholding group standards can bring about positive results. Chinese teachers developed these ideas through laying stress on cooperative actions of the individuals within a group. They have used different techniques to arouse the enthusiasm of every child in participating a collective action in process of accomplishing group tasks, thus providing the opportunities for children to experience the strength of a collective and to recognize the importance of cooperation between group members.

To explain this idea, a teacher gave me an example. In a painting class, the children were divided into four groups, and each group was asked by the teacher to complete a painting with the participation of all group members. Through the within group discussion on their own, each group had fixed the theme, worked out the plot, and decided on the technique of painting with help of the teacher. The teacher said:

*I noticed that every one was very active and conscientious in the whole process. Sometimes they disputed with each other, but they finally found out the common solutions and agreed with each other. Everybody was so happy when they finished the work. Their works were really wonderful. ... Well, what they*

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have learnt through this activity were not only the painting skills, but also they had got knowing that a collective wisdom is always better than individual’s, and a collective force is much greater than individual’s. More importantly, they have learnt how to adjust their own actions to meet the task of a collective, how to work cooperatively with other members of a group, and how to carry out their personal ideas and achieve the personal ambitions under a collective goal.\textsuperscript{308}

Stressing the superiority of collective power is one of the characters of Chinese culture and politics. There is an old saying in China: three cobbler with their wits surpass Zhuge Liang, the master mind, – the wisdom of the masses exceeds that of the wisest individual. Recognizing the mass force, Mao adhered to the mass line in carrying out his political ideas. “The masses have boundless creative power. They can organize themselves and concentrate on places and branches of work where they can give full play to their energy; they can concentrate on production in breadth and depth and create more and more undertakings for their own well-being.”\textsuperscript{309} The reason why the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution movements were extended widely in China is that Mao insisted on his mass line principle.

Furthermore, what is concerned as important in a collective by the Chinese is the “relation”. Chinese society is essentially, from a cultural perspective, a relation-based society. In a relation-based social system, “the emphasis is placed on the relation between particular individuals”.\textsuperscript{310} The focus is not fixed on any particular individual but on the particular nature of the relation between individuals who interact with each other.\textsuperscript{311} The individual is never conceived of as an

\textsuperscript{308} Interview with a teacher in Hangzhou, 1997.
\textsuperscript{310} Liang, S.M., \textit{The Essential Feature of Chinese Culture}, Hong Kong: Chi-Cheng T’u-Shu Kung Hsu, 1974, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{311} See also Solomon, R.H., 1971.
isolated, separate entity. In a final analysis, man is a relation being. A relation being is sensitive to his relations with others, above, below, or on equal footing with him. More importantly, man can only be cultivated and developed in inter-human relationships in a social context.

Also, the last sentence of the teacher in the painting class left a deep impression on me. She talked about the personal ideas and personal ambitions. I remember that in my childhood and teen-age the terminology used a great deal in the educational field in the West such as individuality, personality, individual difference, individual interests, aptitudes, and ambitions, individual freedom, and individual self-fulfilment, etc. were disreputable in Chinese society. People were expected to believe that there would be no personal interests without the collective interests; there would be no personal development without the development of the collective; there would not be of value of an individual out of a collective; in a word, there would be no individuals without the collective. Students were told in school what they needed was a kind of spirit of selflessness. They should not have their personal ideas or personal opinions, since Mao's thought had already represented all ideas people ought to have. People were expected to wear clothes of same style, to sing the same songs, and to use the same words in speech. The minority should submit to the majority; personal interests should be subordinated to the interests of the collective; and the local authorities should obey the central authority had been the rules of society of that time.

7.4 Redefining the Concept of Collectivism

Doubtlessly, while still looking upon the collective spirit and collectivism as good mental quality of people, the notions of collectivity and collectivism have been given new meanings since the process of marketisation and privatisation of national economy, the reality of single-child families composing the majority of the modern households, as well as the influence of Western individualism into

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Chinese society since the “open-door” policy. It was said that under the modern economic relationship and the new social environment, China has become a society just like the Western capitalist societies following the law of the jungle, which requires people to be more competitive. The questions are: Does advocating collectivism mean ignoring individual difference and individual interests? Is collectivist ideology incompatible with the competitive mechanism of society? The Chinese preschool educators have their own understanding and experience of these issues. Obviously, along with the social transformation, the new ideas and strategies such as attaching importance to individual differences and competitive ability of the individuals have been introduced into educational process.

**Individual differences**

Historically, there had been a misinterpretation on the relation between individual and collective. In fact, from Confucianism to Marxism, there is no antithesis between individual interests and collective interests. On the contrary, collective interests should be seen as a representative and collection of the individual interests. Without the difference and diversity of the individuals, there would be no harmony in society. To explain the function of Zhong (正), Confucian made a distinction between harmony and uniformity or identity, which was laid on the distinction between the Chinese words Tong (同) and He (和) respectively. Tong means harmony, which is incompatible with difference. He means harmony, which is not incompatible with difference; on the contrary, it results when differences are brought together to form a unity. Harmony can be illustrated by cooking. Water, vinegar, pickles, salt, and plums are used to cook fish. From these ingredients there results a new taste, which is neither that of the vinegar nor of the pickles. Uniformity or identity, on the other hand, may be likened to the attempt to flavour water with water, or to confine a piece of music to one note.\(^{313}\)

Confucius said: the gentleman prefers He (Harmony) but not Tong (Uniformity or Identity); the small man prefers Tong but not He. According to Confucianism, in order to achieve harmony, the

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\(^{313}\) Fung, Y.L., 1948, p. 174.
differences must each be present in precisely their proper position, which is Zhong, thus the function of Zhong is to achieve harmony.\textsuperscript{314}

In dealing with the issue of the development of industrial society, Marx pointed out that in industrial society, individuals have acquired greater importance and a stronger position in the industrial production process, but at the same time, the dependence of the individuals on productive organizations has also been reinforced. Modern society requires an all-round and full-developed individual. The fundamental requirements for competition are the individual’s ability, wisdom, skill, and sound personality. An important aspect of the Marxist concept of Man is the question of the free will, and, closely related to this, subjective consciousness. Many statements by Marx and Engels seem to indicate a rather deterministic view regarding historic development as determined by factors outside human control. Engels holds that “In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will.” \textsuperscript{315} But Marx also claimed that, within a given set of circumstances including laws of development, “men make their own history”.\textsuperscript{316} To Marx and Engels freedom and free will were mainly a function of awareness of necessity and laws of development.

The Kessen group observed in 1973 that Chinese educators were hesitant to acknowledge inborn differences in temperament, intelligent or ability.\textsuperscript{317} Indeed, words such as “exceptional children” and “retarded children” could not be found in the Chinese educational literature during that time. Twelve years later, comparative research done by Tobin, Wu and Davidson found that the Chinese preschool teachers and child-development experts were much less reluctant to discuss individual differences in children than with the Kessen group.\textsuperscript{318} On the contrary, the study of “supernormal (gifted)” children had become a much popular project in preschool circle since the beginning of the 1980s. Stevenson, Lee, and Stigler, in their 1981 summary of the state of Chinese studies in child development, pointed

\textsuperscript{314} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{315} Engels, F., \textit{Dialectics of Nature} (1883), London : Lawrence and Wishart, 1946.
\textsuperscript{316} Marx, K., \textit{The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon} (Dec 1851 - Mar 1852), translated and published by Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1937.
\textsuperscript{317} Kessen W., 1975.
out that research on individual differences started to be reported in Chinese academic journals in 1980 and that aptitude testing of children was coming into vogue. The topics such as "child prodigy" or "child genius" have no longer been a forbidden zone of speech. Although in contemporary China, chaotic, selfish displays of individualism are still abhorred by preschool teachers, displays of individual talent or achievement that follow a clearly defined structure and stay within socially defined boundaries are considered pro- rather than anti-social.

These ideological transformations have brought about changes in kindergarten educational practice. While acknowledging the individual differences of children in temperament, aptitude and ability, preschool teachers put their emphasis on the diversity of educational process, manner, and methods following the principle of "taking measures suited to each individual". For example, children with music talent are routinely presented as featured performers in preschool productions. Young children with special potential for success in academics, arts, or sports are enrolled in "Children’s Palaces". It has also become very popular in kindergartens that children are organized into different group activities according to their own interests and talents. The kindergartens offer many kinds of special groups such as calligraphy groups, painting groups, electronic keyboard groups, dancing groups, singing groups, computer groups, English groups, and so on, which vary from kindergarten to kindergarten according to specialties of the teachers. Such group activities focus on the skill training of the children. Although, the kindergarten cannot offer a great variety of special group activities to meet the needs and interests of all children, the positive point is to take the individual interests and desires of children as the first consideration.

Competitive ability

Furthermore, Chinese understanding of collectivism does not preclude such displays of competition or such open acknowledgment of differential ability as long as individual strivings follow socially approved channels and are clearly directed to serve the greater public good. It is believed that it is selfishness, not competition or the acknowledgement of differential abilities, that poses a threat to the collective. On the contrary, competition can create a positive atmosphere to the collective in which everybody's enthusiasm will be aroused. Competition needs a kind of self-recognition, self-confident, self-expression, self-exertion and self-improvement, but is not necessarily connected with selfishness. In brief, selfishness displays a sort of behaviour of harming others to benefit oneself; but the principle for competition is to benefit oneself at no expense of others.

The acceptance and encouragement of competitive morality and competitive action in Chinese preschool have undergone a process. Previously, a certain competitive action was actually tacitly approved of in Chinese preschool. For example, as the Kessen group described, some talented children in kindergarten classrooms were selected by the teachers to perform solo songs or dances, or lead roles in group-performances. But it was evident that to push individual forward was not encouraged at that time.

We were wondered whether the tendency to feature individual children in lead roles in the songs and dances was incompatible with the overriding cultural theme of selflessness and service to others. Upon inquiring about this at one kindergarten, we were told that several children could perform the lead roles and that indeed they did change off in those roles from one performance to another. Furthermore, the children were told that they were selected for the performances to do a service to their school, not to bring attention to themselves. The children who often had leads were also asked to undertake self-criticism to make sure that they
Chapter 7

were not taking the performance as an occasion for admiration of self.\textsuperscript{320}

Today, it seems that people are easier and opener to accept the idea and behaviour of “standing out among one’s fellows”. One should feel good about oneself as a valued, integral part of the group, as well as feel good when he himself is outstanding. Not only are parents instilling such ideas into their children, but also are school teachers enhancing the values of individual success. In school, arranging the names of contestants in the order of students’ academic achievements is used frequently to push the students to be more serious with their study. In preschools, appraising children’s behaviour and achievement through comparison is also broadly adopted by the teachers. For example, the “best painting works” are selected from the whole class to be put up on the wall in classroom. “The best child of this week” is chosen through public appraisal, who can get a toy, a flower, or a book as a prize in Friday afternoon. Children who are talented in singing, dancing, or telling story are usually assigned by teachers to perform in front of their classmates as the models. A teacher explained:

\textit{I don’t see anything wrong with pushing individual children forward. Of course we don’t encourage the behaviour of, for example, comparing who dresses well or badly, but we do encourage the spirit of competition in learning, work, behaviour, and moral character of the children.}\textsuperscript{321}

A university teacher also stated his view when we chatted around the topic of “the Chinese of this generation”, which can represent a quite common view among Chinese intellectuals.

\textit{In the past people believed that ‘fame portends trouble for men just a fattening does for pigs’}. Nowadays young people believe in the famous remark: ‘A soldier

\textsuperscript{320} Kessen, W., 1975, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{321} Interview with a teacher in Beijing, 1997.
who is not willing to be a marshal is not a good soldier'. One should aim to be the number one, and try to be different from the common run. Otherwise he will be regarded as just a good-for-nothing person. In the past people upheld that 'I do work for others'. Nowadays young people uphold that 'I do work for others, but others should do work for me too'. I would like to see this as more utilitarianism than individualism.

7.5 Collectivism Education under New Social Condition

While still giving emphasis to the importance of collectivity and collectivism education in preschools in China, the intensions and extensions of these concepts have undoubtedly changed to a certain degree due to the changes in social reality and in ideology. In essence, China is a rapidly changing socialist society. Among all the changes, the increasing role of the market in the economy is crucial. One of the implications of the market element in the socialist society is the change of the role of individuals in social action. The emergence of the market sector in labour structure has given rise to the concept of choice. Instead of that a job was allocated and bestowed by the state in the past, the practice of “employment by merit” and the increased open opportunities for choosing, selecting and changing job for a person have strengthened the notion of choice. For the first time in a socialist country for over forty years, people have developed the notions of individual choice and individual needs. This goes against not only the Chinese socialist tradition of expecting individuals to abide by national needs, but also against the cultural tradition of the prevalence of community expectations.

In a system of strict planned economy, the characteristics of a community member are one of rigidity. Once a person is “allocated” to a position, the autonomy of status change is virtually lost. Ways of obtaining personal benefits and the scale of such benefits are dictated by the person’s rigid position.
Chapter 7

Such a position is in turn determined by strict and specific systems, such as the household registration system, the unit system and the administrative hierarchy. By way of all these systems that undermine individual autonomy, the society might have attained some state of order and stability. However, people's activeness and innovation, which may bring about wealth as well as progress, are lost.\textsuperscript{322}

However, the introduction and endorsement of individual choice and individual needs has virtually undermined the entire ideological basis for planned economy and consequent manpower planning. The notions of individual choice and individual needs, which are prevalent in western liberal philosophies, for the first time became a necessary notion in the education of children and youth in China. This change of ideology is reflected in the literatures and textbooks for young children. For example, instead of giving only emphasis to instilling the ideas of submission to the collective and bringing selflessness into young children's minds in the past, the new edited stories for kindergarten children gives the development of self-consciousness of the children wide coverage. A set of picture-story books titled "A Good Child Should Do In This Way" was published in 1995, which collected a series of tales into seven parts: "Self-cultivation", "Relations with others", "Daily life", "Hard study", "Self-protection", "Politeness and Self-respect", and "Self-reliance" that focused on aspects of children's personalities and moral education. I quote one of the tales in the following:

\textit{Dodder}

\textbf{- Over-reliance on others would only do harm to oneself}

\par

\textit{In the past, there were tall and strong pine trees, and no weak and thin dodder. The story could be traced back to the past. The pine tree had many cones, inside which were healthy nuts. When these nuts became big

enough and were leaving their parents, opinions differed among them. Most nuts were willing to go among the barren mountains. When they grew up, they would become tall and form forest. “How hard it will be living in the mountains!” Only one small nut did not want to live by himself. He wanted to rely on his parents. “I’ll live with my parents,” he said. Due to the lack of sunshine and rainfall, the little pine nut became very small and thin. His parents could not help. “Ah! It’s a shame to rely on others.” Thus, the later generations of this little pine nut were even worse. At last they became dodders whose existence depended on others.323

The implication of this tale is to give importance to the individual independence and autonomy, as well as the spirit of being bold in challenging oneself. In the part of “Relations with others”, the following personal characteristics and behaviours are encouraged through telling the short tales by implication: offer help; show understanding for others; don’t be keen on gaining petty advantages; proper help; share with others; don’t look down upon others; help those in need; put oneself in somebody else’s position; learn from other people’s strong points.324

Undoubtedly, there has been a change in principles in handling the relationships between individuals and between individual and the collective. In the past, the collectivity was formed through the establishment of authority (e.g. the directing power of teachers in classroom); now in the process of social démocratisation, the collectivity is maintained based on a more equal, mutual, and cooperated relation among the members of the collective, which claims more self-recognition, sociability, tolerance and rationality of persons. Furthermore, under the present market competitive conditions, it is regarded as not being realistic to persist in the principles of collective interests absolutely over individual interests,

324 Ibid.
Chapter 7

and selflessness of the individual. The marketised society demands more competitive consciousness and ability of the individuals, as well as the integration of individual efforts and individual profits. But, as Mok argues, the Chinese experience of marketisation is different from its Western counterparts because the Chinese leaders have not committed ideologically to the philosophy behind the notions of privatisation and marketisation. Instead, "they just adopt mechanism to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of public policies."\(^{325}\) It is regarded by the Chinese government that a socialist marketised society, which differs from a capitalist marketised society, demands also an organic integration of macro (state)-regulation and market mechanism, in which the principle of collectivism in guiding organizational and individual behaviour is still necessary. However, it is also argued that along with the social change there is also a need of redefining the concept of collectivism, as a teacher said: "By collectivism, at present, it means not infringing the actions of others, and not being incompatible with others."\(^{326}\)

Although the teachers have been aware of the necessity and importance of adjusting their understanding of collectivism to the new situation, and attempted to apply more multiple activities in implementing the ideas, they find it difficult, in practice, to carry out an effective collectivism education, especially while they attempted to get parents' support to pursue the related activities after school. A senior class in Shanghai No.1 Kindergarten has attempted to carry out an activity of "doing people good turn" through asking the children to deliver evening paper to their neighbours. Only 5 children among total 42 children in whole class had done this accompanied by their parents. Some children explained why they did not do this because "Mammy said it's not my business", "We'll pay the loss if I miss a paper, my daddy said." The teacher of this class made a wry smile and said: "The general mood of now-day society is putting money above all else and selfishness. It has become more and more difficult to carry out the moral education in schools under such macro environment. The children are usually confused by the distinctions between what we


\(^{326}\) Interview with a teacher in Beijing, 1997.
“Kindergarten Education with Chinese Characteristics”

teachers asked, and what their parents said and the things happened around them.”

7.6 Conclusion

From Confucian tradition to socialist ideology, collectivity and collectivism have occupied a virtual position and played a crucial role in shaping the ideas and actions of Chinese people in their economic, political and social life. It has also been a distinct characteristic of Chinese education. Under the present new social condition of marketisation and privatisation, what is the fate of this proposition in today’s kindergarten education?

By the responses to the issue of kindergarten education with Chinese characteristics, it is indicated that people still commonly give the importance to collectivity and collectivism in moulding the spirit of new generation and in organizing educational activities. However, to meet the new demand of social change, it is argued that any formalist and dogmatic understanding and action of the principle of collectivism will get nowhere. The notions of collectivity and collectivism need to be entrusted to new meaning to meet the requirement of the new age.327

327 The Chinese innovation can be studied by reference to the problem, i.e. liberal theory, between collectivism and individualism. This thesis, however, gives attention to recent Chinese discussions of this problem. It does not examine the liberal theories that are prominent in the USA.
Chapter 8
“Crossing the River by Feeling for the Stones under Foot”
(Summary and Discussion)

8.1 Education and Social Transformation

This is a study of changes in Chinese kindergarten education. Close investigation of kindergarten education in China allows us to draw several conclusions. First, recent structural reforms in early childhood education have been shaped by the foremost task of the nation – economic development. To meet this demand for economic reform, early childhood education has been restructured. The previous welfare model of kindergarten, which was regarded as one of the outcomes of a socialist system, is being transformed into a new market competitive model to meet a demand for the marketisation of society. The implementation of the contract system, the encouragement of private kindergarten, the decline of the party’s ideological control, the extension of kindergarten directors’ decision making power, and the increasing autonomy of kindergarten administration and management have been the major strategies in the advancement of the reform.

Second, the investigation indicates that structural reform has occurred unevenly at the local and institutional level. While some kindergartens have made greater advances in implementing the systems of “director responsibility”, which brings about greater autonomy in administration and management of the kindergartens, some kindergartens are still restricted to decision making powers, especially in the sector of financial and personnel management. This diversity of implementing reform policy brings about inequalities between institutions. The unevenness results from the complex internal and external factors of these individual schools, which reflected the local and institutional conflicts and contradictions.
Third, demands for social transformation require a reconstruction of educational ideas. The reform of kindergarten curriculum, changes in classroom arrangement, the readjustment of the relationship between teacher and children, the adoption of new models for organizing children's activities, and revision of the notions of child and child development have accompanied national policy changes, and the cultural and ideological transformation of Chinese society.

Fourth, the process of ideological reconstruction has been more protracted and arduous, reflecting a sense of ideological tensions. In an era of industrialisation, marketisation, and globalisation, Chinese culture is very complex—a mixture of Oriental and Western, modern and traditional, Marxist and non-Marxist, socialist and capitalist, democratic and autocratic, elitist and populist elements. The current educational ideas reflect this cultural and ideological conjuncture in which changes and continuities co-exist.

8.2 The Locus and Nature of Change

Stepping back, however, we can also view the reform process in Chinese kindergarten education as part of a larger educational and social transformation. Below I will discuss how these changes should be interpreted.

In one way, I consider educational reform, in part, as policy change. This "permits us to generalize more meaningfully about the overall educational process."[328] Policy is considered as a set of goals and priorities for action based on a theoretical vision of how things work. A policy involves the application of this theory to a specific problem or situation. Since policy includes both theory and application, it involves more than one level. As Elmore argues:

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\textit{Policies, by themselves, do not produce results. They must be interpreted, applied and elaborated into organizational routines and structures. For this reason, it is not strictly accurate to say that policy is "made"}
\]

Policy is a result of coalitions and negotiation that bear the stamp of local interests, conflicts, and compromise. The implementation of policy involves far more than a mechanical translation of goals into routine procedures, and it involves fundamental questions about conflict, decision-making, and "who gets what" in a society. Policy change is actually an unfolding process of interpretation, since policies should be taken as bundles of potentialities. "They define a domain for action, and within that domain they may establish priorities. But even such definitions and priorities allow a variety of legitimate interpretations." In fact, policy involves frequent local-central interpretation, and people at the local level consequently have an active and partially autonomous role to play in the policy process.

Analyzing the process of interpretation requires historical and contextual approaches. Historical approach helps us to understand variation in policies, conditions that spawn it, and the consequences that flow from it. Contextual approach helps us to understand the interrelationships among the content of policy, institutional structures in which policy is implemented, and the wider social and political context in which these structures and processes occur.

Before 1979, kindergartens and daycare institutions in China were under the command of different levels of the Women's Federation. Early childhood education was not deemed an educational undertaking but a kind of welfare facility. In October 1979, the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the State Council dispatched a document...
Summary and Discussion

demanding a shift of authority for early childhood education from the Women’s Federations to Educational Committees. Since then, this transfer of work has been carried, but by 1997 it had not been completed in all areas. A relative reform “vacuum” was created in kindergarten practice. Furthermore, preschool education, which is outside the system of compulsory education, has received less attention from both central and local government. Traditionally, that has meant less support, but at the same time, also less control from the central and local authorities. All these have provided the possibilities for preschool institutions to have more autonomy than other educational institutions. The case studies and interviews of this research indicate that an important locus of change tends to be at the local and individual institutions, where administrators and teachers exercise what I found to be a surprising degree of autonomy in interpreting vague policy statements emanating from the center. This relative autonomy of preschool institutions, in addition to making policy reflective of local concerns, provides space for experimentation, diversity, and creativity.

Change also reflects conflicts and contradictions at local and institutional levels. For a long period of time, people have been accustomed to thinking about early childhood care as a kind of welfare facilities provided by the state. Both the childcare institutions and children in these institutions were beneficiaries of the welfare system. In addition, the centralized planned economic system did not call for local initiative. Under the marketised economic system, a contradiction between long-term educational goal and short-term economic results arises. Local administrators experience difficulties in determining their work directions. At the same time, the remaining twisted roots and gnarled branches in the old organizational system have hampered the restructuring process. Furthermore, calls for a rationalisation of kindergarten education have been resisted by existing educational practice. People have been searching for a balance between the new and the old to alleviate the contradiction. However, as Western critical theorists suggest, contradictions within school may carry the potential for change. On the other hand, the

333 For example Zhejiang Province started this work in the beginning of the 1990s, but until 1997 there were still several prefectures and counties that had not completed this work.
change process may tend to exacerbate these contradictions and produce new contradictions.

Discussion of the locus of change thus leads us to further consideration of the nature of change itself. One major finding of this study is that reform brought about change, which was complex and took many forms. Reform of kindergarten education in China started in the beginning of the 1980s characterized by a great number of experimental programs that were created locally but inspired by Western influence. The reform mood in other educational fields often existed in individual kindergartens’ curricula. The appearance of “Regulations for Kindergarten (trial)” at the end of the 1980s represented a symbolic policy change: a new formulation of educational goals, educational and management principles, and material and staff requirements for kindergarten. The local process of restructuring kindergarten system and decentralizing administration in the 1990s, which reflected the demands for national reform, fostered different strategies for implementing the central and local policies. At the same time, in response to demands for social transformation and the single-child policy, there have been changes in the ideology of early childhood education. New ideas about child development and the mission of early childhood education reflect these changes.

Inevitably, the process of reform has been unsystematic, incoherent, inconsistent, and unstable. Every stage of the reform has had a current “key” task. Kindergarten practitioners usually leave the previous task and turn to the new focus. In addition, a related issue of reform is faddism. Schools, districts, and states are often under tremendous pressure to reform. Innovation and reform are thought of being big business, politically and economically. For many people, the temptation to latch on to the quick fix is great. They go along with the fashion and react uncritically to innovations as they come and go.

These features of change reflected a reform philosophy of the post-Mao’s leadership of China. As famous as his pragmatic economic philosophy “it doesn't matter if a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice”, Deng Xiaoping added the metaphor for the post-Mao’s reforms – “crossing the river by feeling for the stones underfoot”. Most interpretations of this expression stress the importance of proceeding in an incremental manner. You could have no theories and plans before you cross a river, rather, you should take one step and
feel for the stones under your feet before taking another – adjusting your action in the process. The message is not the traditional “plan, then do” but “do, then plan... and do and plan some more.” This strategy is more flexible and effective in giving play to the creativity and initiative of the reformers, who are hedged in less by rules, regulations, and convention. However, you cannot find stones mere where you want them. You must take them as they are -- that is, the history, the outcome of the past reforms. If you cross a river by following the stones, you are constrained by the pattern you find. Furthermore, you may feel uncertain about every next step. Your steps may be haltingly, back and forth, and chopping and changing. Your action may be unsystematic, short-sighted, and even chaotic. The reform of Chinese kindergarten education has been influenced by this philosophy, which is characterized by a groping process, unevenness in the development of individual institutions, uncertainty for the further reform, and short-termism.

To sum up, the reforms in the field of early childhood education in China are neither wholly centrally controlled nor wholly locally created. Rather, what emerges is a combination of centralized and decentralized planning and groping, an iterative and interactive process of changes in policy and practice. Reform brought about change that was complex and took many forms.

8.3 Consequences of the Change

Researching into reform and change in a specific field, one recurring analytic problem concerns definitions of success and failure. If evaluation can be done by examining whether the outcomes are consistent with the goals, questions remain: how to distinguish formal goals and informal goals, \(^{334}\) how to interpret the relation and distinction between central goals and local goals, and how to identify unintended consequences? Evaluation criteria are problematic. Yet, determining success or failure of kindergarten educational reform in China is not the thrust of this study, and predicting the exact character

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\(^{334}\) By formal goals, I mean the goals that are centrally defined; by informal goals, I mean those based on extrapolation from central and local authorities’ actions.
of the next shift is beyond my ability. But discussing the short-term consequences of these changes might be more significant for the future reform.

Too often, change-related problems are ignored, denied, or treated as an occasion for blame and defense. Success in school reform efforts is much more likely when problems are treated as natural, expected phenomenon. While acknowledging the positive aspect of reform in Chinese kindergarten educational system, there is a tendency to ignore the potential dangers – or unintended consequences – of these changes.

One danger is that the reform process brings about hierarchy and inequality. Attempts to diversify provision have tended to reinforce, rather than diminish, hierarchies and other educational variations within the educational system and between kindergartens. As the national goal of education reform is closely related to the demand of the economic development of the country, the government has given greater concern to higher education, vocational training programs, and upper secondary schooling. Thus, a rigid classification and differentiation of the entire educational system has been re-established, in which preschool education -- defined as informal education -- has tacitly been allocated the lowest status in the whole system. This is vertical differentiation. Furthermore, the same process of differentiation has been reproduced within the system of kindergarten education itself. The proliferation of types of kindergartens (kindergartens with distinguishing feature in art or other special fields, boarding kindergartens, experimental kindergartens, Montessori kindergartens, and so on) and the practice of grading and classifying kindergartens occur with unequal status. The horizontal distinctions that are commonly made between “bad” and “good” kindergartens, between “ordinary” and “special” kindergartens are deepened.

A second danger occurs through what might be called benign oversight or partial attention. The case studies demonstrated a tendency for kindergarten administrators to focus on the economic management, giving less concern to the improvement of curriculum and delaying teachers’ vocational studies. The case studies also

335 See Table 2.
indicate that kindergarten personnel focus on the symbolic aspects of reform, leaving substantive activities unchanged. This conservative effect of the reform process results in some continuities in program and in classroom actions. In my contact with kindergarten teachers, I found gaps between the teacher’s words (goal-statements and self-description) and practical classroom actions (individual practices). One example is seen around the issue of using “educational activities” instead of “lessons”. I noticed that many teachers might be using the “new” words just following the fashion of the “discourse” in the circle of Chinese early childhood education, but their daily educational actions had not made great differences with before. In the interviews, it has been mentioned several times by the teachers themselves that what they now called the “educational activities” was in fact the same thing as “lessons” or “lecturing” in the past. In their words, “it is just a change of the name”. A disjuncture between goals for change and actual practice is evident.

An important consequence of the changes observed in kindergarten education is a growing educational imbalance that has serious social ramifications. Research on compulsory education in China has demonstrated widening gaps in educational access between urban and rural areas, between eastern developed region and western undeveloped region. My research, however, with absence of a survey of kindergartens in countryside and in western region of China, is thus not able to make a comparison to indicate the existence of this kind of gaps existing also in early childhood education. But some comparisons can be made. According to statistic data from Zhejiang Provincial Education Committee, the enrollment ratio of children in kindergarten was 64% at provincial level. But in Hangzhou and Ningbo, the enrollment ratio had reached over 99%, and 97.68% in Pinghu by the end of 1996. The lower ratio at provincial level was caused by the lower enrollment ratio in rural areas in Zhejiang. The imbalance between cities and countryside in children’s access to kindergarten is thus evident. And predictably, uneven economic and cultural development between regions may exaggerate this imbalance.

Another finding from the case studies is the gap between kindergartens in their ranges of innovative practices. Compared to the kindergartens I visited in other cities, the kindergartens in Pinghu have less done with innovating programs, encouraging responsibility and contract system, renewing teaching and play materials and equipment, and so on. In the process of carrying out reforms “according to local conditions”, the regional economic, political, and cultural differences may play a crucial role in determining the reform tempo and direction of the regions. This variation may remain, and even widen with further reforms.

Danger can also occur while concentrating on “raising standards (提高)” and “quality”. A number of kindergartens by their actions have shown their commitment to elite education. Ningbo English Kindergarten has taken a closed model of education, a distinctive program and advanced equipment, features that set it apart from other kindergartens. Non-elite kindergartens have to adjust their mission as best they can. There are increased numbers of different types of kindergartens with “distinctive feature” (i.e. providing special extra curriculum and programs such as art, computer, foreign language learning, and so on) in many urban areas over the country. The underlying message is that they provide a distinctive education, and in their perspective you are expected to be a person with such characteristics. Thus, “An education that privileges one child over another is giving the privileged child a corrupted education, even as it gives him or her a social or economic advantage.” These class-based inequalities in access to kindergarten and in knowledge, pedagogy and curricular orientation are likely to be reproduced and reinforced.

A central debate on kindergarten educational development, like in other fields of educational system, has been the balance between equity and efficiency. The recent emphasis on competition and individual excellence within the education system and the broad economy has been accompanied by much greater concern for efficiency, sometimes apparently at the expense of equity. The

marketisation and privatisation of education also provide ideal conditions for exacerbating existing inequalities.

To sum up, reform in Chinese kindergarten education is a groping process that allows much autonomy, involves much conflict, and produces both change and continuity. The reform intention -- to improve kindergarten education, also produces the prospect of re-instituting hierarchy, imbalance and inequality.
Appendix 1

Interview Questions (parents)

1. Appraisal of the current status of the kindergarten

1) What do you think of the environment, equipment and material conditions of this kindergarten? Why? Any suggestions?

2) What do you think of the arrangement of curriculum in this kindergarten (such as schedule, classes, and activities, etc.)? Why? Any suggestions?

3) Are you satisfied with the teachers' work (such as the teachers' attitude, sense of responsibility, and teaching ability, etc.)? Why? How should they do to be better?

4) Is your child satisfied with her/his kindergarten life? Why? How do you know that?

5) How much do you pay for the kindergarten fees? How much does it cover of your total family incomes? Whether or not do you have to pay any other extra money? If you do, how much? Are there any difficulties for your family to bear this expense? If there are, how do you solve the problem?

2. Parents' participation in kindergarten's work

1) How often does the kindergarten hold the parents meeting? What do you usually do in these meetings?

2) Do you often discuss with the teachers regarding your child's educational and developmental questions?

3) If you do not agree with the way of working of a teacher, are you going to tell her/him about your real opinions and suggestions? Do you think the teacher will take your advice if you hold on your views? Could you give any examples?
4) Have the parents any opportunities to participate in working out of kindergarten’s work and activities plans? How? What do you think of it?

3. Views on the essence of kindergarten education, child development, and adults’ role in child education and child development

1) What is the most important thing that your child should learn in kindergarten? Why? How do you think of the importance of kindergarten education for child development? Why?

2) What do you think of the requirements for a kindergarten teacher? Why?

3) Your opinion on what is the most important aspect of child development. Or in other words, what is your understanding of child development? Why?

4) As a parent, what do you think of your role and responsibility in your child’s development? Why?

5) Traditionally, it was believe to be important to have a “family rule” for children, what is your view of it? Why? Do you have any “family rule” at home? How is it?

6) Some people think that parents’ prestige is very important in family, do you agree with it? Why? If you do, how do you do in building up your prestige at home?

7) What would you give the definition to “a good child” or “a well-behaved child”?

8) What is you personal view on male teachers working in kindergartens?

4. Family education

1) Do you teach your child extra at home? If you do, what do you teach? How much time does your child spend on this learning? Why are you doing so?

2) Does your child go to any art or skill training classes after school? If she/he does, what does she/he learn in these classes?
Appendix 1

How much time does she/he usually spend on this learning (including class learning and homework, etc.)? How much do you pay for these classes? Why do you send your child to these training classes?

3) How is your family structure? What does your child usually do during the weekends and holidays?

5. Changes in kindergarten and family

1) Are there any changes in your child’s kindergarten influenced by the policy and practice of market economy (changes in organizing classroom teaching and activities, educational ideas, curriculum content, kindergarten administration and structure, and teachers’ attitude and action, etc.)? How do you think of these changes?

2) Are there any changes in your family influenced by the policy and practice of market economy (changes in family economic situation, family structure, ideas of family education, the characteristics of child, the needs and characteristics of the child, the concept of family, and the relationships between family members, etc.)? How do you think of these changes?

3) Most private kindergartens in China today charge higher fees. What do you think of this? If you had enough money, would you send your child to the private kindergartens? Why?

4) Do you think the problem of unemployment will bring about any trouble for kindergarten education, for example any economic problem for those children of unemployed people attending kindergarten education? If the answer is yes, how can this problem be solved?

6. Single-child policy and single-child education*

1) Is your child single-child?

2) It has been said that the phenomenon is quite common that the single-children are usually spoiled by their parents or grandparents at home. How is your child? What are the typical
characteristics of a spoiled child in general? How to correct the spoiled behaviour at home?

3) Do you think kindergartens are the proper place for correcting the spoiled behaviour of the single-children? Why? How do the kindergarten teachers do actually in practice? Does it produce any effects? Could you give us any examples?

4) Are there any changes dealing with the national and local single-child policies recently? Would you want to have more children if the policy permitted? Why?

5) The single-child policy may bring about some social problems, for example, since the public services for old man are not perfect in China, a single-children couple may have to take care of four parents and eight grandparents. As a parent of a single-child, are you worried about your life when you have got old? Why? How can you do with it?

* Questions for the single-child’ parents only.
Interview Questions (teachers)

1. Presentations on class and children

1) How many children in your class? What is the ratio between girls and boys? Why?
2) Could you make a general comment on the children in your class?
3) How is your work schedule? How do you think of it? Why? How could it be better? Why?

2. Personal experiences and appraisal of the status of the kindergarten

1) Your educational background and work experiences.
2) Do you like your career? Why? Are you satisfied with your salary? Why? Do you have any secondary occupations? Have you ever thought about to change your occupation? Why?
3) How are the housing, medical and other welfare conditions in this kindergarten?
4) What do you think of the environment, equipment, material conditions, and interpersonal relationships in this kindergarten? Are you satisfied with them? Why? How could they be better?
5) What do you think of the administrative work of this kindergarten? Why? How could it be improved?
6) Could you identify the “director responsibility system”?
7) How does the kindergarten arrange the teachers’ advanced studies (for example the time, requirements, locations, and subjects, etc.)? Have you had any opportunities to have teachers’ vocational in-service studies? If you have, do you think these vocational studies are important and benefit you or not? Why?
8) How do people evaluate teachers’ professional work in this kindergarten? Who are in charge of this evaluation work? Does it produce any effects? Why? How could it be better?
3. Arrangement of kindergarten activities

1) Could you describe the daily schedule for children in kindergarten? Is this schedule good and reasonable? Why? How could it be better?

2) What textbooks and teaching materials have you been using? Are you supposed to choose textbooks and teaching methods, to arrange children's activities, and to manage classroom affairs by yourselves? How?

3) Are there any teaching (curriculum) experiments and research projects on going in this kindergarten? If there are, could you describe them?

4. Relationship between kindergarten and families

1) How often to have a parents' meeting? What do you usually do in these meetings? Does it produce any effects? Why?

2) How often do you contact parents individually? How? Under what situation you would have an individual talk with the parents? And under what situation the parents would have an individual talk with you?

3) What aspects of child development are stressed by the parents? Why? Do you think today's parents (most of the parents) have good knowledge about the pedagogy, child education, child psychology and child development or not? Why?

4) Has it happened in your experience that there have been conflicts between you and the parents on how to treat and educate a child? If it has, how did you solve these problems?

5) Do you think it is necessary or important to have parents' cooperation in kindergartens' work? Why and how?

5. Views on the essence of kindergarten education, child development, and adults' role in child education and child development

1) What is the most important thing that children should learn in kindergarten? Why? How do you think of the importance of kindergarten education in child development? Why?
Appendix I

2) What is the most important thing that the kindergarten should provide for children? Why?

3) What is your understanding of child development? Or in other words, what is your own opinion on the most important aspects of child development? Why? How should kindergarten education promote child development? As a teacher, how can you do in practice to promote children development? Any examples?

4) How much do you know about early childhood education in the US, Japan, and other Western countries? How did you get these information? What is your view on these Western educational theories and practices? Or in other words, what ideas can be applied in Chinese kindergartens; and what are not suited to Chinese conditions? Why?

5) How much do you know about the child developmental theories? How did you get this knowledge? How do you apply this knowledge into your classroom practice? What are your views and experiences of adapting these theories to Chinese kindergarten?

6) What is your understanding of “respecting child”? Why? How do you do with it?

7) How do you do in keeping the classroom discipline? How do you use the ways of praise and criticism in your classroom? Any examples?

8) How do you arrange the group and individual activities (for example the ratio between group activities and individual activities)? Why?

9) How would you identify “a good child” or “a well behaved child”?

6. Single-child education

1) How many single-children in your class? It has been said that the phenomenon is quite common that the single-children are spoiled by their parents or grandparents at home. What is your view on it? In the case of your class, are there any children can be identified as spoiled-children? What are the typical characteristics of a spoiled child?
2) If there are “spoiled children” in your class, do you think it is necessary and possible to correct their behaviour through kindergarten educational activities? Why and how? Could you give us some examples?

7. Changes and reform

1) Your personal view on what has been the greatest change in kindergarten since the national reform and the open-door policy. Any examples?
2) People talk a lot about “Chinese characteristics” recently, what are your opinions on “kindergarten education with Chinese characteristics”? What does it mean? Why?
3) How do you think of the status quo of collectivism education in kindergarten? How is the situation of kindergarten education under marketisation?
4) What have been the benefits and costs for kindergarten education brought about by the reform efforts?
5) What is your personal view on male teachers working in kindergartens?
Appendix 1

Interview Questions (administrators)

1. Presentations on the kindergarten

1) How many children totally and groups in this kindergarten? What is the ratio between boys and girls? Why? Do you have any requirements for the entrance of children? How is the status of hardware in this kindergarten?

2) How many staff in this kindergarten? What is the ratio between teachers and children? How is the status of qualification of the teachers in this kindergarten?

2. Teachers and teaching management

1) How is the system of teachers’ employment? (Do you have any authority to hire and fire teachers?)

2) What is your personal view on the most important requirements to be a qualified teacher? Or in other words, what kind of teachers would you like to employ?

3) How do you evaluate teachers’ work? What is the criterion for evaluating a teacher? Does the result of evaluation connect to the teachers’ incomes, titles, material benefits, and so on? How?

4) How do you arrange the teachers’ vocational studies (including in-service studies)? Why?

5) Are there any teachers in your kindergarten having the secondary occupations? If there are, what is your personal view on this phenomenon? What are you supposed to do with it as a director or administrator of the kindergarten? Why?

6) What do you think of the autonomy of teachers in arranging and organizing their classroom activities (for example to choose teaching materials, teaching methods, and timetable, etc.)? Any examples?

7) Are there any curriculum research or experiments on going in this kindergarten? What is your plan for further curriculum reform?
8) How do you work out the kindergarten educational and teaching plans?

3. Administration of the kindergarten

1) Could you describe the status of kindergarten funds, in which how much are allocated by the local government, by educational authorities, and by the organization the kindergarten attached to, and how much are raised by kindergarten itself?
2) How much is the fees for per child per semester?
3) How do you make a budget (for example teachers' and personnel' salaries, buying books, toys, equipment, teaching materials, and food, etc.)?
4) Does this kindergarten charge extra money for the children coming from other districts? How much is the "supporting fees"? Why?
5) Are there any problems and difficulties in kindergarten economic administration? If there are, how would you solve these problems? What changes would take place in administration in the future?
6) Could you identify the "director responsibility system"? What is the limit of a director's responsibility by your own experience? How much autonomy does a director have actually in her/his work? Any examples?
7) What is the function of a party secretary in kindergarten's daily work today? Could you explain how the strategy of separating the functions between Party group and administrative group works in practice. Any examples?
8) Are there any documents or work plans for kindergarten education provided by local government, local educational authorities, or the Women Federation? How do these institutions guide, supervise and evaluate individual kindergarten's work?
9) What do you think of the administrative work of this kindergarten? Are there any problems and difficulties in your work? How do you solve these problems? What changes will take place in the future?

4. Changes and reform
Appendix 1

1) How does this kindergarten do with the question of linking up kindergarten education and primary education (for example the problem of repetition in textbooks)? How do you solve these problems?

2) How many private kindergartens are there in this district? What have been the features of this kind of kindergartens?

3) What are your personal views on privatisation and entrepreneurial activity of kindergarten?

4) What have been the greatest changes in kindergarten since the national reform and the open-door policy? Do you think the problem of unemployment will bring about any trouble for kindergarten education, for example are there any economic problem for those children of unemployed people attending kindergarten education? How would you solve this problem?

5) How do you think of the future of your kindergarten? How do you think of the future of the development of Chinese kindergarten education?

6) People talk a lot about the "Chinese characteristics" recently, what are your opinions on "kindergarten education with Chinese characteristics"? What does it mean and why?

7) What is your personal view on male teachers working in kindergartens?
Appendix 2

Decree of the State Education Commission of the People’s Republic of China

No. 2

"Regulations for Kindergarten (trial)", enacted by the work meeting of the State Education Commission on May 16, 1989, is hereby promulgated. The trial implementation will start from February 11, 1990.

Minister Li, Tie Yin

June 5, 1989

Regulations for Kindergarten (trial)

Chapter 1 General Principles

1. In order to promote scientific management of kindergarten and improve the qualities of care and education, we now lay down this regulation.

2. Kindergarten is the institution serving children from the age of 3 to the age of 6. Kindergarten is the preparatory stage of school education.

3. The tasks of kindergarten are to carry out the policy of combining care with education; to offer education promoting all-round and harmonious development of the children’s bodies and minds; and to provide facilities for parents to take part in construction of socialism.
4. Kindergartens can be established on the basis of one-, two-, or three-year systems.
5. The major goals of care and education in kindergarten are to:
   Improve the physically and functionally harmonious development of infants; build up their health; cultivate their habits of hygiene and their interest in participating in physical activities.
   Strengthen infants' fundamental abilities of associating with others by means of their sense organs and language; enhance their understanding of the environment; cultivate their interests and their capacity of working with their hands; and develop their intelligence.
   Arouse children's love of their hometowns, motherland, collectives and manual labour; cultivate their moral character, behaviour, honesty, courage, diligence, friendliness, politeness and discipline; and cultivate their bright and cheerful dispositions.
   Arouse children's temperaments and interests in feelings and expressing beauty.
6. Kindergarten can be established on the basis of full-time, half-day, temporary, seasonal and boarding forms.

**Chapter 2 Enrolment and grouping system of kindergarten**

7. Kindergarten enrols children every autumn. Vacancies can be filled at any time of the year.
   Children from families of revolutionary martyrs, or with disabled and single parents are given priority enrolment.
8. Conditions permitting, kindergartens run by enterprises, institutions, work units and the army shall also be open to the children of nearby local residents.
9. Before enrolling in kindergarten children shall take a medical check-up in accordance with the regulations for hygiene and health formulated by the department of public hygiene.
   Kindergarten enrolment shall not be made on the basis of any kinds of examinations or tests.
10. A kindergarten shall only be so large that it is suitable for children's physical and psychological development and convenient to kindergarten management.
The number of children in each group shall generally be: 25 in the junior class (3-4-year-olds), 30 in the middle class (4-5-year-olds), 35 in the senior class (5-6-year-olds), 30 in the mixed class and less than 40 in pre-primary class. The number of children in each group in boarding kindergartens shall be less than in ordinary kindergarten.

Chapter 3  Hygiene and health care in kindergarten

11. Kindergarten shall work conscientiously for promoting children’s physical and psychological health.
   Kindergarten shall strictly implement the ”Regulations for Hygienic and Health Care in Nursery and Kindergarten” and other regulations issued by the Ministry of Health and Hygiene.

12. Kindergarten shall work out a daily schedule for the children. The interval between meals shall not be less than three and a half hours. The time for children’s outdoor activities shall not be less than two hours in full-time kindergarten, and three hours in boarding kindergarten.

13. Kindergarten shall arrange a health check-up system for the children and set up health files. The general check-up shall be made once a year. Children’s height shall be measured twice a year, and their weight and eyesight shall be checked four times a year.
   Kindergarten shall pay attention to infants’ oral hygiene and their eyesight.

14. Kindergarten shall institute the systems of hygiene disinfection and sick child isolation, and carry out planned immunisation and the prevention and treatment of diseases.
   Smoking is strictly forbidden in the areas for children’s activities.

15. Kindergarten shall institute the systems of protecting and checking up the safety of houses, installations, fire-fighting equipment, traffic and the supervision of food and medicines.
   Kindergarten shall intensify its education regarding safety for children.

17. Kindergarten shall provide children with drinking facilities.

Kindergarten shall cultivate good defecation and urination habits. Kindergartens are strictly forbidden to restrict the number of times and points of time for children’s defecation and urination.

18. Kindergarten shall carry out physical activities suited to the children. The time for outdoor physical activities shall not be less than one hour per day.

Kindergarten shall fully utilize the natural elements like sunlight, air and water, in order to build up children’s physique, adaptability and resistance to various diseases in a planned way.

Children with weak constitutions or deformations shall receive special care.

19. In summer, kindergarten shall prevent heatstroke and keep a low the temperature; in winter kindergarten shall prevent frostbite and keep the children warm.

Chapter 4   **Education in kindergarten**

20. The following principles apply to the education in kindergarten:

Physical, intellectual, moral and aesthetic education shall interact and be organically combined with each other.

Kindergarten education shall act in accordance with the laws of children’s growth of body and mind and conform to the characteristics of their age. Educators shall pay attention to children’s individual differences, teach them in accordance with their aptitude, and stress the development of their personalities, thus promoting the healthy development of children’s individuality.

Educators shall be geared to the needs of whole children, love them, and educate them by means of encouragement and enlightenment.

Educators shall rationally organize comprehensive education permeating activities.
Kindergarten shall create favourable conditions of education and provide children with opportunities to act and assert themselves.

Play shall be regarded as the basic activity of kindergarten. Education shall permeate all activity.

21. Children’s daily activities shall be organized with periods of resting. The stress shall be on children’s practical and free activities.

22. Kindergarten’s daily life shall be organized on the basis of concrete conditions. Kindergarten shall set up necessary and proper conventions, and uphold the principles of being consistent, persistent and flexible. Educators shall cultivate children’s habits and their ability to take care of themselves.

23. Kindergarten education shall be a purposeful, planned and multiform educational process in which children can act on their own initiative.

The content of educational activities shall be selected and organized in a planned way in accordance with educational goals, children’s actual ability levels and interests, and based on the principle of following in order and step by step.

Educational activities shall be organized so as to make full use of the favourable conditions of the surroundings. Kindergarten shall provide opportunities for children to act by means of flexible participation in collective and individual activities. The stress shall be on the processes of children’s activities, thus promoting children’s all-round development.

24. Play is an important way to carry out all-round development education.

Children’s play shall be selected and guided in accordance with the age characteristics of the children.

Kindergarten shall create favourable playing conditions (time, space and materials) for the children. The functional multiplicity and variability of playthings shall be emphasized. Teachers shall respect children’s desire to choose form of play and encourage them to produce their own toys.

Teachers shall provide proper guidance for children in their play and keep them joyful, thus promoting an overall development of children’s ability and personality.
25. Moral education in kindergarten shall stress the emotional education and the cultivation of children’s behaviour and lay stress on the imperceptible influences. Moral education shall be carried out in children’s daily life and activities. Kindergartens are strictly forbidden to impair children’s physical and mental health, for example through maltreatment, corporal punishment or corporal punishment in disguise.

26. Kindergarten shall cultivating children’s psychological character within the process of their activities in accordance with their different levels of psychological development. Special emphasis shall be laid on the individual diversity of children, which means that rigid uniformity is not required in children’s activities.

27. In kindergarten everybody shall speak the common speech of Chinese. Minority nationalities are allowed to speak their native languages in their own kindergartens.

28. Kindergarten and primary school shall maintain close ties and cooperate with each other. The educational links between these two stages shall be emphasized.

Chapter 5 Kindergarten buildings

29. Kindergarten shall have the room for activities, infant toilets, washrooms, offices and kitchens. Conditions permitting, there shall also be set up room for health care, playing, physical activities, music and a reception room. Boarding kindergartens shall have bedrooms, isolation wards, bathrooms, washhouses, and staff rooms.

30. Kindergarten shall have enough space for outdoor activities. Kindergarten shall create facilities for play and physical activities, sand pits, mini-farms, mini-plantations, etc. Kindergarten shall plant trees to enhance the beauty of the surroundings.

31. Kindergarten shall equipped with tables, chairs, toy-shelves, toilet articles, necessary teaching aids, toys, books, and musical instruments.

The boarding kindergartens shall have the single beds for children.
Teaching aids and tools shall meet the requirements of safety, hygiene and educational demands.
Kindergarten shall draw on local resources and produce teaching aids and toys adapted to local conditions.

32. The kindergarten buildings, the requirements of architectural design and the equipment of teaching aids and toys shall comply with the stipulations of the state departments.

Chapter 6 Kindergarten staff

33. Kindergarten shall have a principal, a vice principal, teachers, nurses, medical staff, office clerks, kitchen staff and other workers.

34. Kindergarten staff shall love infant educational work, love children, learn the professional knowledge and skills, raise their educational level and professional proficiency, have a sound moral character, be worthy of the name of teacher, be devoted to their duties and be in good health.

35. In addition to the requirement of Article 34, the principal shall be graduated from kindergarten normal schools (including kindergarten normal classes in vocational school) or have professional credentials as a kindergarten teacher, and have administrative abilities and experience from practical work.

The principals are appointed or engaged by the owner of the kindergarten. Their appointment shall be reported to the educational administrative departments.

The principals shall be in charge of the overall work of the kindergarten. Their major duties are to:

1) Implement and execute the relevant laws, regulations, principles, and strategies of the state and the stipulations of the department responsible for the work.
2) Exercise leadership in educational, hygienic and security work.
3) Take charge of the work of setting up and implementing various rules and regulations.
4) Take charge of the work of engaging and deploying staff; direct, check up and evaluate the work of teachers and other staff members; reward and punish staff members.

5) Strengthen the ideological work of the staff members; create the essential conditions for the staffs' political, cultural and vocational studies; care for and progressively improve the life and work conditions of staff members and protect their rights and interests.

6) Manage the houses, gardens, equipment and funds of the kindergarten.

7) Organize and guide the work with parents.

36. Kindergarten teachers shall act in accordance with the requirements of Article 34, section 1.

Kindergarten teachers are appointed and engaged by the principal.

Kindergarten teachers shall be in charge of the overall work of their class. Their major duties are to:

1) Set up educational work plans and organize the implementation work in accordance with both the kindergarten educational program stipulated by the state and the character and individual differences of the children.

2) Observe and analyse the children, and keep records of their development.

3) Obey the regulations of safety, hygiene and health care, guide and cooperate with the nurses.

4) Be in regular contact with the parents in order to understand the children’s home conditions; discuss educational measures with the parents.

5) Take part in vocational studies and educational research activities.

6) Regularly report back to the principal; subject to the principal’s check-up and guidance.

37. Kindergarten nurses shall be graduated from, at least, lower secondary school. In addition to the requirements of Article 34, she shall have vocational training in infant nursing.

The major duties of nurse are to:
1) Take charge of the work of cleaning the houses, installations and surroundings.
2) Take care of the children under the supervision of the teachers; cooperate with the teachers in organizing the educational activities.
3) Obey the regulations of safety, and hygiene and health care under the supervision of medical staff and teachers.
4) Take care of children’s clothing, and of the equipment and utensils of the class.

38. Kindergarten medical staff shall act in accordance with the requirements of Article 34. Doctors shall be graduated from medical college; medical practitioners and nurses shall be graduated from secondary medical school or have the credentials approved by the administrative department of hygiene.

Kindergarten health workers shall be graduated from upper secondary school and have vocational training in infants’ health care.

Their major duties are to:

1) Assist the principal in organizing and implementing the relevant rules, regulations and institutions of hygiene and health care.
2) Balance and improve children’s meals, check up on the hygiene of food and drink, and surroundings.
3) Be in contact with the local departments and organizations of hygiene and health care; carry out the work of planned immunisation and prevention and treatment of diseases in time.
4) Propagate general knowledge about infants’ hygiene and health care.
5) Take good care of the medical apparatus and instruments, and medicines.

39. Other kindergarten staff shall act in accordance with the relevant stipulations of the government.

40. Kindergarten shall give awards to persons who perform their duties conscientiously and get good results in their work in accordance with the relevant stipulations.
Kindergarten shall criticize and educate persons who do not perform their duties, and take administrative disciplinary action against persons who have made serious mistakes.

Chapter 7 Kindergarten funds

41. The owners of the kindergartens are responsible for raising the funds. The standards of the funds for the kindergartens, established by the local governments, shall be laid down by the governments of the provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government. The standards of the funds for other kinds of kindergartens shall be laid down by the owners or the departments responsible for the work at a higher level using the above-mentioned standards as a reference.

42. The standards of the kindergarten fees shall be laid down by the educational administrative departments of the provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government jointly with the other departments concerned.

Kindergartens are not allowed to collect additional fees by teaching children specialized skills. Kindergartens are not allowed to seek profits by means of children's performance.

Temporary charges in exceptional cases shall be collected with the consent of the parents and be reported to the next higher administrative department.

43. The stipulations of the management of funds shall be laid down by the educational administrative departments of the provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central Government jointly with the other departments concerned.

Kindergarten funds shall be reasonably spent within the limits of the stipulations. Kindergarten funds shall not be used for any other purpose.

44. The funds of collective or private kindergartens shall the need for care and education. These kindergartens shall use a proper ratio of the funds to improve the conditions of the kindergartens, and can also set aside a proper ratio of the funds for the reserve fund of the kindergartens.
45. Children’s boarding fees shall be managed democratically and be spent only on children’s boarding expenses. Kindergarten shall give monthly reports of boarding expenses to the parents.

46. Kindergarten shall institute the systems of financial budgets, and examinations and verifications of the final accounts and strictly enforce the relevant financial rules of the state.

Chapter 8 Kindergarten and infants’ families

47. Kindergarten shall cooperate with infants’ families on their own initiative, help parents create good conditions for family education, and propagate the knowledge of care and education.

48. Kindergarten shall regularly call the meetings with the parents, seriously analyse and incorporate parents’ suggestions on kindergarten educational and administrative work.

Kindergarten can arrange an open-day system for the parents.

49. Kindergarten can establish the parental committee.

The major tasks of the parental committee are to: help parents understand the plans and requirements of kindergarten work; help staff know the parents’ opinions and suggestions; and assert kindergarten in organizing the meetings to exchange experiences about family education.

The parental committee shall work under the direction of the principal.

Chapter 9 Kindergarten management

50. Kindergarten shall institute the principal responsibility system. The principal shall be in charge of the overall work of the kindergarten under the leadership of the owner and educational administrative department in accordance with this regulation.

Kindergarten can establish the kindergarten committee. The members of the committee shall consist of the representatives from teachers, nurses, medical and administrative personnel and the parents. The principal shall be the chairman of the committee.
Appendix 2

51. Kindergarten shall institute the system of staff meeting, and strengthen the democratic management and supervision of kindergarten work.

52. Kindergarten principals shall cooperate with the party organizations at the basic level and give full play to the role of the trade union, the Communist Youth League and the other organizations.

53. Kindergarten shall work out the annual plan, regularly assign and summarize the kindergarten work.

Kindergartens’ work shall be reported to the administrative department responsible for the kindergartens, and to the educational department in the end of each academic year.

54. Kindergarten shall subject themselves to the evaluation, supervision and direction of the educational supervisors.

55. Kindergarten shall institute the systems of educational research, professional file, financial management, kindergarten committee meeting, rewards and penalties, safety measures, and making contact with the families and primary schools.

56. Kindergarten can be open in winter and summer vocations. The staff members can work in turn. The concrete measures can be laid out by the owners.

Chapter 10 Supplementary articles

57. This regulation applies to all types of kindergartens in both urban and rural areas.

58. The educational administrative departments in each province, autonomous region and municipality directly under the Central Government can work out their own measures of implementation of this regulation in accordance with their local conditions.

59. The state Education Commission will take the responsibility of interpreting this regulation.

60. The trial implementation of this regulation shall start from 1 January 1990.
**Appendix 3**

Decree of the State Education Commission of the People’s Republic of China

No. 25

“Regulations for Kindergarten” is hereby promulgated, and the implementation will start from June 1, 1996. Decree No. 2 of the State Education Commission of the People’s Republic of China on “Regulations for Kindergarten (trial)”, which was issued on June 5, 1989, will be annulled at the same time.

Minister Zhu Kai Xuan

March 9, 1996

**Regulations for Kindergarten**

**Chapter 1 General Principles**

1. In order to promote scientific management of kindergarten and improve the qualities of care and education, we now lay down this regulation according to “Educational Law of People’s Republic of China”.

2. Kindergarten is the institution to carry out care and education for infants over the age of three. Kindergarten is the component part of elementary education and the basic stage of school education.

3. The tasks of kindergarten are: to carry out the policy of combining care with education; to offer education promoting all-round and harmonious development of the children’s bodies and minds; and to provide facilities for parents to work and study.
4. Children of kindergarten age from three to six (or seven). Kindergartens shall be established on the basis of three-year systems generally, as well as one- or two-year systems alternatively.

5. The major goals of care and education in kindergarten are to:

   - Improve the physically and functionally harmonious development of infants; build up their health; cultivate their habits of hygiene and life, and their interest in participating in physical activities.

   - Develop infants' intelligence; strengthen their fundamental abilities of associating with others by means of their sense organs and language; enhance their understanding of the environment; cultivate their interests, their thirst for knowledge, and their capacity of working with their hands.

   - Arouse children's love of their hometowns, motherland, collectives, manual labour and science; cultivate their moral character and behaviour of being honest, self-confident, fond of knowing, friendly, courageous, polite and discipline; and cultivate their bright and cheerful dispositions.

   - Arouse children's initial temperaments and interests in feelings and expressing beauty.

6. Respect and love infants, strictly forbidden to impair children's physical and mental health, for example through maltreatment, corporal punishment or corporal punishment in disguise.

7. Kindergarten can be established on the basis of full-time, half-day, temporary, seasonal and boarding forms. The above forms can be established separately or blindingly.

Chapter 2 Enrolment and grouping system of kindergarten

8. Kindergarten enrolls children every autumn. Vacancies can be filled at any time of the year.

Children from families of revolutionary martyrs, or with disabled and single parents are given priority enrolment.

9. Conditions permitting, kindergartens run by enterprises, institutions, work units and the army shall also be open to the children of nearby local residents.
10. Before enrolling in kindergarten, children shall take a medical check-up in accordance with the regulations for hygiene and health formulated by the department of public hygiene.

Kindergarten enrolment shall not be made on the basis of any kinds of examinations or tests.

11. A kindergarten shall only be so large that it is suitable for children's physical and psychological development and convenient to kindergarten management.

The number of children in each group shall generally be: 25 in the junior class (3-4-year-olds), 30 in the middle class (4-5-year-olds), 35 in the senior class (5-6-year-olds), 30 in the mixed class, and less than 40 in pre-primary class.

The number of children in each group in boarding kindergartens shall be less than in ordinary kindergarten.

Kindergarten children can be grouped based on their ages. It is also permitted a mixed age grouping.

Chapter 3  Hygiene and health care in kindergarten


Kindergarten shall strictly implement the "Regulations for Hygienic and Health Care in Nursery and Kindergarten" and other regulations concerning hygiene and care.

13. Kindergarten shall work out a daily schedule for the children. The interval between meals shall not be less than three and a half hours. The time for children's outdoor activities shall not be less than two hours under normal condition, and three hours in boarding kindergarten. In colder- and higher-temperature areas the time for outdoor activities can be fluctuated in the light of circumstances.

14. Kindergarten shall arrange a health check-up system for the children and set up health files. The general check-up shall be made once a year. Children's height and eyesight shall be measured twice a year, and their weight shall be checked four times a year. Kindergarten shall make regular analysis and evaluation on infants' health and their development.
Kindergarten shall pay attention to infants’ oral hygiene and their eyesight.

15. Kindergarten shall institute the systems of hygiene disinfection and sick child isolation, and carry out planned immunisation and the prevention and treatment of diseases.

Smoking is strictly forbidden in the areas for children’s activities.

16. Kindergarten shall institute the systems of protecting and checking up the safety of houses, installations, fire-fighting equipment, traffic, the supervision of food and medicines, and taking and picking up infants to and from, thus to prevent any kinds of accidents.

Kindergarten shall intensify its education regarding safety for children.

17. Kindergarten shall provide proper meals for children, compose recipes for nutritious meals, and regularly count and analyse the volume of taking food and absorbing nourishment of infants.

18. Kindergarten shall provide children with drinking facilities.

Kindergarten shall cultivate good defecation and urination habits. Kindergartens are strictly forbidden to restrict the numbers and points of time for children’s defecation and urination.

19. Kindergarten shall carry out physical activities suited to the children. The time for outdoor physical activities shall not be less than one hour per day. Kindergarten shall strengthen physical exercise of infants in winter.

Kindergarten shall fully utilize the natural elements like sunlight, air and water, in order to build up children’s physique, adaptability and resistance to various diseases in a planned way.

Children with weak constitutions or deformations shall receive special care.

20. In summer, kindergarten shall prevent heatstroke and keep a low the temperature; in winter, kindergarten shall prevent frostbite and keep the children warm.

Chapter 4  Education in kindergarten

21. The following principles apply to the education in kindergarten:
Physical, intellectual, moral and aesthetic education shall interact and be organically combined with each other.

Kindergarten education shall act in accordance with the laws of children’s growth of body and mind and conform to the characteristics of their age. Educators shall pay attention to children’s individual differences, teach them in accordance with their aptitude, and stress the development of their personalities, thus promoting the healthy development of children’s individuality.

Educators shall be geared to the needs of whole children, love them, and educate them by means of encouragement and enlightenment.

Educators shall rationally organize comprehensive education permeating all activities of infants’ daily life, and give full play of the role of different means of education and their interaction.

Kindergarten shall create favourable conditions of education and provide children with opportunities to act and assert themselves.

Play shall be regarded as the basic activity of kindergarten. Education shall permeate all activity.

22. Children’s daily activities shall be organized with periods of resting. The stress shall be on children’s practical, pleasant and free activities.

23. Kindergarten’s daily life shall be organized on the basis of concrete conditions. Kindergarten shall set up necessary and proper conventions, uphold the principles of being consistent, persistent and flexible. Educators shall cultivate children’s habits and their ability to take care of themselves.

24. Kindergarten education shall be a purposeful, planned and multiform educational process in which children can act on their own initiative.

The content of educational activities shall be selected and organized in a planned way in accordance with educational goals, children’s actual ability levels and interests, and based on the principle of following in order and stepping by step.

Educational activities shall be organized so as to make full use of the favourable conditions of the surroundings. Kindergarten shall provide opportunities for children to act by means of flexible participation in collective and individual activities. The stress shall
be on the processes of children’s activities, thus promoting infants’ development at different levels.

25. Play is an important way to carry out all-round development education.

Children’s play shall be selected and guided in accordance with the age characteristics of the children.

Kindergarten shall create favourable playing conditions (time, space and materials) for the children. The functional multiplicity and variability of playthings shall be emphasized.

Teachers shall respect children’s desire to choose the form of play and encourage them to produce their own toys, provide proper guidance for children in their play and keep them joyful in accordance with their actual experiences and interests, thus promoting an overall development of children’s ability and personality.


27. Kindergarten shall cultivating children’s psychological character within the process of their activities in accordance with their different levels of psychological development. Special emphasis shall be laid on the individual diversity of children, which means that rigid uniformity is not required in children’s activities.

28. In kindergarten everybody shall speak the common speech of Chinese. Minority nationalities are allowed to speak their native languages in their own kindergartens.

29. Kindergarten and primary school shall maintain close ties and cooperate with each other. The educational links between these two stages shall be emphasized.

Chapter 5 Kindergarten buildings and equipment

30. Kindergarten shall have the room for activities, infant toilets, washrooms, health care, offices and kitchens. Conditions permitting, there shall also be set up room for music, playing, physical activities, and reception.
Boarding kindergartens shall have bedrooms, isolation wards, bathrooms, laundry-rooms, and staff rooms.

31. Kindergarten shall have enough space for outdoor activities. Kindergarten shall create facilities for play and physical activities, sand pits, mini-farms, mini-zoo, and mini-plantations, etc.

Kindergarten shall plant trees to enhance the beauty of the surroundings.

32. Kindergarten shall equipped with tables, chairs, toy-shelves, toilet articles, necessary teaching aids, toys, books, and musical instruments.

   Boarding kindergartens shall have the single beds for children.
   Teaching aids and tools shall meet the requirements of safety, hygiene and educational demands.
   Kindergarten shall draw on local resources and produce teaching aids and toys adapted to local conditions.

33. The kindergarten buildings, the requirements of architectural design and the equipment of teaching aids and toys shall comply with the stipulations of the state departments.

Chapter 6  Kindergarten staff

34. Kindergarten shall have proper number of principal, vice principal, teachers, nurses, medical staff, office clerks, kitchen staff and other workers according to the size of the kindergarten.

35. Kindergarten staff shall uphold the basic line of the Party, love infant educational work, love children, learn the professional knowledge and skills, raise their educational level and professional proficiency, have a sound moral character, be worthy of the name of teacher, be devoted to their duties and be in good health.

36. In addition to the requirement of Article 35, the director shall be graduated from kindergarten normal schools (including kindergarten normal classes in vocational school) or above, and have administrative abilities and experience from practical work.

   The directors are appointed or engaged by the owner of the kindergarten. Their appointment shall be reported to the educational administrative departments.
The directors shall be in charge of the overall work of the kindergarten. Their major duties are to:

1) Implement and execute the relevant laws, regulations, principles, and strategies of the state and the stipulations of the department responsible for the work.
2) Exercise leadership in educational, hygienic and security work.
3) Take charge of the work of setting up and implementing various rules and regulations.
4) Take charge of the work of engaging and deploying staff; direct, check up and evaluate the work of teachers and other staff members; reward and punish staff members.
5) Strengthen the ideological work of the staff members; create the essential conditions for the staffs’ political, cultural and vocational studies; care for and progressively improve the life and work conditions of staff members and protect their rights and interests.
6) Manage the houses, gardens, equipment and funds of the kindergarten.
7) Organize and guide the work with parents.
8) Be responsible for contacting and cooperating with communities.

37. Kindergarten teachers shall act in accordance with the requirements of Article 35, section 1. Kindergarten teachers are appointed and engaged by the principal.

Kindergarten teachers shall be in charge of the overall work of their class. Their major duties are to:

1) Observe and analyse the children, set up educational work plans and organize the implementation work in accordance with both the kindergarten educational program stipulated by the state and the character and individual differences of the children.
2) Obey the regulations of safety, hygiene and health care, guide and cooperate with the assistants.
3) Be in regular contact with the parents in order to understand the children’s home conditions; discuss educational measures with the parents.
4) Take part in vocational studies and educational research activities.
5) Regularly report back to the principal; subject to the principal’s check-up and guidance.

38. Kindergarten assistant shall be graduated from, at least, lower secondary school. In addition to the requirements of Article 35, she shall have vocational training in infant nursing.

The major duties of assistant are to:

1) Take charge of the work of cleaning the houses, installations and surroundings.
2) Take care of the children under the supervision of the teachers; cooperate with the teachers in organizing the educational activities.
3) Obey the regulations of safety, and hygiene and health care under the supervision of medical staff and teachers.
4) Take care of children’s clothing, and of the equipment and utensils of the class.

39. Kindergarten medical staff shall act in accordance with the requirements of Article 35. Doctors shall be graduated from medical college; medical practitioners and nurses shall be graduated from secondary medical school or have the credentials approved by the administrative department of hygiene.

Kindergarten health workers shall be graduated from upper secondary school and have vocational training in infants’ health care.

Their major duties are to:

1) Assist the principal in organizing and implementing the relevant rules, regulations and institutions of hygiene and health care.
2) Balance and improve children’s meals, check up on the hygiene of food and drink, and surroundings.
3) Be in contact with the local departments and organizations of hygiene and health care; carry out the work of planned immunisation and prevention and treatment of diseases in time.
4) Propagate general knowledge about infants’ hygiene and health care.
5) Take good care of the medical apparatus and instruments, and medicines.

40. Other kindergarten staff shall act in accordance with the relevant stipulations of the government.

41. Kindergarten shall give awards to persons who perform their duties conscientiously and get good results in their work in accordance with the relevant stipulations.

42. Kindergarten shall criticize and educate persons who do not perform their duties, and take administrative disciplinary action against persons who have made serious mistakes.

Chapter 7  Kindergarten funds

43. The owners of the kindergartens are responsible for raising the funds.

44. The standards of the kindergarten fees shall be laid down by the educational administrative departments of the provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government jointly with the other departments concerned.

Kindergartens are not allowed to collect additional fees by teaching children specialized skills. Kindergartens are not allowed to seek profits by means of children’s performance.

45. The stipulations of the management of funds shall be laid down by the educational administrative departments of the provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central Government jointly with the other departments concerned.

Kindergarten funds shall be reasonably spent within the limits of the stipulations. Kindergarten funds shall not be used for any other purpose.

46. Any organizations and individuals are not allowed to establish kindergartens for seeking profits. The funds shall be ensured for the needs of care and education. Kindergartens shall use a proper ratio of the funds to improve the conditions of the kindergartens, and can also set aside a proper ratio of the funds for the reserve fund of the kindergartens.
47. Children’s boarding fees shall be managed democratically and be spent only on children’s boarding expenses. Kindergartens shall give monthly reports of boarding expenses to the parents.
48. Kindergarten shall institute the systems of financial budgets, and examinations and verifications of the final accounts and strictly enforce the relevant financial rules of the state.

Chapter 8 Kindergarten, infants’ families and communities

49. Kindergarten shall cooperate with infants’ families on their own initiative, help parents create good conditions for family education, propagate the knowledge of care and education, and undertake to educate infants jointly.
50. Kindergarten shall establish the system of contacting parents.
   Kindergarten can adopt multiple measures in guiding the parents to accurately understand the educational content and methods of kindergarten, regularly call the meetings with the parents, and receive parents’ visit and consultation.
   Kindergarten shall seriously analyse and incorporate parents’ suggestions on kindergarten educational and administrative work.
   Kindergarten can arrange an open-day system for the parents.
51. Kindergarten can establish the parental committee.
   The major tasks of the parental committee are to: help parents understand the plans and requirements of kindergarten work; help staff know the parents’ opinions and suggestions; and assert kindergarten in organizing the meetings to exchange experiences about family education.
   The parental committee shall work under the direction of the director.
52. Kindergarten shall take in close contact and cooperation with communities. Kindergarten shall propagate the knowledge of infant education, support cultural and educational activities within the community, and try to gain the support and participation of the community in kindergarten development.
Chapter 9  
Kindergarten management

53. Kindergarten shall institute the director responsibility system. The director shall be in charge of the overall work of the kindergarten under the leadership of the owner and educational administrative department in accordance with this regulation.

Kindergarten can establish the kindergarten committee. The members of the committee shall consist of the representatives from teachers, assistants, medical and administrative personnel and the parents. The director shall be the chairman of the committee.

54. Kindergarten shall institute the system of staff meeting, strengthen the democratic management and supervision of kindergarten work.

55. The party organizations at the basic level shall play a political key role. Kindergarten directors shall give full play to the role of the Communist Youth League, the trade union, and other organizations.

56. Kindergarten shall work out the annual plan, regularly assign and summarize the kindergarten work. Kindergartens’ work shall be reported to the administrative department responsible for the kindergartens, and to the educational administrative department in the end of each academic year.

57. Kindergarten shall subject themselves to the evaluation, supervision and direction of the educational supervisors.

58. Kindergarten shall institute the systems of educational research, professional file, financial management, kindergarten committee meeting, rewards and penalties, safety measures, and making contact with the families and primary schools.

Kindergarten shall make personnel roll, children’s register, and other statistic forms, and report to educational administrative department annually.

59. Kindergarten can be open in winter and summer vocations in principle of not affecting parents’ work. The staff members can work in turn. The concrete measures can be laid out by the owners.
Chapter 10 Supplementary articles

60. This regulation applies to all types of kindergartens in both urban and rural areas.

61. The educational administrative departments in each province, autonomous region and municipality directly under the Central Government can work out their own measures of implementation of this regulation in accordance with their local conditions.

62. The State Education Commission will take the responsibility of interpreting this regulation.

63. The trial implementation of this regulation shall start from June 1, 1996. The No. 2 decree of the State Education Commission of the People’s Republic of China on “Regulations for Kindergarten (trial)”, which was issued on June 5, 1989, will be annulled at the same time.
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