Playing in A Golden Cradle: Preschool and After-School Programs in Shanghai, PRC

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A “Golden” Childhood

China’s past, present, and future

Preschools in China

The Shanghai Children’s Palace
Childhood in China

- Population of approximately 1.31 billion (UNICEF, 2006)
  - 60% to 70% live in rural areas
  - 10% to 12% are children younger than 5 years

- Fertility rates declined from 5.9 in 1970 to 1.7 in 2004 (Hesketh, Lu, & Xing, 2005)
One-child policy (1979) changed family structure and interactions: the 4-2-1 syndrome

Grandparents provide care for many infants and children younger than 3
Reform and “opening up” policies were introduced in 1978.

Growing prosperity has resulted
- Per capita income has increased from $280 in 1985 to $1290 in 2005 (World Bank, 2006)

Health indicators reflect the impact of these trends: malnutrition and mortality rates among infants and children under 5 have declined, while immunization rates have increased.
Education Reform in China

- Elementary school enrollment is reported to be 99%, whereas in 1949 only 20% of children were in school.

- Preschool guidelines and training were established in the 1950s but most preschools were closed during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989).

- Approximately 70% of all children receive at least one year of preschool education (Xuezhong, 2000).

- Types of preschools today include full-day, half-day, and boarding programs.
What do we know about childhood in China?

- Chinese children draw well because they are taught how to draw (Winner, 1989):
  - “Chinese children do not draw childish drawings.”
  - “Chinese children behave very differently from American children, not only in art class but in most other situations as well.”
  - “Classes are very ‘teacher centered.’”
Chinese parents socialize their children from an early age to think in Confucian ways about learning, obligation, and relationships (Chao, 1994; Miller, Wiley, Fung, & Liang, 1997; Stevenson, Chen & Lee, 1993; Wu, 1996)

- *Chiao shun* ~ training
- *Guan* ~ to govern, love, care for
Preschool in Three Cultures showed that many preschools in China endorse traditional beliefs and practices but that parents and teachers are concerned about “spoiling” (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989)

Tai jao ~ too delicate, fussy, spoiled
Regional Differences

- China’s urban children outperform their rural counterparts in physical, cognitive, and social development (Xie & Young, 1999)
- Urban parents are more likely than rural parents to believe that early stimulation and education are beneficial and necessary
- Urban parents tend to enroll their children in preschool at an earlier age than rural parents
- Preschool quality tends to be higher in urban than rural settings: facilities, resources, training, compensation
Preschool at East China Normal University

- Children ages 3 to 6 years
- Tuition is 320 rmb/month (approx. $40)
- In materials, structure, curriculum, and atmosphere, there was little resemblance to the “Dong Feng” preschool (Tobin et al., 1989)
大熊猫

小三班

[手绘图画] 两个可爱的大熊猫

[手绘图画] 大熊猫在森林中

[手绘图画] 五颜六色的花朵和太阳
林奇小朋友说：
护士阿姨，您辛苦了！
我们小朋友说：
工作辛苦的护士阿姨，你们帮我们做操好吧！
The CWI Children’s Palace

- The first after-school activity center in China

- Established in 1953 by Song Qingling
  (aka Soong Ching-ling, Sung Ch’ing-ling, and Madame Sun Yat-sen)
Song Qingling (1892-1981)

- One of three daughters in the powerful Song family

“The one who loved China” (Seagrave, 1985)

- Educated at Wesleyan College for Women in Macon, Georgia (Class of 1913)
“Children can not just enjoy their childhood’s happiness in the Children’s Palace. It is more important for them to learn the capability of laboring alongside with learning to do profitable things for the collective, motherland, and well-being of the people!”

Song Qingling, 1958
The Children’s Palace Today

- Tuition is 200-300 rmb for 3 months of classes (approx. $25-$38)
- Classes are offered M-F 5:00-6:30 and all day on Saturdays
- Approximately 7,000 children (4-16 years) took classes at the Children’s Palace in Shanghai in 2004
- Classes in dance, music, art, theater, and science teach skills, build confidence, and stimulate curiosity and exploration (Yang Zhi Ying, 2005, personal communication)
The Children’s Palace is a “paradise for children and also a base for cultivating versatile persons.”

Interest groups and classes reflect children’s interests and have been designed in accordance with Song Qingling’s “Children’s Educational Thoughts” and with developmentally appropriate practices.

Other CWI Institutions

- The CWI International Peace Maternity and Child Health Hospital
- The CWI Nursery
- The CWI Kindergarten
- Soong Ching Ling Children Development Center
- The CWI Children’s Art Theatre
The CWI Nursery

- Established in 1950 by Song Qingling.
- A boarding and day-care preschool education unit for children ages 2-6.
- Promotes the “development of children’s health physically and mentally.”
- Integrates health care with education “in order to make scientific arrangements for the daily life of children.”
The CWI Kindergarten

- Educational objectives specify that children should be:
  - Healthy and confident
  - Polite and able to communicate
  - Curious and like to explore
  - Independent and cooperative
The Soong Ching Ling Children Development Center

- Gathers data and conducts research about children from birth to age 16.
- Publishes "Preschool Education Information and Research."
- Trains preschool teachers.
我要做文明小观众

1. 不在剧场内奔跑吵闹、大声喧哗；
2. 不在剧场内使用闪光灯；
3. 不在剧场内饮用罐装饮品和有色饮料；
4. 不让携带的物品，发出噪声，影响演出；
5. 关闭手机，或调至振动档；
6. 爱护公物，保持环境整洁。
“Arduously Cultivating a New Innovative and Exploring Generation for the 21st Century”

-Inscription from Jiang Zemin
What will happen to the golden cradle as China continues to grow and expand?

- Individual -- group orientation
- Creativity -- regimentation

(Arnett, 2002; Chen, Cen, Li, & He, 2005; Fuligni & Zhang, 2004; Swartz, 1989)
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References


