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Nirmala Rao
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Jin Sun *Editors*

Early Childhood Education in Chinese Societies

International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development

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Early Childhood Education in Chinese Societies

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Foreword

Remarkable, poignant, and timely, this seminal volume fills a chasmic void in the early childhood literature by creating an entirely new approach to thinking about three entwined issues: (1) understanding the trenchant relationship between embedded culture and emerging policies (e.g., globalization and glocalization); (2) addressing abundant pedagogical, programmatic, and policy polemics that envelop the burgeoning early childhood field (e.g., quality, equity, and sustainability); and (3) unveiling the unique (and fluid) cultural determinants affecting Chinese societies' surging commitment to young children (e.g., juxtaposing and linking western and Chinese cultures). Raising important contemporary policy issues, the volume provides remarkable insights into the processes of preserving culture in Chinese societies, and in its diaspora, while simultaneously advancing the multiple social changes that are associated with shaping effective early childhood services in today's world. In so doing, this vast tour de force looks backward to Confucianism, eastward to Japanese methodologies, and westward to European and American educational philosophies. Moreover, it importantly looks forward to a promising future where heritage and history are honored as vibrant, and culturally appropriates pedagogies, practices, and policies are adapted. A richly documented and eminently readable volume, Rao, Zhou, and Sun have fashioned an intellectual and practical gift that is destined to become a landmark volume for anyone dedicated to understanding and supporting the development of young children throughout the world. It is a veritable treasure of meticulous scholarship, nuanced analysis, and inventive interpretation—an unparalleled masterpiece for today's children and tomorrow's future.

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Sharon Lynn Kagan

Preface

There has been international interest in understanding education in Chinese societies for a number of reasons. Among these is the fact that students from Chinese societies have shown consistently high performance in cross-national studies of achievement. This volume considers early childhood education in Chinese societies. While early socialization processes in Chinese families are deliberated, the focus is on factors that influence early childhood policies and center-based services in different Chinese societies (the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, and Taiwan). Due consideration is given to sociopolitical, economic, cultural, and demographic changes and other influences that have affected and continue to impact early education policies and services.

The recognition of the importance of early childhood education for human capital development, research on early brain development, and the desire to promote equity and compensate for early disadvantage has led governments all over the world to reevaluate their early childhood systems and policies. Over the last decade, the majority of countries in the world have reformed their early childhood education policies to increase access to services, enhance their quality, and promote equity. All the Chinese societies considered in this volume have also issued new guidelines and polices for early childhood education in the past decade. Early childhood education in these societies has been influenced by traditional Chinese values, eastern and western curricular approaches, and the burgeoning scientific research. It has now entered a very positive era and is poised to stride ahead building on rich wisdom and history of education in these Confucian-heritage societies and with important learnings from both eastern and western societies.

Hong Kong, Hong Kong — Nirmala Rao
Shanghai, China — Jing Zhou
Hong Kong, Hong Kong — Jin Sun

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Nirmala Rao
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Nirmala Rao and Jin Sun

The foundations of development and learning are laid during the early childhood period, and there is now compelling evidence from the fields of neuroscience, economics, and developmental and behavioral sciences that highlights the importance of the early years of human development. Research highlights the speed of brain development during the first years of life and shows how environmental factors, such as early relationships, can alter brain architecture. Further, prolonged adversity in early childhood can result in toxic stress and lifelong impairments in learning, health, and behavior (Shonkoff, Boyce, & McEwen, 2009).

Studies on the economic returns of human capital investment typically indicate higher returns to society when the investment is in early childhood rather than in adult programs (Cunha & Heckman, 2007). Therefore, investment in the early years is seen as pivotal to "Building the Wealth of Nations" (UNESCO, 2010a). Given these findings, there has been a significant policy emphasis globally on promoting high-quality early childhood development and education programs.

This book focuses on early childhood education in Chinese societies. Over the past decades, increasing attention has been accorded to understanding Chinese students and the Chinese education system, for several reasons. First, students from Confucian-heritage East Asian societies have shown consistently high performance in cross-national studies of school achievement, such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) (Mullis, Martin, Foy & Arora, 2012) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Mullis, Martin, Foy, &

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Drucker, 2012). Second, there are large numbers of Chinese students studying overseas, and the People's Republic of China is the source of the largest number of outbound international students in the world (Choudaha & Chang, 2012). Third, China has experienced unprecedented economic growth over the past few decades. All these factors have contributed to the interest in understanding the education system in China.

China, the most populous country in the world, had a population of more than 1.37 billion in 2014 (China Statistic Bureau, 2016) and an area of about 9.6 million km^2. There is great diversity within China. For example, there are 56 ethnic groups in China but about 90 % of the population is Han Chinese. There are also five main language dialectical groups, but Putonghua is its official language and is also the formal language of instruction in Han areas. Despite the fast economic growth since China adopted an "open-door" policy in 1978, regional inequalities between the eastern coastal and western inland provinces have been increasing (Chen & Fleisher, 2012).

This book is concerned with understanding early childhood education (ECE) in Chinese societies and considers the People's Republic of China (PRC), Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore, and Taiwan. We use the term People's Republic of China to refer to what is also known as Mainland China or the Chinese mainland. The terms China, Mainland China, and People's Republic of China are used interchangeably in this book. In these Chinese societies, families and schools are strongly influenced by Chinese belief systems, especially by Confucian values that emphasize academic achievement, diligence in academic learning, the role of education in self-improvement and moral self-cultivation, and the belief that the exertion of effort leads to high achievement, regardless of a child's innate abilities (Lee, 1996; Li, 2003; Rao & Chan, 2009).

A variety of terms including early childhood education (ECE), early childhood care and education (ECCE), early childhood development (ECD), early childhood education and care (ECEC), and early childhood care and development (ECCD) have been used to describe services for young children in different parts of the world. The different terms are a reflection of variations in the foci of services and the age group covered. International development agencies typically use the terms ECCE or ECD, ECCD to refer to holistic and converging services in health, nutrition, family care, education, and social protection for children from birth to 8 years. It should be noted that although the term ECD is used to refer to holistic, integrated services in common parlance, the term actually refers to the process of development during the early years. On the other hand, the term early childhood education (ECE) is used interchangeably with preschool education (PSE) or pre-primary education (PPE) and focuses on services for children ranging in age from 3 to 6 years. This type of pre-primary education typically aims to prepare children for formal primary education. To further complicate matters, what many countries refer to as ECCE, ECCD, or ECD are actually services for children ranging in age from 3 to 6 years (Rao & Sun, 2010). This book focuses on services for children from age 3 to the age when they enter primary school, and we use the terms ECE, PSE, and kindergarten education interchangeably in the different chapters to reflect the terminology sued in the different Chinese societies. Table 1.1 shows the different terms used for prior to school services in the five Chinese societies covered in this book.

Table 1.1 Terms used to denote early childhood services and age ranges covered in Chinese societies

Society	Definition and age ranges
China (PRC)	**Early childhood education (0 to 6 years)**. Nurseries are for children below 3 years. Full-day kindergartens provide services for children from 3 to 6 years. Further, in rural areas 1 year of pre-primary education is provided in a primary school for children from 5 to 6/7 years for 1 year before they enter primary 1 at either age 6 or 7
Hong Kong	**Kindergarten education (from 2015) and pre-primary education (3 to 6 years)**. This is provided in kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child care centers. All kindergartens are privately run, and services are provided in nonprofit-making or private independent kindergartens. Some kindergartens are attached to a primary school
Macao	**Infant education (3 to 5 years)**. Free education is provided for 3 years in public kindergartens and in selected private kindergartens
Singapore	**Pre-school education (4 to 6 years)**. Kindergartens are privately run with the exception of 15 kindergartens run by the Ministry of Education which have been recently opened to spur improvements in the quality of pre-school education
Taiwan	**Preschool education (2 to 6 years).** Preschool is not part of the compulsory education system but government provides financial assistance to needy families so children can attend preschools (kindergartens and nurseries)

Sources:
China: http://www.moe.gov.cn/s78/A26/jces_left/moe_705/
Hong Kong: http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/edu-system/preprimary-kindergarten/overview/index.html
Macao: http://portal.dsej.gov.mo/webdsejspace/internet/Inter_main_page.jsp?id=8718
Singapore: https://www.moe.gov.sg/education/preschool
Taiwan: http://www.studyintaiwan.org/album/v4_publications/55fbd7943aa41.pdf

The Focus on Early Childhood Development in Chinese Societies

As noted earlier, governments all over the world have developed and enacted policies to enhance the well-being of young children by focusing on access to early childhood education and its quality (Rao & Sun, 2010). A notable example is the PRC where the government made a landmark decision in 2010 to move towards 1 year of free and universal preschool education. This is a major commitment, as it entails the construction of preschools, the training of teachers and the provision of educational resources, to millions of children who do not receive any early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 2010). The State Council of China issued ten specific guidelines to facilitate the development of ECE and mitigate existing problems (The State Council of the PRC, 2010). These encouraging developments indicate that ECE in China is entering a new and potentially positive era.

However, there is still much to be done to increase access to early childhood education and its quality. For example, the gross enrolment ratio (GER) for pre-primary education (4 to 6 year olds) in China was 70 in 2012 (UNESCO, 2015) up from 44 in 2008 (UNESCO, 2010b). About half of China's population resides in rural areas and these GERs mask the marked discrepancies between urban areas

where there is nearly universal enrolment in early childhood education and poor and remote rural areas where early childhood education is not provided.

In Hong Kong, the government has accorded increasing attention to early childhood education over the last few decades. This is reflected in the emphasis in preschool quality (Ng, Sun, Lau, & Rao, 2017, Chap. 10; Rao, 2010), in the funding of the pre-primary education voucher scheme (PEVS) in 2007, and in the establishment of the free kindergarten committee in 2013. In a similar vein, the Singapore government has also been very proactive and has launched various initiatives to raise the quality of ECE since 2000. These include providing suggested key-stage outcomes of early childhood education, recommending curriculum frameworks, setting new standards for early childhood care and education (ECCE) teachers (including guidelines for ECCE teacher education), encouraging ECCE research, and a focus on quality assurance (Lim & Lim, 2017, Chap. 12).

The Macao government has also exerted a more positive role by introducing legislation since the 1980s to regulate the development of ECE in Macao (Vong & Vong, 2017, Chap. 11). Macao was also the first among the Chinese societies discussed in this book to provide free and universal early childhood education. The government in Taiwan now provides free early childhood education for all 5-year-olds and had allocated considerable attention to preschool quality and social justice (Chen & Li, 2017, Chap. 13).

Why Focus on Chinese Societies?

Clearly, all the abovementioned Chinese societies have been focusing on improving ECE, but this is true of many countries and regions in the world. Why are we focusing on these societies and what are the potential contributions of this work? This book is the first English-language research-based review of ECE and the factors which affect it in Chinese societies. While researchers from disciplines such as cultural anthropology, political science, psychology, and psychiatry have conducted studies to understand the learning and development processes of Chinese learners (Ho, 1986), there is no work that systematically introduces and analyzes the development of ECE in Chinese societies.

We recognize ECE as a complex and multidimensional concept which is distinct from the child development process. The quality of ECE is influenced by the academic and professional preparation of caregivers; the curriculum, the physical and psychological learning environment, and the extent of parent involvement (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001). Government early educational policy has the largest impact on access to, and the quality of, ECE, and this policy itself reflects policy priorities (e.g., social justice and the promotion of rural development) and circumstances (focus on quality after attaining universal access).

The development of ECE is, of course, closely intertwined with social, economic, cultural and demographic changes within a society, as well as outside influences. We endeavor to provide a comprehensive picture of ECE in Chinese societies

by giving due consideration to all these issues. In addition to an up-to-date account of relevant early childhood policy and practice in five Chinese societies, we will focus on the relationships among Chinese cultural values, early childhood policy, and practice. We will also critically evaluate the influence of wide-ranging worldwide socioeconomic, technological, and political changes on early childhood policy and practice related to ECE in Chinese societies and responses to global concerns about the excluded and disadvantaged and on quality and sustainability during the early childhood period.

In this book, we differentiate in some chapters between Chinese and Western approaches to parenting and early childhood education. It is important not to consider Chinese and Western early childhood approaches as opposite ends of a continuum for several reasons. Cultures are not static and contexts change over time for a variety of reasons (Sun & Rao, 2017, Chap. 15) and hybrid educational approaches evolve. We have a common biology and young children all over the world have common needs for care and nurturance. That stated, the east-west dichotomy has been used to explain cultural differences in beliefs and behaviors in a number of disciplines. We are cognizant of the fact that there is not one Chinese culture or one Western culture, but we use the terms "Western" and Chinese to simply illustrate the distinctions between Chinese and non-Chinese practices.

Organization of the Book

This book has four sections. The introductory section includes two chapters that focus on the common Chinese cultural values that underpin early childhood development and education in all the societies covered in this book. In Chap. 2, Sun and Rao (2017) focus on Chinese patterns of socialization during the early years. The similarities and differences in socialization practices across ethnic Chinese parents in different Chinese and non-Chinese societies are discussed, and the influences of globalization and rapid societal changes on these practices are considered. Choy discusses Chinese culture in early educational environments in Chap. 3. She considers the influences of traditional Confucian values, government policies, globalization and national development on pedagogical practices in these environments.

The next section focuses on the PRC and includes six chapters. These chapters consider ECE policy, governance and finance, teacher education, curriculum and pedagogy, ECE in rural China, and ECE in emergencies. Feng (2017, Chap. 4) provides an overview of ECE in the PRC, emphasizing the influence of reform on early childhood education. In Chap. 5, Zhou, Sun and Lee (2017) analyze public investment policy, taking a historical perspective, and with a focus on developments after economic liberalization. Jiang, Pang, and Sun (2017, Chap. 6) discuss kindergarten teachers' professional development, including the preservice and in-service training for kindergarten teachers, in the PRC. In Chap. 7, Yu (2017) takes a history perspective to review early childhood curriculum reforms in the PRC. Zhang and Liu (2017) review the development of ECE in poor and rural areas of the PRC in terms of

policy, access, program quality, finance, and administration. In Chap. 9, Chen, Zhou and Zhang (2017) analyze the response to an emergency in ECE, through a focus on the aftermath of the earthquake in Sichuan province.

The following section focuses on smaller Chinese societies with chapters detailing developments in Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore, and Taiwan. Ng, Sun, Lau, and Rao (2017) discuss the progress, challenges and opportunities for the development of ECE in Hong Kong. In Chap. 11, Vong and Vong (2017) discuss the development of ECE in Macao, considering the role of historical and economic factors, the impact of globalization, and the influence of traditional Chinese culture, and in Chap. 12, Lim and Lim (2017) do the same for Singapore. In Chap. 13 Chen and Li (2017) provide a comprehensive review of the factors that have influenced the developments in ECE in Taiwan.

Part IV focuses on lessons from, and for, early childhood education in Chinese societies. In Chap. 14, Li and Wang (2017) discuss how the interactions between Chinese and Western societies have influenced the development of ECE in varying four Chinese societies. In the final chapter of this volume, Rao and Sun synthesize findings from the preceding chapters. They examine similarities and distinctions in the development of ECE of each society to understand how it has been "glocalised."

This book endeavors to systematically review ECE policy and practices in Chinese societies in the context of recent empirical and theoretical work, in order to facilitate evidence-based policy making in ECE in Chinese societies. Given that "science does not speak for itself" (Shonkoff & Bales, 2011), it is necessary to interpret the meaning and implications of research findings and analyze the effectiveness of relevant policies. Linkages between research, policy, and practices are necessary to promote development and learning during the early years, in Chinese societies and further afar.

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Part I
Understanding Early Childhood Education in Chinese Societies

Chapter 2
Growing Up in Chinese Families and Societies

Jin Sun and Nirmala Rao

Socialization, which begins shortly after birth, is the process of learning interpersonal and interactional skills that conform to the values of one's society: one behaves appropriately, knows the language, possesses the requisite skills, and upholds the prevailing beliefs and attitudes (Harris, 1995). It is widely accepted that socialization is a bidirectional process and that the characteristics of the child affect the process. Nevertheless, parents' efforts to raise their children to have qualities valued by their society, and the education children receive in formal educational settings, are significant for child development. Research indicates that socialization goals vary across cultures, and this chapter focuses on the Chinese patterns of socialization during the early years.

Chinese parents have been characterized as exerting a high degree of control and emphasizing academic achievement (Rao, McHale, & Pearson, 2003). As noted in Chap. 1, students from Chinese societies have shown consistently high performance in cross-national studies of achievement (e.g., Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Arora, 2012), and there has been international interest in understanding the early socialization processes in Chinese families. The publication of the book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, in 2011 (Chua, 2011) ignited a heated debate in Chinese and overseas media on the appropriateness of parenting practices adopted by Chinese parents. The book describes a "Tiger Mom" who adopted a strict, controlling (Chinese) parenting style in the USA and raised two very successful children. The memoir drew a considerable amount of attention in the media and was rather controversial and drew criticism from both researchers and lay people. Is Tiger parenting a common

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parenting style in Chinese societies? Not really. Chinese parents are stricter and more controlling of their children's behavior than Western parents, but they are also warm and loving toward their children. Tiger parenting cannot be equated with authoritarian parenting which involves high parental control and low warmth. A special issue of the *Asian American Journal of Psychology* has provided a critical evaluation of the notion, prevalence, and impact of Tiger parenting in overseas Chinese (Juang, Qin, & Park, 2013).

In this chapter, we discuss the nature and characteristics of Chinese parenting, which influence various parenting practices in Chinese societies, including Tiger parenting. It begins with an overview of the commonalities and distinctions in parenting practices between Chinese and non-Chinese families. Second, it considers how Chinese parenting practices and early childhood education have changed in recent years. Third, it summarizes relatively recent changes in preschool pedagogy. Finally, it considers how one major policy, the one-child policy, has influenced child-rearing.

Commonalities and Distinctions Between Chinese and Western Families in Parenting Practices

In this section, we consider research that compares Chinese families living in either Chinese or non-Chinese societies, with non-Chinese families. Two major paradigms have been deployed to describe parenting practices (Wang & Chang, 2010): Baumrind's authoritative-authoritarian parenting typology (Baumrind, 1971) and Rohner's parental acceptance-rejection theory (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2007). Both of them are based on studies conducted in Western cultures. Authoritative parents are warm and responsive, use inductive discipline, and provide age-appropriate autonomy to children. They also monitor children's behavior closely and set reasonable rules for children (Berk, 2009, p. 569). Authoritative parenting is considered to be the ideal style of parenting to facilitate children's development. In contrast, authoritarian parents use punitive disciplinary measures, exert a high level of control, and rarely offer autonomy to children (Berk, 2009, p. 570). Researchers believe that authoritarian parenting can have negative consequences for child development. Similarly, the parental acceptance-rejection theory posits that children everywhere need acceptance from parents and other attachment figures; if children are not accepted by their parents, they tend to develop negative traits, including hostility and aggression, impaired self-esteem, and emotional problems (Rohner et al., 2007).

Authoritative and Authoritarian Parenting Among Chinese Families

Chinese parenting practices are influenced by traditional Chinese values. For example, at the core of the Chinese value system are Confucianism and Taoism, which guide Chinese people's behavior and social interaction. In general, these two doctrines oppose individuality and self-assertion but advocate a balance between natural, human, and spiritual entities (Munro, 1985; Ryan, 1985). Specifically, Taoism emphasizes self-control and interpersonal harmony, whereas Confucianism is concerned with fulfilling social obligations, establishing relationships with others, conforming to norms, respecting parents and elders, and achieving family reputation through individual achievement (Fung, 1983; King & Bond, 1985). Taoism and Confucianism are therefore considered, to a certain extent, to provide the philosophical backdrop for Chinese parenting.

Is Chinese parenting authoritative or authoritarian? Using the model of authoritarian and authoritative parenting (Baumrind, 1971), developed based on the Western connotations of warmth and control, researchers have conducted a series of studies to understand Chinese parenting and have found inconclusive evidence about whether or not this Western framework can adequately explain Chinese parenting (Wang & Chang, 2010). Chang (2006) examined the parenting practices in Beijing and Shanghai, China; Wu et al. (2002) studied mothers of preschoolers in Beijing and an urban area in the USA; and Supple et al. (2004) and Wang et al. (2007) considered Chinese and Western children's ratings of their parents' behaviors. The findings from these studies suggest that the authoritative-authoritarian parenting typology is useful in capturing Chinese parenting. Authoritative parenting was associated with more positive orientations toward academic attainment in children and higher self-esteem, but authoritarian parenting was linked to more aggression and anxiety. Other studies (Chao, 2001; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1994) have found no effects of authoritative or authoritarian parenting on Chinese-American children's academic achievement, and these differences might be due to immigrant status, rather than to Chinese cultural values, since most of these studies were conducted with Chinese immigrant children in the USA.

The appropriateness of applying the dimensions of authoritative and authoritarian parenting to understand Chinese parenting has been questioned. Nevertheless, they are still widely used in cross-cultural studies that compare the parenting behaviors of Chinese parents and their non-Chinese counterparts. For example, Pearson and Rao (2003) examined the relationship between parents' socialization goals and child-rearing practices, and their impact on peer competence during early childhood, in a sample of Hong Kong Chinese mothers, English mothers, and their preschool-aged children. They found that the Hong Kong Chinese mothers were more authoritarian than English mothers.

Other studies have also reported similar results, with Chinese mothers exerting more control and giving their children less autonomy in mother-child interactions

than their Western counterparts (e.g., Chiu, 1987; Jose, Huntsinger, & Liaw, 2000; Lin & Fu, 1990; Wu et al., 2002). However, as noted earlier, findings regarding parental control among Chinese participants are inconsistent. For example, Wang et al. (2007) surveyed early adolescents in Beijing and Chicago and found that Chinese adolescents reported higher levels of psychological control than American adolescents, but Chinese adolescents reported lower levels of autonomy support and behavioral control by their parents than their American counterparts.

Clearly, more research is needed to understand Chinese parenting practices using culturally relevant constructs. For example, Chao (1994) found that Chinese parents showed a significantly higher level of authoritarian parenting and parental control than European-Americans. After controlling for confounding variables, Chinese mothers scored significantly higher on "training" which captured important dimensions of Chinese parenting, which were not tapped by the authoritative-authoritarian framework, but which could explain Chinese school success. Chao's sample comprised of mainly immigrant Chinese mothers in the USA, mostly from Taipei, and European-American mothers of preschool children in the greater Los Angeles area. In a follow-up study, Chao (2000) found Chinese immigrant mothers had higher scores in the training, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles than European-American mothers of children in the first through third grades; Chinese immigrant mothers also showed higher socialization goals for filial piety and structural parental involvement practices, as compared to European-American mothers. These results suggest that there may be different implications for behaviors such as child obedience and parental control among varied ethnic groups.

Xu et al. (2005) studied 97 mainland Chinese mothers and their young children and found that both authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles were associated with mothers' adherence to Chinese values. They found that valuing of collectivism, conformity to norms, emotional self-control, and humility were associated with authoritarian parenting, whereas valuing of collectivism and conformity to norms were also correlated with authoritative parenting styles. These findings suggest that authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles in Chinese mothers have culture-specific meanings, and this provides support for Chao's (1994, 2000) argument that Chinese parenting emphasizes not only child obedience, and parental strictness, but also parental acceptance and responsiveness.

Extant research suggests that Chinese parents facilitate children's performance through particular parenting styles that may not be adequately captured by the authoritarian-authoritative dichotomy. They foster children's ability by stressing obedience to rules and adult authority; they also express warmth in more subtle ways, including by being supportive and sensitive to their children's needs (Chao, 1994). In particular, the Chinese notion of *guan*, an umbrella term which simultaneously means "to govern," "to care for," and "to love," is considered a parent's responsibility and cannot be categorized as representing either authoritative or authoritarian parenting (Chao, 1994). Parental care, concern, and involvement are synonymous with firm control and governance of the child in Chinese societies, and therefore, *guan* has very positive connotation. Parents' *chiao shun* (training), which entails the continual monitoring and correcting of children's behavior to ensure that

children are not falling short of societal standards, is a culture-specific characteristic of Chinese parenting (Chao, 1994).

Socialization Goals and Parenting Practices

In addition to the broad aspects of parenting practices discussed above, influences from traditional Chinese culture are also reflected in parent-child interactions. For example, Liu et al. (2005) observed mother-child interactions in a 10-minute free-play session with a sample of 2-year-olds and their mothers in Beijing, China, and Southern Ontario, Canada. They specifically compared Chinese and Canadian mothers' autonomy- and connectedness-oriented parenting behaviors during a 10-minute free-play session. Results indicated that Chinese mothers showed a higher level of involvement than Canadian mothers. After controlling for overall involvement, Chinese mothers scored higher on encouragement of children's connectedness-oriented behaviors, but Canadian mothers were more likely to encourage children's autonomy during play. These findings are in accordance with the traditional emphasis on interpersonal cooperation and harmonious relationships in Chinese culture (Ho, 1986; Triandis, 1990) and the regard for self-direction and personal autonomy in Western Chinese societies (Larson, 1999; Triandis, 1990).

As noted earlier, Chinese parents put more emphasis on children's school achievement than Western parents (Rao et al., 2003) and require children to exert the effort necessary to do well in school (Chao, 1994; Pomerantz, Ng, Cheung, & Qu, 2014). For example, many studies comparing European-American and Chinese parents' interactions with children in mathematics learning have found that Chinese parents instruct children in a more formal, structured, and direct way and provide more encouragement for mathematics-related activities than European-American parents (Huntsinger & Jose, 1997; Huntsinger, Jose, Liaw, & Ching, 1997). Chinese parents also offer a more supportive family environment for children's mathematical learning than Western parents (Wang, 2004).

In addition, Pan et al. (2006) found that although both Chinese and American mothers adopted concept-focused and calculation-focused instructions in their interactions during mathematical-related activities, Chinese mothers teach more calculation in daily life than American mothers. Further, unlike their American counterparts, Chinese mothers' instructions cover more complex mathematical knowledge. Although both Western and Chinese parents were involved in their child's academic life, European-American parents volunteered more in schools, while Chinese-American parents focused more on formal and structured systematic teaching of their children at home, and parental teaching methods were stable over time (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009).

In order to examine cultural differences in parents' responses to children's performance, Ng, Pomerantz, and Lam (2007) surveyed Chinese and American parents of children in Grades 4 and 5. They considered parents' emphases on their school success or failure, and observed Chinese and American mothers' responses to their

children's performance, and found that Chinese parents placed more emphasis on children's academic failure than success, but American parents did the opposite. The authors argued that this differentiation is related to the differences between the Chinese and Western cultures: Chinese culture places more value on self-improvement, and failure is considered to be critical to identify where corrective behaviors are needed, but, in Western countries, there is an emphasis on self-enhancement, with a focus on possessing positive attributes (Heine, Kitayama, & Lehman, 2001).

To summarize, both Chinese and Western parents show authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles, but there are unique components in Chinese parenting styles and these are related to traditional Chinese cultural beliefs. Although Chinese parents exert authority and control in their interactions with children, it is argued that this is the way in which they manifest their love and concern for their children.

Changes in Parenting Practices

While Chinese traditional values and the history of the nation vary markedly from Western ones, China has also experienced considerable industrialization and Westernization in recent years. These factors have led to changes in parents' socialization goals, as well as pedagogy in preschools, as a function of different levels of exposure of Western ideas. Children in Chinese societies, regardless of whether they live in the People's Republic of China (PRC), Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, or Macao, have all experienced the impact of globalization to varied extents. This trend has been particularly significant in Mainland China, as it has experienced considerable industrialization and Westernization since the 1980s. Western ideology and Chinese traditional values have been integrated and adapted in both parenting practices and early childhood education (Liu et al., 2005; Rao, Ng, & Pearson, 2009; Xu et al., 2005). We will therefore focus on the fusion of Chinese traditions and Western ideas in parenting practices and preschool education in Mainland China, in the following section.

Chinese child-rearing practices have been significantly influenced by increasing exposure to Western ideas, as well as by a growing body of professional knowledge on positive parenting. Chen et al. (2000) examined how maternal authoritative and authoritarian attitudes were manifest in mother-child interactions and relationships in Chinese culture. With a sample of 2-year-old children and their mothers in Beijing and Shanghai, they found that maternal educational levels were positively associated with authoritative attitudes and low power strategies but negatively associated with authoritarian attitudes and high power strategies. The mothers with relatively higher levels of education showed more authoritative styles, and used more reasoning strategies, than those with lower levels of education. Xu et al. (2005) also found that the years of education mothers received were positively associated with authoritative parenting styles. These results suggest that mainland Chinese mothers with more education are more likely to have contact with, and have an understanding of,

Western patterns of child-rearing. They are therefore more likely to appreciate inductive reasoning, democratic forms of control, flexibility, and respect for individualization, over power-assertive, restrictive, and directive approaches to child-rearing.

In addition to general parenting styles, Chinese mothers' educational levels were further found to influence specific maternal scaffolding behaviors in learning-related problem-solving tasks. Sun and Rao (2012a) examined the mother-child interactions involving mothers of different levels of education, and their 5-year-old children, in four different problem-solving tasks, and compared mothers' behaviors with teachers' in comparable tasks. They found that mothers with more education showed more collaborative scaffolding content and manner, more positive but less negative feedback, and more transfer of responsibility to children than mothers with lower education. Interestingly, there were no significant differences in transfer of responsibility to children between mothers with different education levels, and between mothers and teachers, in a worksheet, a typical school mathematics learning task. This suggests that adults fully realized the importance of the worksheet task for children's learning, and they intended to elicit children's independent thinking by letting the child assume as much responsibility for problem-solving as possible. Again, this finding shows Chinese parents' emphasis on school achievement and indicates that such emphasis may be not influenced by their educational levels.

Although the extant literature on Chinese parenting focuses on mothers, fathers do play a significant role in socialization. In traditional Chinese families, men were heads of households and were solely responsible for the family income. Men made important decisions in the family and handled matters outside the home. The mother's realm of influence was within the home. Mothers were responsible for day-to-day caregiving, while fathers typically set longer-term goals for children and encouraged them to achieve these goals.

While traditional Chinese values continue to have a profound influence on Chinese socialization, the family milieu has undoubtedly changed over the past decades because of socio-contextual and political changes and economic development. First, gender equality has been promoted and more and more women are in the workforce. This means that fathers, particularly urban fathers, have shouldered more caregiving responsibilities. Second, Chinese parents, especially those in the cities, are more educated and have had increasing access to Western parenting ideas that emphasize father involvement in child care and education more than does traditional Chinese culture. Current parenting practices in urban families have been influenced by Western ideas, and fathers are more engaged with young children than in the past. Third, the one-child policy has influenced parenting practices. In families with only one child, both fathers and mothers shower love on the single child and invest time, energy, and resources to better support the only child's learning and development.

In summary, Western ideology and Chinese traditional values have been integrated and adopted in Chinese families, against the background of globalization. Chinese parents who have received more education are more likely to accept Western patterns of child-rearing, such as inductive reasoning, democratic forms of

control, flexibility, and respect for individualization, in their parenting practices, than parents who are less educated. More educated parents are also less likely to adopt power-assertive, restrictive, and directive approaches to child-rearing, which have been generally considered as characteristics of Chinese parenting styles than other parents. Nevertheless, Chinese parents, regardless of their educational levels, highly value academic achievement in their children and consistently exhibit their concerns in their parenting practices.

Changes in Preschool Pedagogy

Traditional and contemporary societal factors also contribute to early childhood education in Mainland China. Traditional Chinese teaching and learning emphasizes training, knowledge acquisition through memorization, the child's efforts, the teacher's authority, and discipline (Rao et al., 2003). As a result, traditional preschool education in China is teacher centered and academically oriented, and parents tend to abide by teachers' recommendations (Pang & Richey, 2007). In preschools today, teachers' instructional practices are less didactic and more child-centered than in the past, reflecting changes in cognitive socialization (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009).

The Regulations on Kindergarten Education Practice, released by the National Education Commission on a trial basis in 1989, was a milestone in Chinese preschool and early education (Chan & Mellor, 2002). Notions promoted by the kindergarten educational reform may be at odds with traditional Chinese beliefs about early education (Rao & Li, 2008). Western educational beliefs, such as respecting children, active learning and teaching, and learning through daily life in kindergartens, are gradually being accepted and promoted in Chinese preschools, while the establishment of partnerships between teachers and parents is also being encouraged (Liu & Feng, 2005). As Tobin et al. (2009) pointed out, contemporary kindergartens in China have much better "software" than before; teachers also put more emphasis on child-initiated activities and de-emphasize direct instruction.

Western influence on the changes in the recommended teaching content and methods can be discerned by examining and comparing preschool education in China before, and after, kindergarten educational reforms. For example, traditional early mathematics education emphasized the memorizing of arithmetic facts, and drill and practice, and neglected problem-solving, while the Regulations on Kindergarten Education (on a trial basis) emphasize logical reasoning and problem-solving skills. Mathematics teachers are now encouraged to teach with variation and to emphasize precise and elegant mathematical language, logical reasoning, and mathematical thinking. However, traditional Chinese values are still evident in the views of experts, such as Lim (2007), who recommend "order and serious classroom discipline, strong and coherent teacher-student rapport and a strong collaborative culture." As reform guidelines based on Western, democratic and scientific ideas may not be totally congruent with Chinese cultural traditions, early childhood

education in China may be characterized as a hybrid of traditional Chinese and more progressive views on early learning, as is the case in Hong Kong (Ng, Sun, Lau, & Rao, this volume; Ng & Rao, 2008; Rao et al., 2009).

It may be difficult for preschool teachers in China to follow teaching guidelines promoted by preschool professional organizations in China. This is because these guidelines emphasize age and individually appropriate teaching in a context in which large class teaching is prevalent. Liu and Elicker (2005) observed teacher-child interactions of 12 Chinese teachers in six classrooms in Nanjing, China. They found that teacher-child interactions in Chinese kindergartens focused on daily routine rather than on children's emotional needs. Teachers placed much emphasis on knowledge and skill acquisition. They typically exerted high control and stressed obedience and order but inhibited initiative and creativity.

Sun and Rao (2012b) examined how Chinese mothers and teachers adjusted their scaffolding behaviors according to children's response (success, failure, and no response) in jigsaw puzzle and worksheet tasks. Sensitive scaffolding, that is, providing more support following a child's failure, and less support following success, was more evident in teacher-child interactions than in parent-child interactions. Chinese teachers showed more appropriate shifts of scaffolding levels after children's failure or no response, compared to mothers. However, there were no differences between teachers and mothers when children gave a successful (correct) response. This suggests that teachers may not have been reflective and skilled enough to further the scaffolding process and move children to higher levels of thinking when their previous instructions had been successfully followed.

Unexpectedly, Sun and Rao (2012b) further found that the scaffolding by teachers of children from families with low socioeconomic status (SES) was less optimal than that by teachers of children from the high SES group. For example, although teachers of children from the low and high SES groups were both professionally qualified, teachers of children from the lower SES group provided a lower collaborative level of scaffolding for their students in a puzzle task than teachers of children from the higher SES group, after children did not respond to teachers' prior step of scaffolding. Teachers of children from the lower SES group also provided more collaborative strategies in the worksheet task than in the puzzle, after children did not respond. They offered a lower collaborative level of scaffolding for their students in the puzzle task than other teachers. The authors believed that the especially high expectations from low SES parents might influence teachers' instructions in kindergartens. At the same time, there are fewer resources and less support available for teachers of children from lower SES families than for teachers of children from middle or upper SES families (Duke, 2000). To prepare these children for primary schools with limited resources, as well as to satisfy parents, their kindergarten teachers have to stress children's academic performance, and they may then put more value on the school-related, rather than on the play-like, tasks. Moreover, there are relatively few educational resources available for teachers in kindergartens catering mainly for lower SES children and a lack of in-service training for these teachers to improve their scaffolding skills in play-like activities. As a result, Sun and Rao (2012b) pointed out that children from lower SES families may actually

have fewer opportunities to play with toys, and fewer opportunities to develop learning interests in nonacademic domains, compared to those from middle or upper SES families.

Taken together, the fusion of Chinese traditional values with Western educational ideas has had substantial and unique influence on both parenting and early childhood education in the Chinese context. At the same time, there are differences in the home and school experiences for children from families with different socioeconomic status, and this may disadvantage children from the low SES families and adversely influence their long-term development. Policy-makers and communities should provide more support to families and kindergartens to ensure that parents and teachers provide appropriate and sufficient guidance to each child.

The One-Child Policy

The Chinese government implemented the one-child policy from 1979 to 2015. This has led to the single child getting considerably more attention from parents (and grandparents) than a child with siblings and changed parenting practices. It has also influenced children's preschool experiences. According to the 2005 census, there were more than 100 million single children below 18 years of age in China. About 90 % of urban children, and over 60 % of rural children, in mainland China, had no siblings (Wang, 2009). The one-child policy resulted in marked changes in the age structure of the population and in gender ratios as traditional Chinese families have a strong male preference. By 2011, all 31 provinces allowed ethnic minority couples, or couples who are both only children, to have two children. In November 2013, the one-child policy was further relaxed, by allowing couples to have two children, if one parent is an only child, in some provinces. In October 2015, the PRC ended the one-child policy and issued its new family planning policy – the universal two-child policy. The new policy permits all couples, regardless of their Hukou (system of household registration required by law in mainland China that determines where you can live), or whether they are single child themselves, to have two children.

Although the one-child policy was rescinded in 2015, it was enforced for over 35 years in the country. It changed the structure of the family and resulted in generations of children who grew up without siblings. It benefitted urban daughters and together with rapid societal, economic, and cultural changes diminished the influence of traditional Chinese parenting beliefs and behaviors. The new policy may have implications for ECE as parents have to emotionally and financially invest in the upbringing of two children.

Are Single Children Spoiled?

Clearly the one-child policy has influenced the composition of the family, and the nuclear family has replaced the traditional extended family, in most families in urban areas. This is increasingly true of rural areas as well. The majority of families in China has no more than 3.27 persons (Wang & Liu, 2006), and there has been disquiet about the developmental outcomes of the single child. For example, many parents and educators in China are concerned about whether only children are over-indulged in the family (Jiao, Ji, & Jing, 1986), and having only one-child had led to what has been termed the 4 +2+1 syndrome. Four grandparents and two (2) parents tend to treat the single (1) child as a little emperor/empress. Furthermore, the absence of siblings diminishes children's communicative opportunities in early years, and this may impede their socio-emotional development. These children may have more negative behavioral qualities and adjustment problems, such as selfishness, poor peer relationships, and difficulties in delaying gratification (e.g., Jiao et al., 1986).

There are numerous studies comparing the developmental outcomes of single children and children with siblings in Mainland China. Poston and Falbo (1990) compared the academic achievement and personality characteristics of only children, and children with siblings, in Changchun, China. They found that the two groups of children scored similarly on personality ratings, but the urban only children performed significantly better than children with siblings on academic measures, and there were no differences among rural children. Chen et al. (1999) compared only children and those with siblings in terms of social behavior, peer acceptance, academic achievement, normative school behavior, and academic achievement. There were no significant differences between these two groups of children on these variables. In terms of cognitive development, Jiao, Ji, and Jing (1996) compared children of different ages with and without siblings in Beijing. They found that there were no significant differences in cognitive abilities, including memory processes, language skills, and mathematics between the groups of older children who were born at the beginning of the policy. However, the younger only children performed significantly better in these cognitive tasks than their counterparts with siblings. As Tobin et al. (2009) have pointed out, the new generation of single children in China has turned out to be more capable than those of the preceding generation.

These findings seem to alleviate concerns that China's one-child policy is creating a generation of spoiled children, as single children appear to perform satisfactorily in both social and academic aspects. Researchers believe that children's early experience in day-care centers or kindergartens makes a difference to children's socialization experience and may compensate for the possible experience in nuclear families. The national gross enrolment rate for pre-primary education (children aged between 4 and 6) in China was 44 in 2008 (UNESCO, 2010) and 70 in 2012 (UNESCO, 2015). National figures cloak disparities between urban and rural areas. There is now almost universal enrolment in pre-primary education in most cities,

and the GER in cities was above 90 by 2005 (Corter, Janmohammed, Zhang, & Bertrand, 2006). The majority of children in urban areas are likely to attend nursery centers at a younger age, because their parents have to work. As a result, most urban children spend an overwhelming part of their preschool years, 5 days a week for about 8 h a day, in group care. They are encouraged to participate in a variety of group activities, play with their peers, and interact with teachers. These early out-home-care experiences benefit the socio-emotional development of children without siblings.

Parenting in Urban Educated Families

Parents with only one child devote more time and attention and provide more resources to these children than those with more than one child. Social and economic changes in contemporary China have significantly improved people's living conditions, and young children usually have a variety of toys, books, and learning materials at home. It is also common for parents to provide extra homework for their children and arrange for them to attend multiple extracurricular lessons after preschool (Lee, 2003; Xie, 1996), to ensure that their child will not be "left behind at the starting gate" of primary school. Wang and Chang (2010) interviewed parents in Beijing and found that parents expressed concern for children's psychological and emotional well-being. They expressed substantial concerns about children's physical well-being (e.g., we do everything we can to make sure out child is healthy) and material well-being (e.g., within our financial abilities, we will satisfy most of our child's material needs).

The mere provision of learning-related resources to children does not automatically facilitate learning. Some parents may purchase age-inappropriate materials, or may arrange too many extracurricular activities for the child, while ignoring the significance of daily parent-child interactions and child free play. Sun and Rao (2014) interviewed a group of parents of preschoolers in Beijing to discern their attitudes toward early childhood education and about educational resources provided for children. Many parents thought that purchasing toys or books for their child was a symbol of parental involvement in early childhood education, and they were willing to do that. At the same time, most of parents interviewed sent their child to at least one extracurricular class, such as drawing, English, arithmetic, dancing, or piano classes. However, these parents rarely spent much time playing with or reading to their children because they had to work. Further, they believed that it was the kindergarten teachers' job to engage in such activities.

Similar findings are reported from Tobin et al. (2009) who found that single children had an abundance of toys and other resources in the preschool context. Tobin et al. (2009) compared their findings to those garnered from an earlier study conducted in the late 1980s (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1991). They found that while there were more resources in kindergartens 20 years later, when the second study

was conducted, there were also other differences. Kindergarten children were more likely to be neglected by their busy parents in the 2000s. Working parents often requested another adult, often a grandparent or childminder, to take the children home from the kindergarten. When the parents came home, there had little time to interact with their children. The pattern of non-paternal care during the week day is likely to be common in large cities in China even today. The lack of parent-child communication and bonding has raised new challenges for preschool teachers.

The Increased Importance of Peers

The one-child policy has eliminated the sibling system in the family. According to Falbo and Polit (1986), single children cannot exchange their academic or social experiences with siblings, and this is a disadvantage for single children. In addition to the limited opportunities for single children to develop their interpersonal skills, a lack of siblings may also restrict their ways to express stress, and this may lead to long-term problems. However, later research (presented earlier) has questioned this assumption. Only children have an especially strong desire to socialize, since they do not have company or playmates at home (Eischens, 1998). Hence, the peer group in the kindergarten and community has become even more important as a socialization agent, to help them learn to cooperate with others, obey rules, and solve problems.

Chinese children from urban areas spend the majority of their time in kindergarten, and their classmates have become the most influential peer group for single children. In recent years, the composition of these kindergarten peer groups has been changing. There has been increased immigration from rural to urban areas, particularly large cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen. Immigrant families are likely to send their child to local kindergartens for early childhood education. As a result, it is very likely that children in one class may come from different provinces of the large country. Therefore, the increasingly mobile population has led to children having peers from more heterogeneous backgrounds, and this has increased the diversity of urban Chinese children's socialization experiences. They may have opportunities to have an early understanding about the diversity of society, e.g., different customs and hometowns, through this interaction with their peers.

When children come back home, their peers are mostly children from their extended family or those living in the same community. To compensate for the lack of a sibling system, parents tend to create opportunities to increase contacts between cousins, if possible. Cousins, therefore, can be a proxy for siblings, for only children, and can enrich only children's early peer experiences. In addition, peers from the same community are more likely to be playmates of children.

However, most contemporary families live in single homes and do not share an entrance with their neighbors (Wang & Liu, 2006), thereby reducing interactions with them. Isolated family housing and the lack of neighborhood relationships may restrict interactions with peers. Playing outdoors, or attending some community

activities accompanied by adults, may be the only opportunities to play with other children in the community and to develop peer relationships.

In summary, the new generation of single children is not different in social competence from children with siblings. In some studies, they have shown better cognitive performance than their counterparts with siblings. Although they enjoy an abundance of toys and learning materials, they may receive insufficient attention from their busy parents. Therefore, preschool plays an even more important role in facilitating the holistic well-being of these children. Instead of being with siblings, single children may develop beneficial peer relationships with children from varied backgrounds in the preschool and community contexts.

Directions for Future Studies

Viewing Childhood Socialization Within the Integrated System of Family and School

The majority of children's socialization experiences occur in the family and school, and children's development is considered largely a function of the balance between their experiences in the kindergarten and at home (Alnert & Lamb, 2003). When parents and teachers have similar priorities for child development, and use similar socialization techniques (Hess, Holloway, Dickson, & Price, 1984; Lehrer & Shumow, 1997), clear values and expectations for behavior are conveyed to young children. Childhood socialization should be understood within the integrated system, including both family and school, in which the two components influence each other. For example, Chinese parents, particularly those from lower SES backgrounds, place high demands on preschools to prepare children for the academic demands of primary school. However, Chinese early childhood education experts recommend a play-oriented curriculum in kindergarten (Tobin et al., 2009). These divergent views influence children's socialization experiences. Further, if children's experiences at home and kindergarten are discordant, teachers may, for example, emphasize more independent learning and active exploration, while parents may be more directive and offer little autonomy to children. As found in Sun and Rao (2012a, 2012b), the child may get different messages from home and school.

Socioeconomic development has brought changes in both Chinese parenting practices at home and early childhood education in kindergartens. To some extent, changes in the two contexts influence each other. It is therefore very important to consider family and school contexts as an integrated system and examine how they work together to create early socialization environments for children.

Understanding the Socialization Experiences of Children from Different Backgrounds

Accompanying the rapid modernization process in China, differences between urban and rural population, and between the rich and poor, have become increasingly evident in society. As a result, urban children or children from high SES backgrounds normally have more resources, both at home and in school, and they usually have more opportunities to receive high-quality education and parental support than their rural or low SES peers. At the same time, a large number of rural residents immigrate to cities. Some rural children accompany their parents to the cities but fail to qualify for enrolment in schools in the city as they are only temporary residents in the city. Some other children are "left-behind" children in rural areas and stay with their grandparents or other relatives. There are an estimated 61 million left-behind children in China, and some 10 million only see their parents once a year, and about 2.5 million children do not have any contact with their parents for the whole year (Beijing Children' Mental Health Care Centre, 2015). The early socialization experiences of these children are substantially different from those of the local city children or from the rural children who stay with their parents. More research is needed, especially on the early socialization process of these "left-behind" children.

Enhancing Parenting Skills

Although an increasing number of parents appreciate the importance of early childhood education, they may not be aware of appropriate ways to promote child development. As noted earlier, urban parents may invest in their child's learning by purchasing a variety of toys and books or enroll their child in different extracurricular classes. Many are willing to transfer the responsibility of learning facilitation to the kindergarten. Closer collaboration between family and kindergarten, well-designed parenting programs, and more dissemination of scientific knowledge on early childhood development and education through mass media would be useful.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the extant literature on Chinese early childhood socialization experiences, in both family and kindergarten contexts. Contemporary Chinese children have been experiencing a large range of diverse socialization processes, compared to their previous generations. Against the background of rapid societal and economic development, both socialization practices at home and in kindergartens are changing. While there is continuity in the promotion of some traditional Chinese

values, adaptation to the changing socioeconomic climate has been necessary. As a result, new characteristics are emerging in both Chinese parenting and in kindergarten education. Although maintaining traditional values, such as respecting elders and authorities and obeying rules and academic learning, both Chinese parents and kindergarten teachers acknowledge the importance of active learning, child-initiated activities, and respecting children. These attributes are also highly valued in Western belief systems.

The single-child policy is unique to Mainland China and was ended in 2015 after being mandated in 1979. After over 35 years of implementation, it seems that single children develop as well as their peers with siblings. While only children have more resources and different early peer experiences than in prior generations, there are concerns on socialization of only children, relating to inappropriate and insufficient parental involvement in child development. Further studies are needed to help parents better involve themselves in the process and to better understand the role of Chinese fathers in socialization.

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Chapter 3
Chinese Culture in Early Educational Environments

Grace Choy

This chapter focuses on Chinese culture in early educational environments and the influences of relatively recent educational reforms. It first examines Chinese culture through the core values of Confucian teaching. It next considers research on physical and pedagogical aspects of early educational environments in Chinese societies. Early childhood education (ECE) in different Chinese societies has undergone tremendous changes in the past 30 years, and reform initiatives based on Western assumptions that are at odds with traditional Chinese cultural beliefs and practices have been implemented. The tensions associated with these reforms are discussed. Confucian core values may be regarded as the common thread for the contextualization of ECE across different Chinese societies.

Chinese Culture

Culture has been studied from diverse angles. It is generally agreed that culture is a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that is adopted by members of a society. People from the same cultural group collectively share a pattern of thinking, feeling, and behavior based on a system of shared meanings (Rohner, 1984; Smith & Bond, 1998). They do not necessarily live in the same environment, but they perceive themselves as belonging to the same cultural group. Hofstede defined culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede, 1997, p. 5). Culture is transmitted from generation to generation and maintains its continuity through socialization of young members. These shared cultural meanings

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are acquired in early childhood, and they continue to be reinforced throughout the lifetime (Barnouw, 1985; Matsumoto, 1997). Culture is not static; it changes dynamically with time and circumstances. Acquired cultural values may therefore vary with changes in the environment. In the case of Chinese culture, Confucian values influence Chinese families and teachers, regardless of where they live. On the other hand, society-specific educational guidelines and the influence of policy result in variations in the form of early childhood education in different Chinese societies.

Individualism and Collectivism

The unique characteristics of Chinese culture are highlighted when it is compared with other cultures. The cultural dimensions of "individualism-collectivism" and "power distance" proposed by Hofstede (1980, 1997) can provide a useful analytical framework to explain variations across cultures. In general, Chinese culture is characterized by a collectivistic orientation and is high in power distance (i.e., having social rules to preserve status differences). However, there is a potential danger of dichotomizing cultural values, as increasingly people are subject to multiple layers of cultural influences in a globalized world. Huijbregts, Tavecchio, Leseman, and Hoffenaar (2009) suggested that all cultural groups valued dimensions of both individualism and collectivism to some extent. Hence, a balanced view would be provided by investigating both cultural-general characteristics and culture-specific core values (Schaetti, Ramsey, & Watanabe, 2009).

Confucian Values

Chinese culture has been shaped primarily by dominant Confucian values, which have interacted with Daoist, Buddhist, and Judeo-Christian doctrines throughout history. Confucianism evolved over 2000 years and has undergone significant transformations. Many Daoist and Buddhist concepts were integrated into neo-Confucianism during the reign of the Song and Ming dynasties (Tu, 2000). In this chapter, we discuss the Confucian core values identified by the neo-Confucianism revival started in the twentieth century (Tu, 2000).

Neo-Confucian scholar Tu Wei-ming (2000) of Harvard University identified the essential features of Confucian traditions. The core value in Confucian thought is "Xue-zuo-ren," or learning to be human. Authentic learning, for Confucius, is "learning for the sake of the self." Xue-zuo-ren can be expressed as becoming aesthetically refined, morally excellent, epistemologically well educated, and religiously profound.

On the surface, it seems to align with the traditional Western idea of individualism. In reality, the idea of "learning for the sake of the self" does not mean a quest

for one's individuality or personal gain. For Confucius, "self" is conceived within relationships. Authentic learning is defined as "cultivation of self in community" for the holistic refinement of personality. The Confucian self must relate meaningfully to members of the family, the neighborhood, the community, and the nation. Self-cultivation can be understood as the broadening of the self to embody an ever-expanding circle of human relatedness (Tu, 1998, 2000).

The concept of "mutuality" can explain this relatedness. Relationships are not based on one-way impositions of power. For instance, the relationship of father and son is based on mutuality and reciprocity of love and filial piety. The ways for learning to be human are through the principle of reciprocity in human relatedness and the cultivation of virtue in practice (Tu, 1985, 2000). Confucianism has been criticized as promoting authoritarianism and unquestioning obedience. This interpretation may not take the concept of mutuality into account and has undermined the original intent and core value of Confucianism.

According to the books of Da Xue and Zhong Yong, Confucianism regarded "Ge-wu," the exploration of ideas; "Zhi-zhi," the pursuit of knowledge; "Zheng-xin," the discipline of the heart; and "Cheng-yi," the consolidation of sincerity, as ways of self-cultivation. These ways of self-cultivation or "Xiu-shen" will lead to "Qi-jia," bringing harmony to the family; "Zhi-guo," governing a nation; and "Ping-tian-xia," bringing peace to the world (Yang, 2006, Yew Chung Culture Committee, 2006).

If the primary Confucian concern is to learn to become a good person, what does this entail? What are the primary virtues to be learnt in order to become human? It consists of "Zhong" (loyalty), "Xiao" (filial piety), "Ren" (humanity), "Yi" (righteousness), "Li" (rites), "Zhi" (wisdom), "Xin" (trust), and "He" (harmony) (Yang, 2006).

For Confucius, at least five areas are crucial in the process of learning to become human, namely, aesthetic, social, historical, political, and cosmic, and in this aspect, Confucius was a forerunner of holistic education. "Cultivation of self in the community" is a process of education. Both family and schools are conceived as the locus where core values are transmitted to the next generation. The dyadic relationships provide a rich environment for learning to be human. Confucian teaching envisions that education should balance the ability to accumulate "social capital" with character cultivation. Tu summarized this by stating, "The primary purpose of education is character building. Intent on the cultivation of the full person, education should emphasize ethical as well as cognitive intelligence. In addition to providing for the acquisition of knowledge and skills, schooling must be congenial to the development of cultural competence and appreciation of spiritual values" (Tu, 2000, p. 206).

Goals of Education

Influenced by the core value of Xue-zuo-ren in the Confucian tradition, many Chinese educators advocate moral self-development or self-cultivation as an indispensable component of education. Some regard it as a primary goal of education.

Two pioneers in early educational philosophy, Chen He-qin and Tao Xing-zhi, also emphasized holistic education and were highly influential and well regarded for generations of Chinese society.

Chen He-qin (1892–1982) established the first experimental early childhood center in China. His theory of "lively education" asserted that the overall objective of education is "learning to be human" (Xue-zuo-ren), "learning to be Chinese" (Xue-zuo-Zhongguoren), and "learning to be modern Chinese" (Xue-zuo-xianda-Zhongguoren). In terms of pedagogy, he advocated "teaching by doing" (zuo-zhong-jiao), "learning by doing" (zuo-zhong-xue), and "making progress by doing" (zuo-zhong-jinbu). He emphasized moral self-development and identified thirteen principles for discipline and nurturance (Preschool Education Research Association China, 2003).

Tao Xing-zhi (1891–1946) was another pioneering Chinese educator who asserted that character education should begin before the age of six. He believed that kindergartens could build good habits and attitudes in young children to ensure later success and that this formed the basis for nation-building. He also placed a strong emphasis on respect for young children (Corter, Janmohammed, Zhang, & Bertrand, 2006; Preschool Education Research Association China, 2003).

Emphasis on Learning to Self-Perfect

Li (2009) argued that "learning to self-perfect" is a core learning belief among Chinese learners. The pursuit of human self-perfection is regarded as the utmost purpose of life and is accomplished by a personal commitment to learning. Li (2009) found that whereas Western learning mainly concerns itself with the discovery of objective knowledge, with a strong emphasis on intelligence and ability, Chinese learners believe that learning is about how to become a better person with moral virtues, which is in line with the teaching of Confucianism.

Early Educational Environments in Chinese Societies

Early childhood education both reflects and imparts the cultures' core values by turning young children into culturally appropriate members of their society (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009), and early childhood educators tend to discuss early educational environments in terms of structural and process quality. Structural quality includes factors typically regulated by the government or by professional societies such as staff-child ratios, staff training, group size, and teacher turnover. Research indicates that these factors are associated with child development outcomes. On the other hand, process quality refers to the interaction between the teacher and the child and the way the curriculum is taught. Teachers' pedagogical

practices are influenced both by their professional training and their cultural beliefs about early development and learning (Rao, Ng, & Pearson, 2009; Tobin et al., 2009).

There has been both continuity and change in the physical and pedagogical aspects of early educational environments in different Chinese societies over the past 30 years. The characteristics of these developments in specific Chinese societies are thoroughly discussed in later chapters in this volume, including the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Feng, 2017, Chap. 4), Taiwan (Chen & Li, 2017, Chap. 13), Hong Kong (Ng, Sun, Lau, & Rao, 2017, Chap. 10), Macao (Vong & Vong, 2017, Chap. 11), and Singapore (Lim & Lim, 2017, Chap. 12). This chapter will limit discussion to selected examples to illustrate physical and pedagogical features of early formal learning environments in Chinese societies.

The Quality of Early Educational Environments

Access to Early Childhood Education

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Pre-primary Project conducted a three-phase, longitudinal, cross-national (17 countries) study on the provision of ECE. In phase two of the IEA Project (i.e., 1989–2001), Olmsted and Montie (2001) compared the structural characteristics of early childhood settings in 15 countries, including the PRC and Hong Kong. The Chinese sample consisted of both urban and rural children from six provinces. The Hong Kong sample was recruited from kindergartens and child-care centers. According to the report, about 80–90 % of urban children between the ages of 3 and 6 attended kindergartens in the PRC. In contrast, 25–30 % of rural children attended kindergartens or 1-year preschools. In Hong Kong, all children under 6 years of age attended pre-primary education settings (85 % kindergartens and 15 % day nurseries).

Physical Environment and Facilities

Olmsted and Montie (2001) found that Hong Kong classrooms were furnished with child-sized chairs and tables with low shelves. All washrooms had child-sized toilets and sinks. Some had a music room, and open-space play areas (either indoor or outdoor), located within or outside the school property. Urban kindergartens in the PRC had at least a playroom and a bathroom for each group. Some settings provided a sleeping room or a multipurpose room for music and other activities. Increasingly, more urban kindergartens have set up activity corners for drama, music, science, and reading purposes. Rural kindergartens typically had one classroom designed with a traditional blackboard setting and a central bathroom located outside the classroom. Each kindergarten was required to have an outdoor play area. The quality and quantity of equipment and teaching materials varied from classroom to classroom.

It should be noted that the IEA study was conducted nearly 30 years ago, and there have been many improvements in ECE since then.

Observational tools such as the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS, Harms & Clifford, 1980) and the revised version (ECERS-R, Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998, 2005) are used to rate the quality of early childhood programs. The ECERS-R has several subscales, and items are rated on a 7-point scale. The ECERS-R has been used extensively in the Western world. Chen (1998) rated 25 classrooms in Taiwan using the ECERS (1980). Overall, Chen (1998) found that Taiwan kindergartens were stronger in items on personal care routines and fine and gross motor skills, but scored lower in items on language-reasoning, creative activities, and social development, particularly in items on sand/water play, space for privacy, multicultural awareness, and special facilities. Hu and Szente (2009) conducted the first study using the revised version ECERS-R (2005) to investigate 40 classrooms in Beijing. According to the two studies, teachers in both societies were strong in providing care for the children and in making parents feel welcome. However, individual space for privacy was new for teachers in both Beijing and Taiwan, which seemed to align with the collectivistic tendency. Both Beijing and Taiwan also received relatively low scores on diversity and inclusiveness items. The ECERS-R is currently being validated in Hong Kong. Arguably, ECERS-R is based on Western assumptions of the definition of "quality," which implied a universal "best practice."

Teacher Qualifications

Policies are in place to upgrade early childhood teacher qualifications in various Chinese societies. In the PRC, certified kindergarten teachers are required to either have a high school diploma, with 2 to 3 years preservice training, or to pass a qualification examination. Principals are required to have tertiary education training (Olmsted & Montie, 2001). In 2004, the Hong Kong government mandated that all ECE practitioners finish compulsory training to reach 100 % Qualified Kindergarten Teacher (QKT). All ECE teachers were also required to have a Certificate of Education (CE) by 2012, and principals were required to complete the CE by 2005 and were encouraged to complete a B.Ed. by 2012 (Chan, Lee, & Choy, 2009). In Singapore, from the 2009/2010 school year, all newly appointed kindergarten principals have to hold a degree in ECE and one-year post-qualification experience and will have completed a certification course before (or exceptionally, within) the first year of their appointment. By January 2013, three in four registered K1 and K2 teachers (i.e., those working with 4-to-6-year-olds) are to be trained to the Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education-Teaching (DECCE-T) level; and by January 2006, all preschool principals should have attained a Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education-Teaching (DECCE-T), a Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education-Leadership (DECCE-L), and at least 2 years of relevant experience in the preschool sector (Lim & Lim, 2017, Chap. 12). In Taiwan, to qualify as a licensed early childhood educator, one must (a) complete a 26-unit professional program,

either while pursuing a university degree in an ECE department or after completing a degree in another subject in higher education; (b) complete a half-year internship at a kindergarten; and (c) pass the teachers' qualification exam before earning a teacher certificate (Lin, 2012).

Teacher-Child Ratio

In terms of group size, the state regulation in the PRC is 20–25 children for 3- to 4-year-olds and 25–30 children for 4- to 5-year-olds. Class size in kindergartens is limited to 40 (*Kindergarten Work Regulations and Procedures*, National Education Committee, PRC, 1996; Corter et al., 2006). According to the Education Bureau in Hong Kong (2015), since the 2003/2004 school year, the teacher-to-pupil ratio is 1 to 15, or lower. With effect from 1 January 2012, the teacher-child ratio in Singapore is required to be 1:8 for 18-to-30-month-old toddlers, 1:12 for 30-month- to 3-year-olds, and 1:15 for 3-to-4-year-olds. With effect from 1 January 2013, the teacher-child ratio for Kindergarten 1 children was set to 1:20, and for Kindergarten 2 children, it was 1:25 (Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, Singapore, 2011). In Taiwan, the number of students per teacher at preschool level was 26.1 in 1981–1982 and became 9.8 in 2014–2015 (Ministry of Education, Taiwan, 2015).

Curriculum Guidelines

The development of early childhood education curriculum guidelines reflects the momentum of the reform initiatives in different Chinese societies. However, theory and pedagogy developed in the West were incorporated into the ECE curricula across Chinese societies.

Wang, Yang, and Jeng (2005) compared the early childhood curricula in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, and the PRC, by examining four official documents in terms of content structure, curriculum goals, domains for learning and development, implementation, and evaluation. The four documents[1] compared were *Guiding Framework for Kindergarten Education, Trial version* (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2001); *Guide to Pre-primary Curriculum 1996* (Curriculum Development Council of Hong Kong, 1996); *Early childhood education, primary education and primary education preparatory classes curriculum development guidelines* (Education and Youth Affairs Bureau of Macao, SAR, 1999); and *Standards for Kindergarten Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, Taiwan, 1987). According to Wang et al.'s analysis, the guidelines in China were concise in content, whereas Hong Kong provided the most detailed guide. Both Hong Kong and Macao

[1] The revised version of the *Guide to Pre-primary Curriculum 2006* from Hong Kong (Curriculum Development Council, 2006) and the *Curriculum Guidelines for ECEC* passed in 2011 from Taiwan (Shing et al., 2015) were not published at the time of Wang et al.'s (2005) study.

placed equal emphasis on physical, cognitive, language, social, emotional, and aesthetic domains, whereas both the PRC and Taiwan placed less emphasis on the emotional domain.

Wang et al. (2005) concluded that early childhood curriculum documents in the four societies consistently emphasized child-centeredness, by taking into consideration the developmental needs, interests, abilities, and experience of young children. All societies stressed "respect" and "accommodation" of individual differences in young children by providing a variety of teaching and learning activities. The importance of integration with multiple life experiences through play was highlighted. Both Taiwan's and Hong Kong's documents had a separate section on "Play." In terms of implementation, the PRC, Hong Kong, and Macao focused on the arrangement of learning environments and parental participation. In particular, Hong Kong and Macao provided children with space for privacy, whereas the PRC and Taiwan emphasized the use of community resources. In terms of curriculum evaluation, all Chinese societies used a multi-method evaluation strategy. Both the PRC and Hong Kong highlighted variability in different early childhood programs and were cautious about applying a "unified standard" without taking into account individual differences. The PRC also sought parental feedback and evaluation.

In 2003, Singapore launched the kindergarten curriculum framework entitled *Nurturing Early Learners: A Framework for a Kindergarten Curriculum in Singapore* (Preschool Education Unit, Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2003). The framework provided an overarching aim of kindergarten education, followed by six principles, and how to put the principles into practice. The six principles were holistic development and learning, integrated learning, active learning, supporting learning, learning through interactions, and learning through play. Many theories and pedagogies developed from the West were incorporated into the early childhood education curricula across Chinese societies.

Educational reforms in the past decades led to significant improvements of structural environment in various societies. Nonetheless, structural indicators are a necessary – but not a sufficient – condition, for quality. It has been argued that the most important indicator of quality is process quality (Smith et al., 2000).

Teachers' Cultural Beliefs and Practices

According to Tobin et al. (2009), "implicit cultural beliefs and practices" refer to "taken-for-granted practices that emerged from embedded cultural beliefs about how children learn and how teachers should teach" (Bruner, 1996, p. 46). "Implicit cultural beliefs and practices" are not taught explicitly nor mandated in the reform guidelines. They are passed down from the more experienced teachers to the new teachers (Tobin, 2010). However, ECE teachers tend not to be aware of their pedagogical beliefs and practices as culturally shaped (Tobin et al., 2009).

Tobin and colleagues visited *Daguan You'eryuan* (Da-guan Kindergarten) in Kunming, China, in 1984, and again in 2002, and they noticed that, while there was

dramatic development in some areas, many cultural values had stayed the same in the two decades. Tobin and colleagues reported their observations in the original *Preschool in Three Cultures* (1989) and the sequel *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited* (2009), respectively. In the sequel, they also contrasted the development of *Daguan You'eryuan*, with a more "progressive" *Sinanlu You'eryuan* in Shanghai, in order to exemplify the fruits of educational reform in the past two decades.

In the 1980s, what surprised the Westerners in *Daguan You'eryuan* were teacher-directed block activities, boarding programs in kindergarten, children singing patriotic songs, engaging in daily morning exercise, and lining up at a long trough in a bathroom. There was a strong collectivistic element in these practices, in sharp contrast with the individualistic Western culture. Twenty years on, the collectivistic practice of daily morning exercise remained unchanged, as it is thought to induce a sense of group pride in the children, as they experience "the pleasure of merging one's desires with the desire of the group." However, key changes were evident in the phasing out of the boarding program, the upgrading of the "hardware" (building and materials) and the "software" (curriculum and pedagogy).

In the first visit, Tobin, Wu, and Davidson (1989) found that preschool teachers based their teaching on a primary school model. The teachers told children what to do and expected them to sit quietly and listen obediently. It was exemplified by following instructions in the teacher-directed block activities. Outsiders were stunned at the "perceived authoritarianism" of teachers and the curriculum. The block building activity in 2002 was much more child-centered and spontaneous and children's creativity and imagination were fostered. At *Sinanlu*, Tobin et al. (2009) were impressed by the "Storytelling King" activity, as it illustrated how a traditional teacher-directed storytelling activity can be transformed into a child-initiated activity. The Shanghai teacher skillfully encouraged the 4-year-olds to complete their stories in front of a group of peers, while guiding others to listen actively. Children were encouraged to give meaningful comments on the stories, and the storytellers were open to critique. Children voted for the best storyteller and crowned him or her a Storytelling King. This learning activity integrates many social, language, and mathematics skills. It fitted into the Western notion of "emergent co-construction" among the teachers and the children. Tobin (2010) also observed an emphasis on mastery and performance and the use of critique as a strategy for self-improvement in this activity. He attributed these characteristics to the implicit Chinese cultural belief in the power of exemplars and a commitment to shared social activity.

The reform initiatives have demonstrated that new curriculum and pedagogies have been tried, while some old practices such as the early morning exercise remain. Some argued that there was a paradigm shift in the two decades. A strong emphasis is placed on "play-based," "individualized," and "active learning" (Liu & Feng, 2005). Tobin (2010) argued that ECE in the PRC has moved from "more didactic, teacher-directed, knowledge transmission pedagogy" to a "constructivist, child-initiated, and child-directed pedagogy." Several factors account for this phenomenon, including globalization and its resistance, government policies and national development, and the dissemination of research findings (Rao et al. 2009).

The Tidal Wave of Globalization

All societies are under the influence of globalization which has led to growing interconnectedness and interdependence of people and institutions throughout the world. It is both "the compression of the world, and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole" (Robertson, 1992, p. 8). Critics argue that globalization leads to cultural homogeneity, and there is a world trend toward standardization of global practice. Ritzer (2008) used the process of *McDonaldization*, or more recently *Starbuckization*, to illustrate some of what cultural homogeneity entails. The spread of this commitment to consumerism has actually changed the way of life in the new countries. The "standardization" of various aspects of life seems to iron out local differences. Huntington (1993) argued that the process of globalization is thrusting different civilizations together, at a faster rate than at which the marked local differences can be accommodated. Consequently, traditional practice and local identity are weakened. According to Wallerstein's (2004) world system theory, the main difficulty with the tidal wave of globalization is using Western societies as the main reference point for standards and neglecting the possible role played by non-Western countries. This phenomenon is also experienced in early childhood education.

With the global dissemination of latest research findings on "best practices" in ECE in the Western world, there is a push toward incorporating Western theories and pedagogies into the Chinese contexts. It has been argued that Western assumptions are implied in different curriculum guidelines in the PRC, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, and Singapore.

For instance, in the *Guiding Framework for Kindergarten Education, Trial version* (2001), of China, many widely accepted ECE ideas, pedagogies, and approaches from the Western world were incorporated such as Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, Bredekamp's developmentally appropriate practice, Katz's project approach, Malaguzzi's Reggio Emilia theories, and Gardner's multiple intelligences. According to Prof. Hua Ai-hua, "the basic idea of preschool education reform is meant to assimilate international experiences" (Tobin et al., 2009, p. 83).

The development of the *Guiding Framework for Kindergarten Education, Trial version* (2001), was a collaborative and ongoing process among administrators, researchers, and education bureaus at provincial and city levels and was synthesized by the Basic Education Department of the Ministry of Education. Nationwide efforts were made in the PRC since the preparation of the *Kindergarten Work Regulations and Procedures, Trial version* (National Education Committee, PRC, 1989), which was revised in 1996. However, in rural areas, many local governments could not fully embrace this top-down reform initiative. In response to globalization, many local practices have been challenged. The daily concerns in the rural areas also present difficulties for implementation, such as a shortage of qualified teachers, and large class sizes. There is a discrepancy in accepting the rationale for reform and the actual implementation. Many practitioners call for making accommodations to the local conditions.

McMullen et al. (2005) compared the beliefs about appropriate practice among early childhood professionals in the USA, the PRC, Taiwan, Korea, and Turkey and found that non-Western countries were under pressure to conform to Western standards of what is appropriate. Take developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) as an example: it was built strongly on the work of Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, and Erikson and on real-life practice in American classrooms (Bredekamp, 1987). Hyun (1998) and Grieshaber and Cannella (2001) argued that DAP implies that there is one and only one philosophy of ECE and that the fundamental goal of education in DAP is to nurture individual creativity, autonomy, and critical thinking, which may be in contrast to the collectivistic concerns in Chinese culture. Hyun (1998) proposed that a "Developmentally and Culturally Appropriate Practice" (DCAP) would therefore be more appropriate.

Resistance to Globalization: Glocalization

In the process of globalization, there is a constant tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization (Appadurai, 1990). Despite the powerful force of global standardization of practice, some suggested that interactions between cultures are leading to new mixtures of culture and provoking a defense of tradition. Appadurai (1990) and Nederveen Pieterse (2004) argued that globalization could generate greater diversity and contribute to cultural diversification or cultural hybridization and that it is virtually impossible to transplant one culture over another culture. Waters (2001) also noted that homogenization tendencies are mediated by a process where the local culture will adapt, modify, and counteract the new culture.

Robertson (1992) introduced the term "glocalization" to describe this paradoxical relationship between the homogeneity and heterogeneity of culture. It is refashioning the global form to resonate with local preferences. Ritzer (2008) defined glocalization as "the interpenetration of the global and the local, resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas" (p. 166). This term captures the coexistence of both universal and particular trends in globalization. In other words, global standardization and local hybridity are not mutually exclusive, but together constitute an interconnected process. It is under this context that Tobin (2010) called for contextualization, or "Ben-tu-hua" of ECE practice. The Western early childhood practice should not be treated as the global standard.

Contextualization or Ben-Tu-Hua

It is not surprising that the strong push toward child-centeredness has been counterbalanced by acknowledgment of the value of traditional Chinese pedagogical practices. Tobin (2010) urged Chinese early childhood practitioners to treasure their "endangered" indigenous cultural beliefs and practices under the wave of globalization.

This call coincides with the views of Chinese early childhood academics and professionals who are taking stock of, and reflecting on, the reform initiatives and the rapid ECE development in the past 30 years (Xiao Xiang-ning and Li Ji-mei, personal communication, April 2010). It is widely recognized that creative integration of Western ideas with Chinese wisdom in the process of contextualization or Ben-tu-hua is needed and that it is in parallel with the paradoxical and dialectic relationship of "globalization" and "glocalization."

Thirty years on, some of the tensions inherited in the process of contextualization begin to surface, with early childhood practitioners finding it difficult to fully embrace the theories and practices adopted from Western cultures (Zhu & Zhang, 2008). The tensions in the integration of traditional and new pedagogies can be examined in three aspects: (1) tension between Western and Chinese values, (2) tension of differential development between geographical locations, and (3) tension between the expectations of parents and educators.

Tension Between Western Theories and Pedagogies and Chinese Traditional Beliefs and Practice

"Respecting children" can be taken as an example of where difficulty arises in the integration of traditional and new pedagogies. Following the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989), the *Guiding Framework for Kindergarten Education, Trial version* (Ministry of Education, PRC, 2001), has explicit requirements for "respecting children." On the conceptual level, "respecting children" has become a consensus. There seems to be a heightened awareness and efforts of ECE teachers to respect children, which generally means "treating the child as individual, as a creative thinker, and a new citizen" (Hsueh, 2010). On the other hand, Hsueh (2010) discovered that ECE teachers in the PRC were concerned about their authority and professionalism. Traditionally, children were taught to respect their teachers, parents, and the elderly, in order to maintain the hierarchy of social order, which is characteristic of a society high in power distance, according to Hofstede's (1997) conceptualization. However, obeying authorities seemed to be at odd with the promotion of an egalitarian relationship between teacher and individual child, in a child-centered approach. Early childhood teachers were therefore confused when required to "respect" the children under their care.

Pang (2009) argued that at the beginning of the reform, many basic questions needed to be clarified. For instance, "What is the status and relationship between educator and student?" If children are treated as the belongings of adults, and learning only takes place under the guidance of adults, then education is viewed as a one-way process. If educators and students are viewed as having interactive reciprocal relationships, then there will be a different pedagogy.

One possible way to tackle this difficulty is to go back to the original purpose of education according to the Confucian core value. If we understand "respect" within the Confucian concept of "mutuality" or "reciprocity" in human relationships, the tension between "respect for teachers" and "respect for children" may be resolved. Many preschool directors believe that respecting children and educating children must go hand in hand. "Respecting" and "learning" can mutually coexist and should not be contradictory. The meaning of "respecting children" will be enriched and deepened through the years.

Tension Between Differential Developments in Various Geographical Areas

Another tension lies in the differential level of development between urban and rural areas. Li Ji-mei and Yan Chao-yun (personal communication, April 2010) pointed out that the major issue in the PRC is the huge population and the differential development in various parts of China. There is no "one-size-fit-all" practice that can represent the enormous variations in different urban and rural areas. This may be one reason why the Chinese curriculum is deliberately concise (Wang et al., 2005).

Using the "learning through play" pedagogy as an example, Che and Yan (2008) compared the views of "play" between urban and rural preschool teachers, administrators, and academics by showing them a video of a rural kindergarten. Most viewers disapproved of the use of a primary school pedagogical model in early childhood settings. This *primary-schoolization* refers to a large group collective gatherings with teacher-centered activities, direct instruction and demonstration, and a strong emphasis on academic learning (e.g., Chinese character recognition) and seldom use of "play" as the basic activity. Not surprisingly, rural teachers placed more emphasis on child-initiated spontaneous free play than on teacher-designed "learning through play" activity. Unexpectedly, many urban viewers appreciated the quality of play that rural children demonstrated in the video, when compared with urban children. Rural children's imagination and their ability to utilize every possible environment and opportunity for play were impressive. Che and Yan (2008) argued that while urban children nowadays seemed to lose their natural "ability to play," as they are surrounded by overanxious adults organizing various learning activities after school, one should not romanticize the rural pedagogical approach on play, as rural teachers are actually limited in their resources.

Rao and Li (2008) found that free play comprised only 17 % of the time in urban kindergartens in the PRC and they termed this Chinese-style play-based education as "Eduplay." However, it may be even more difficult for rural teachers to find the right balance among teaching, learning, and "play," as many practical conditions restrict "learning through play" activities. There is a shortage of qualified teachers and qualified trainers in the rural areas, and many rural teachers are unaware of the

latest early childhood educational concepts and pedagogies. Rural kindergartens usually lack funding for necessary equipment, toys, and activities. Differential development between urban and rural China in ECE development is fully discussed by Zhang and Liu (2017, Chap. 8).

The struggle to integrate play and learning is not only experienced by teachers in rural areas alone but also by their more "Westernized" Chinese counterparts in other Chinese societies. Since the introduction, for example, of "learning through play," in Hong Kong by Dr. Betty Chan in the 1970s, Hong Kong early childhood teachers are still having difficulty with the implementation of this pedagogy, with Cheng and Fung (2009) noting that there are still discrepancies in teachers' cognitive understanding of this pedagogy and their actual practice.

Tension Between Expectations from Parents and the Latest Early Childhood Research Advocated by Educators

Another area of tension arises between educators calling for more "play-based" curriculum and parents pushing for more academic instruction (Zhu & Zhang, 2008). Contemporary parents put a lot of pressure on preschools to provide more academic training, as parents are concerned about a fast track to economic success, while preschools are responsible for producing economically competitive children who can succeed in the globalized world, an approach that is also reflected in Chinese learner's beliefs (Li, 2009).

Increasingly, parents are becoming "customers," and the running of a preschool is becoming more "market-driven." Parents are willing to invest in their children's education. In the PRC, there is a system of categorization and ranking of preschools, based on the program's physical resources and teacher quality (an external inspector ranks the teachers, according to their educational backgrounds and teaching competencies). Those with a top ranking can charge the highest tuition fee.

Another side effect of rapid economic development leads to materialism, where children are increasingly dependent on, and possibly limited by, commercial toys for play. Bracey, Montie, Xiang, and Schweinhart (2007) suggested that local materials work particularly well in early childhood settings, because they may not necessarily be commercially available. At Chengdu, early childhood teachers Wang and Shen (2009) discarded commercial products and provided an innovative example of utilizing traditional paper cutting, local nursery rhyme, Sichuan opera, and agricultural produce, to create a unique learning environment.

Similar tension is experienced in Taiwan, as parents also place heavy emphasis on academic advancement (Hsieh, 2004; Lin & Tsai, 1996). A common dilemma faced by Taiwan ECE practitioners is that the child-centered philosophy and pedagogy they learnt from professional training are often in conflict with the ideas of parents and the larger society about how best to educate children (Hsieh, 2004, McMullen et al., 2005).

This contrast between parents' expectations and the educational goal introduced by the educational reforms suggests that the need for parental education is high. Chinese parents and educators share a common root of Confucian upbringing and a common goal of doing what is in the best interest of young children. Parental education will be more effective if parental ethno-theories are acknowledged, and new pedagogies are explained in the light of Confucian insights.

Confucianism as the Common Thread?

Ben-tu-hua should begin with deepening our understanding of such Confucian core values as Xue-zuo-ren (learning to be human). If Chinese early childhood educators rediscover the Confucian core values and conceptualize early education in this light, it may well serve as a reference point for deciding what Western ideas or practice are to be adopted, modified, or discarded in Chinese ECE.

Confucianism in Different Chinese Societies

Each Chinese society has its own unique historical development, which in turn provides the context for core Confucian values to flourish. Zhu and Zhang (2008) stated that ECE in the PRC reflects the hybrid of traditional Chinese, Communist, and Western cultures. Similarly, with a colonial past, Hong Kong has been influenced by Chinese and British cultures; Macao is shaped by Chinese and Portuguese cultures; and Taiwan has experienced dynamic interactions between indigenous Chinese, Japanese, and Western cultures.

Nonetheless, Confucianism is well alive in all Chinese societies (Tu, 1996). Since the Han dynasty, Confucianism was used to legitimize the imperial rule of successive dynasties, and Confucian cultural values became the state ideology (King, 1996a). At the establishment of the PRC in 1949, the official ideology was Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, and, for some time, the Chinese communist government was highly critical of the feudal past and of Confucianism. Nonetheless, intellectuals such as Li Zhe-hou and Jin Guan-tao found a firm Confucian sedimentation in Chinese socialism. It is noted that Confucian ethics are evident in the beliefs, attitudes, and behavior of Chinese people. Recently, the Chinese communist government even led a worldwide promotion of Confucian studies, showing that the habits of the heart of mainland Chinese do not cease to be Confucian (Tu, 1996).

According to King (1996a), the modernization of Taiwan since 1950s has transformed the State Confucianism ideology into Intellectual Confucianism. The middle class and the intelligentsia became critical of the nationalist government-endorsed state ideology, and Taiwan experienced a crisis of authoritarianism that was addressed by endorsing a new Confucian humanism.

Unlike the PRC and Taiwan, Hong Kong, and to a certain extent Macao, was neither reactionary to State Confucianism nor endorsing Intellectual Confucianism. King (1996b) analyzed that Hong Kong is characterized by rationalistic traditionalism about its Confucian heritage. Rationalistic traditionalism is the mentality of the Hong Kong business community. Family values, such as filial piety, frugality, and respect for elders, contribute to the economic success of Hong Kong. Confucian values are selectively preserved for their extrinsic usefulness in pursuing economic goals with a sense of "utilitarian familism."

Similarly, the Confucian ethos is considered to have contributed to increased economic productivity in Singapore. In addition, the Singaporean government intended to construct a national identity rooted in shared values, and it orchestrated a national campaign to promote Confucian ethics in schools since the 1980s. According to Wong (1996), the positive values of Confucianism were emphasized in order to strengthen the Singaporean cultural identity and use it as a social barrier against "negative Western cultural inroads."

Despite the variations in the endorsement of Confucianism across different political systems, core Confucian values are alive and well in all these societies. As core cultural values penetrate educational values across different Chinese societies, they can be regarded as the common thread in understanding the vision of early childhood education as discussed in the following section.

Common Thread Across Early Childhood Curriculum in Chinese Societies

Wang et al. (2005) found that character development or moral self-cultivation was strongly emphasized in different Chinese contexts. Following Confucian teaching, early childhood teacher is expected to serve as the role model for self-cultivation in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the PRC. Teachers are expected to demonstrate their passion and longing for self-cultivation and learning and to nurture children's character building. This was explicitly mentioned in the curriculum documents in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the PRC. Character education was also explicitly listed in Macao's guidelines.

The 2011 *Curriculum Guideline for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)* in Taiwan is based on the Confucian educational philosophy of *Ren*, with a goal of continuing the traditional virtues of humanity and filial piety; nurturing children's love for oneself, others, and the environment; and laying the foundation for lifelong learning (Shing et al. 2015).[2] Similarly, according to the curriculum

[2] In 2005, the Taiwan Ministry of Education invited Shing and her colleagues to conduct research for the revision of the curriculum guideline for preschool. The new *Curriculum Guidelines for ECEC* covers body movement and health, cognitive, language, social, emotional, and aesthetic domains. The *Early Childhood Education and Care Act* was passed in 2011 with the implementation of the *Curriculum Guidelines for ECEC* (Shing et al., 2015).

framework in Singapore (Preschool Education Unit, Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2003), the first desired outcome of preschool education is "Know(ing) what is right and what is wrong." The Singaporean curriculum framework stresses sound moral and social values, positive family values, and strong community ties. Hence, it can be concluded that moral development or character formation, as reflected in their curriculum guidelines, is a consistent goal of education across Chinese societies.

Conclusions and Implications

Western ideas should not be unilaterally imposed on Chinese societies without adapting them to local needs. Ben-tu-hua is part of the "glocalization" process. It is a process where thoughts and actions of traditional practice are continuously refracted back upon one another, so that the practices are altered in the light of new discoveries. In Nederveen Pieterse's (2004) conceptualization, this "cultural hybridization" is expressed as old forms that become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms into new practices. Hence, the relationship between global and local is often paradoxical. The globalization process does not necessarily erase or replace local practices – it may even encourage or generate new forms.

Competing Desires and Uneven Development?

However, this is not a smooth and easy process as early childhood teachers are struggling with the competing desires of "internationalizing pedagogies" while maintaining a core Chinese identity. They might experience dissonance between explicit curriculum guidelines and implicit cultural beliefs and practice, uneven development between urban and rural areas, and the tension between professional pedagogies and parental expectations of how a child should be educated in society.

It is expected that uneven development is part of normal growth process. Tobin et al. (2009) borrowed Piaget's concept of "decalage" as a metaphor to describe ECE development in the PRC. This metaphor can be extended to other Chinese societies that are also struggling with the process of contextualization. It is "a moment of growth and change in which competency varies across domains": "The old equilibrium has become destabilized, but a new equilibrium has not yet been established" (p. 54). ECE in different Chinese societies is in the adolescence stage, where they are enjoying a "physical growth spurt" (acquisition of hardware) but "struggling cognitively and emotionally" in the software.

It is time for early childhood educators and policy-makers to reflect on questions such as "What is the ultimate goal of education and socialization?" and "What are the desirable characteristics of a child, that is valued by Chinese culture?" Chinese societies could find inspiration from Confucianism and traditional culture, to rethink

the *purpose* of early educational provision. How to respect the wisdom of local cultures and simultaneously incorporate the latest research on child development and ECE pedagogy is ultimately a balancing act (Zhu & Zhang, 2008).

Implications for Other Countries

The current experiences of Chinese ECE may have implications for other countries who are also struggling with the integration of Western educational philosophy and local contextualization. Sen (2002) argued that the process of globalization should not be mistaken as equivalent to global Westernization. He pointed out that for thousands of years, globalization has contributed to the advancement of different countries through dissemination of knowledge, and this knowledge does not necessarily come from the West. A millennium ago, technological knowledge transmission through globalization was from the East to the West. High-tech knowledge and tools and implements that furthered the progress of humanity, such as paper, the printing press, gunpowder, the magnetic compass, and the wheelbarrow all originated in China. Hence, Sen (2002) argued that regarding globalization as merely Western imperialism of ideas and beliefs would be a costly error. Had Western countries resisted Eastern influence at the turn of the first millennium, they could not have developed the latest technology the world enjoys now. Hence globalization and Westernization should not be confounded.

In fact, Tu (2000) pointed out that during the neo-Confucian revival in the Song dynasty, Confucian ideas spread to Vietnam, Korea, and Japan, and became an integral part of these East Asian countries, thereby making it likely that these countries are facing the issues discussed in this chapter. Confucian core values such as "cultivation of the self in groups" can, therefore, not only enrich our understanding of early education but can also be shared with other East Asian countries with Confucian influences and possibly provide an alternative to Western concepts. Maybe one day, the "glocalized" practice of Chinese early childhood practice may provide inspiration for the "globalized" world.

As an analogy, Xiao Xiang-ning believes that Chinese ECE is struggling to choose from three paths (personal communication, March 2010):

> *Use a pair of Chinese shoes to walk a Chinese path (Traditional way),*
> *Borrow a pair of Western shoes to walk a Chinese path (Westernized way),*
> *Learn the Western way of shoe-making to make a pair of Chinese shoes and walk a Chinese path (Contextualization way).*

It is up to early childhood practitioners and policy-makers in different Chinese societies to exercise wisdom in choosing a path to pursue, with a pair of shoes that is most appropriate for their own situation.

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Part II
Early Childhood Education in the People's Republic of China

Chapter 4
An Overview of Early Childhood Education in the People's Republic of China

Xiao-xia Feng

Introduction

Once considered the weak link in China's education, early childhood education (ECE) has seen unprecedented development in recent years. The rapid development of China's economy and the implementation of social and economic reforms have been accompanied by swift development of the preschool education sector. There have been notable increases in preschool participation, with enrolment rates in kindergartens increasing from less than 30 % in 1991 to over 70 % in 2014 (Ministry of Education, 2015a). The growth of preschool education has also posed some challenges and difficulties. It has been necessary to ensure the quality of the preschool education against the background of rapid expansion and to meet the needs of socially disadvantaged rural and migrant children. This chapter reviews the development of early childhood education in the People's Republic of China (PRC) from a historical perspective and discusses strategies that have been implemented to overcome challenges posed by reforms to the preschool sector. Since 2010, the State has clearly taken more responsibility for preschool education. This is reflected in the recently issued guidelines and legislation and increased funding for the sector. The proper implementation of these initiatives will ensure that China will have a high-quality and effective system of preschool education.

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The Contemporary State of ECE in China

There are three main types of early childhood services in the PRC, including nurseries, kindergartens, and pre-primary classes. Nurseries provide care for children from birth to 3 years of age; kindergartens provide care and education to children between 3 and 6 or 7 years of age; and pre-primary classes cater to the needs of children from 5 to 6 or 7 years of age. Pre-primary classes are usually located in primary schools in rural areas.

Before turning to a historical review of early childhood education in China, it is important to emphasize that China currently operates the world's largest preschool education system. In 2014, 40.51 million children ranging in age from 3 to 6 years were enrolled in 0.21 million kindergartens and were supported by 2.08 million teachers (Ministry of Education, 2015a). In 2014, 66.36 % of the kindergartens were privately owned (Ministry of Education, 2015b).

Preschool facilities in China can be generally divided into five categories based on their funding and management arrangements.[1,2]

1. Category 1 consists of public kindergartens that are directly administered and fully funded by provincial and municipal education departments. Various levels of educational authorities manage these kindergartens. Their teachers are permanent staff and receive the same compensation and benefits as primary and secondary school teachers.
2. Category 2 comprises public kindergartens that are fully funded and managed by state-owned enterprises or the Army. The teachers and parents of children attending these kindergartens are employees of these state-owned organizations. These kindergartens are not fully funded by the government but receive funding support for teachers' salaries and for construction fees, from the budget of these (semi-)governmental organizations. Teachers in these kindergartens are treated as staff and get the same compensation as other employees in these (semi-) governmental agencies and state-owned enterprises.
3. Category 3 includes public kindergartens that are under the jurisdiction of District Education Offices and receive partial financial support from the municipal government. The rest of the funding comes from the Bureau of Civil Affairs or other sources.
4. Category 4 includes private kindergartens that are set up by individuals. Their funding mostly comes from parents. Teachers' pay is decided by the owner of the kindergarten.
5. Category 5 refers to some private kindergartens that have received financial support from the government in recent years as they are deemed as providing a service for the community. The tuition fees charged by these kindergartens are

[1] Before 1994, data from the Ministry of Education was only provided for the three types of public kindergartens. From 1994, data are also provided for private kindergartens.

[2] This categorization applies to mainstream local kindergartens.

regulated by the government to ensure that low- and middle-income families can afford to pay for kindergarten education.

In addition, there are kindergarten programs in international schools which are mainly in major urban cities. These programs typically cater for international students, overseas Chinese who are working in China, and upper-middle class families.

The Development of Early Childhood Education in China

China's education system has been subject to reform and change throughout history. An understanding of the development of preschool education is necessary to gain an understanding of current-day challenges. The roots of publicly funded preschool education in western countries and in China are different. In western countries, large numbers of young women joined the workforce after the Industrial Revolution that took place in the middle of the eighteenth century. Since women were engaged in paid employment, there was a need for child-minding services, and out-of-home early childhood care and education services were provided for the first time. Initially these services were provided by charitable organizations, but with time, governments all over the world have taken more responsibility in providing publicly funded preschool education (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2011).

On the other hand, ECE in China emerged for different reasons. It was not a response to women joining the workforce. Instead, it was a result of the political reform. The Qing government in Wuchang, Hubei Province, set up the first kindergarten, thereby marking the beginning of public preschool education in China (Zhu & Wang, 2005). After that, kindergartens established by the government and individuals started to appear in major cities. These early kindergartens primarily catered for children from wealthy families. Hence, in China, government-funded preschool education was first provided to privileged sectors of society, and it was only later that preschool education was available to children from working-class families or the "masses." This was the reverse of the Western approach where preschool education was first provided to working-class families and then to more socially advantaged families.

The May 4 Movement in 1919, which is seen as the event that led to the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, marked the beginning of a new political era in China. It was felt that China's problems could be alleviated by "two doctors" – doctor democracy and doctor science. The ideas associated with this "New Culture Movement" included the emancipation of women and exerted a strong impact on the development of preschool education in China. There were concerns that preschool education was a luxury, for the more advantaged members of society, and based on foreign ideas. Hence, scholars such as Tao Xingzhi, Chen Heqin, and Zhang Xuemen promoted the notion of establishing kindergartens that were accessible to working-class families, that had "Chinese" characteristics, and that were

located near factories and in rural areas (Tang & Zhong, 1993; Zhu, 2008). Rural kindergartens and kindergartens for children from working-class families were thus established. However, in 1949, there were only 1300 kindergartens serving 130,000 children in China (Compilation Group of the History of Preschool Education in China, 1989; Tang & Zhong, 1993).

Development of ECE in China (1949–1978)
After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, an increasing number of women joined the workforce. Early childhood care and education services were necessary to allow these women to engage in paid employment (Zhu & Wang, 2005). Hence, kindergartens were established in 1952 to meet both educational and social welfare objectives. They were developed to promote all-round development and education of young children and to provide childcare services. This enabled parents to engage in farming, manufacturing, and other forms of work and study, knowing that their children were getting quality out-of-home care and education.

A number of significant guidelines and/or laws have been developed and implemented in order to promote early childhood education since 1949. These, as well as major international treaties ratified by the PRC, are shown in Table 4.1 below.

The *Decision to Change the Education System* (Government Administration Council of the Central People's Government, 1951) was a particularly important document for preschool education in China. This document acknowledged, for the first time, that preschool education was a major component of the PRC's education system. Official documents issued after 1951 recognized preschool education as the first component of the education system that preceded primary, secondary, and higher education, respectively.

As a result of the *Decision*, numerous factories, mines, enterprises, government offices, and schools set up childcare facilities for their employees. Childcare was considered a staff amenity that met a social welfare objective. As noted above, these "educare" services allowed working parents to focus on their jobs. Hence, regardless of whether a parent was a soldier fighting at the front line, or a factory worker, he/she could focus on his/her job with the knowledge that his/her child was being cared for in a safe and nurturing environment (Government Administration Council of the Central People's Government, 1951). In addition, residential early childhood facilities referred to as "boarding nurseries" and "boarding kindergartens" were established by the local government, for children whose parents were soldiers or who were orphans. Further, in rural areas, mothers' groups were established, and mothers took turns to take care of groups of children Government Administration Council of the Central People's Government, 1951).

With a large population, vast territory and a relatively backward economy, there was clearly a large need for preschool education. During the three decades from 1949 to 1978, the number of kindergartens in the country increased from 1300 to over 160,000, and the preschool enrollment grew from 130,000 to over 7.87 million (Tang & Zhong, 1993). With such a rapid expansion, it was necessary to ensure that preschool education met certain standards and that there was a degree of consistency in the form and quality of preschool education. Therefore, the State developed

Table 4.1 National laws and guidelines on early childhood education after 1949

Year (Date)	Name of legislations
Laws related to children passed after 1949	
28 Dec. 1990	Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Disabled Persons
4 Sept. 1991	Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Minors
1 Oct. 1992	Law of the People's Republic of China on Maternal and Infant Health Care
23rd Aug. 1994	Education Act for the Handicapped
Laws related to kindergarten education passed after 1949	
1 Oct. 1951	Decision to Change the Education System
18 March 1952	Kindergarten Temporary Regulation (Draft)
July, 1952	Temporary Guiding Framework for Kindergarten Education (Draft)
7 March 1986	A Checklist of Toys and Teaching Aids for Kindergartens
9 March 1987	Standards for the Institutional Organization of Day and Boarding Kindergartens
5 June 1989	Procedural Regulations for Kindergartens
11th Sept. 1989	Act for Kindergarten Management
8 March 1995	Education Law of the People's Republic of China
26 Jan. 1996	Qualifications and Requirements for the Position of Kindergarten Directors
2 July 2001	Guiding Framework for Kindergarten Education
27 Jan. 2003	Guidelines Governing the Reform and Development of the Early Childhood Education
29 July 2010	National Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020)
6 Sept. 2010	Measures for the Healthcare Management of Nurseries and Kindergartens
21 Nov. 2010	Suggestions on Current Development of Early Childhood Education
8 March 2011	Notification on Establishing a Lead Team to Promote the Three-Year Action Plan for Early Childhood Education
9 Oct. 2012	The Early Learning and Development Guidelines for Children 3–6 Years of Age
3 Nov. 2014	Suggestions on Implementing the Second Round of Three-Year Action Plan for Early Childhood Education
International treaties signed	
20 Nov. 1989	Convention on the Rights of the Child
30 Sept. 1990	World Declaration on the Survival, Protection, and Development of Children
Sept. 1990	Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s

guidelines that were to be followed for the establishment of preschool education facilities. At the same time, there was a need to ensure that as many children as possible could benefit from preschool education. Hence, it was decided in 1979 to provide flexible and diversified forms of early childhood services. This guideline has been depicted as the "walking on two legs" preschool education policy (Government Administration Council of the Central People's Government, 1979). In short, this guideline supported the development of alternative forms/modes of funding of kindergarten education. The establishment of both state-funded public kindergartens (one leg) and non-state-funded private kindergartens (one leg) was

encouraged to meet the need for early childhood education (Zhu, 2007). The "walking on two legs" policy promoted the development of preschool education in China.

Development of ECE in China (1979–2009)

Between 1979 and 2009, marked progress in ECE was made in the PRC. This was the period which saw major economic and political reforms and marked increase in development and prosperity. These conditions brought new opportunities for the development of preschool education in China. A few of the notable developments during this period included the enactment of laws, the increase in preschool participation, an emphasis on providing quality ECE, an increase in the quality and quantity of kindergarten teachers, and the burgeoning of research in ECE in China.

First, a number of national laws to ensure children's rights to development and education were enacted. These included *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Minors* (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 1991), *Law of the People's Republic of China on Maternal and Infant Health Care* (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 1992), and *Education Law of the People's Republic of China* (The State Education Commission, 1995). It is important to note that the Education Law included the State's obligation to provide preschool education. The PRC also ratified many international treaties to signal the importance placed on children's rights to survival, health, development, and education. These included the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (The General Assembly of the United Nations, 1989), the *World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children* (UNICEF, 1990a), and *Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children* in the 1990s (UNICEF, 1990b).

Second, there was a phenomenal increase in preschool participation. While the guiding principle of "walking on two legs" was maintained, amendments to the policy further encouraged various organizations to develop preschool education, through multiple channels, in various forms, in a planned and orderly way, so as to provide more children with the opportunity to receive preschool education. As a result, the preschool enrollment grew from less than 8 million in 1978, to over 28 million in 2009 (Department of Development and Planning, Ministry of Education, 2010; Tang & Zhong, 1993). Although preschool participation markedly increased (see Fig. 4.1), the role of the home environment for early development was also recognized. Parents are children's first teachers, and a number of documents encouraged parents to provide a favorable home environment for young children. For example, the Working Committee for Women and Children under the State Council issued *China's Outline of Child Development in the 1990s* (The State Council, 1992) and *China's Outline of Child Development 2001–2010* (The State Council, 2001), to support parents to care and educate in ways that promote optimal child development. Other services provided to support parent's caregiving roles included parent education services and classes to promote parent-child bonding. In the context of China's one-child policy in 1979 (see Sun, & Rao, 2017, Chap. 2), the importance of the preschool experience for young children was also recognized.

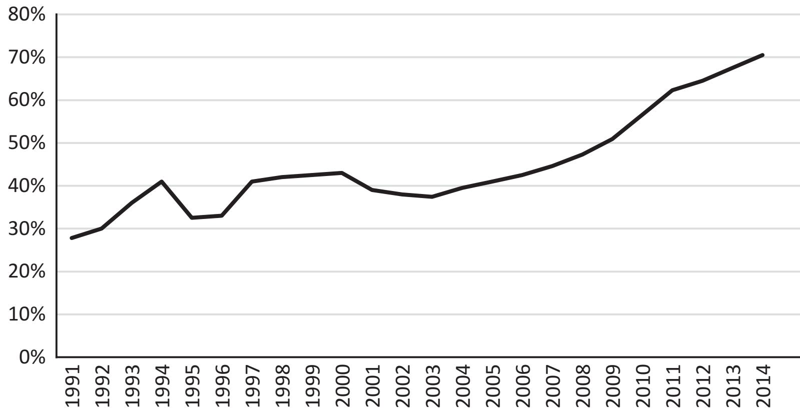

Fig. 4.1 Change in enrollments in kindergartens from 1991 to 2014

Third, there was an emphasis on enhancing the quality of preschool education. This was through focusing on the curriculum and on teacher quality. The academic and professional qualifications of kindergarten teachers were enhanced (see Jiang, Pang, & Sun, 2017, Chap. 6). Between 2001 and 2008, the percentage of teachers with junior college education or above increased from 30.47 to 57.53 % (Department of Development and Planning, Ministry of Education, 2002, 2009). In 2008, the number of university graduates and postgraduates among preschool teachers was 106,660 (Department of Development and Planning, Ministry of Education, 2009). Further, there were many more university-level educational programs for preschool programs, and by 2008, 128 universities and 389 colleges in China had started to train preschool education personnel (see Jiang, Pang, & Sun, 2017, Chap. 6). The professionalization of the teaching force improved the quality of preschool education. Better-qualified preschool teachers were empowered to conduct pedagogical research, to cater to individual students' learning needs, and to effectively promote children's learning and development.

Fourth, between 1979 and 2009, there was a great increase in the volume of research into preschool education (Feng, 2015). Both preschool teachers and researchers appreciated the importance of research in raising the quality of preschool education. University-based researchers typically studied the development and education of young children from physiological, psychological, and educational perspectives. Additionally, teachers engaged in action research to enhance teaching quality (Zhu & Wang, 2005). Research has been influential in improving preschool education in China (Feng, 2015). Researchers have also addressed the challenges and difficulties in reforming the preschool education system reform and have endeavored to establish a preschool education system that is both appropriate for the Chinese cultural context and able to meet the society's needs for quality education.

Difficulties and Challenges (1979–2009)

Though China's preschool education improved greatly between 1979 and 2009, and there were impressive gains in preschool participation, problems existed. There was a discrepancy between demand and supply, unintended consequences of privatization, poor conditions of service for kindergarten teachers, and marked regional disparities in the availability and quality of preschool education.

Discrepancy Between Demand and Supply There was an increased demand for preschool education from parents, for educational and custodial reasons. Chinese parents value education highly (see Sun & Rao, 2017, Chap. 2) and see it as a means to upward social mobility. They want their children to be better prepared academically for school so that they will not be behind at the starting line at school. Further, many kindergartens that provided high-quality education charged very high tuition fees that parents could not afford to pay. It has been pointed out that fees in some kindergartens were higher than university tuition fees (Feng, 2015).

The speed of China's economic growth and accelerating urbanization further fueled the demand for preschool education. There was massive migration from rural to urban areas that affected childcare arrangements. Some young children accompanied their parents to the cities, but some 61 million children are currently "left behind" in rural areas (See Sun & Rao, 2017, Chap. 2). This high level of migration had, and continues to have, significant implications for the care and education of young children. Regardless of whether children migrated with their parents – in which case they could be denied access due to not having permits or *hukou* – or stayed and got "left behind" in their hometowns, there was an unmet demand for preschool education (Feng, 2015).

Despite the increase in public demand for preschool education, there was a decrease in supply of preschool places. The reform of the economic system in China led to companies/enterprises focusing on increasing production of goods. The companies/enterprises were no longer required to provide childcare facilities for their employees, as this was considered a social welfare benefit. Hence, many kindergartens were closed (Zhang, 2012). A small number of them changed their funding and management structures and became private kindergartens. Later, some kindergartens set up by government agencies and institutions were also closed during the process of streamlining these agencies and institutions, and this further reduced the number of kindergartens in China (Feng, 2015). The total number of kindergartens in the country fell from about 180,000 at the end of the 1990s to about 110,000 in 2000. Between 2000 and 2001 alone, the number of kindergartens in the country decreased by over 64,000. Although there was a rapid increase in the number of private kindergartens afterward, the total number of kindergartens was still below 140,000 in 2009 (Feng, 2015). The decrease in the number of kindergartens was also accompanied by a decrease in the number of children enrolled in kindergartens.

Consequences of the Privatization of Kindergartens Before 2000, most of the kindergartens in China were funded by the state. Among the five categories of kin-

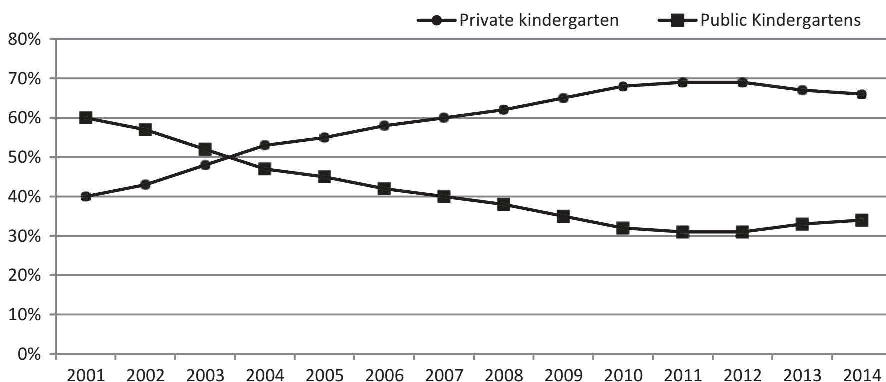

Fig. 4.2 Change in the percentage of public and private kindergartens between 2001 and 2014 (Source: Ministry of Education, 2015b)

dergartens mentioned earlier, the majority were funded by the state or by state-owned enterprises (Zeng, 2008). However, with kindergartens being closed, privatizing, or otherwise changing their business framework, the structure of China's preschool education changed.

As shown in Fig. 4.2, the proportion of state- or enterprise-funded kindergartens decreased sharply. These kindergartens had met the needs of middle- and low-income families, and a considerable part of the tuition fees was indirectly supported by the state or funded in a large part by these enterprises. Further, many of these kindergartens were located in work premises thereby making them very convenient for parents. The closure of kindergartens set up by enterprises posed problems for middle- and low-income families. Parents had to meet the full costs of preschool education in private kindergartens, and owners of private kindergartens sought to make profits through charging fees (Feng, 2015). They also had to make arrangements for their young children to go to kindergartens that were not located at their work places.

The subsidized and convenient kindergartens were replaced with both high-quality private preschools that charged high fees and poor-quality kindergartens that charged lower fees. There was a shortage of high-quality, affordable state-funded kindergartens, and it was difficult for children from low-income families to secure a place in these kindergartens (Feng, 2015).

Further, state-funded kindergartens were mainly located in the cities. These kindergartens, which had better-qualified teachers, tended to meet the needs of government officials, social celebrities, executives, and others from more advantaged social backgrounds. This caused discontent and led to calls for more state-funded, high-quality preschool education for low- and middle-income families.

Status of Early Childhood Educators According to the *Teachers Law of the Peoples' Republic of China* (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 1993), kindergarten teachers should enjoy the same social position and rights as

primary and secondary school teachers. However, with primary and secondary education being compulsory and preschool education turning privatized and market oriented, a large gap between the salaries of kindergarten teachers and that of primary secondary school teachers developed. Since Kindergarten teachers commanded lower salaries than primary and secondary teachers and had poorer terms of employment, this led to attrition. This made it difficult for kindergartens to have a stable teaching force and to attract talented personnel (see Jiang, Pang & Sun, 2017, Chap. 6).

Variations in the Quality of Early Childhood Services The government accorded increasing attention to the quality of ECE and enacted laws and regulations such as *Procedural Regulations for Kindergartens* (The State Education Commission, 1989) and *Guiding Framework for Kindergarten Education* (Trial Version) (Ministry of Education, 2001). Local governments also developed curriculum guidelines and standards for kindergartens. However, the pressure to be financially viable and also make profits led some kindergartens to cut expenses, including on teacher salaries and educational resources. Teachers' qualifications, years of teaching experience, instructional beliefs, and practices vary markedly, and this influences preschool quality. Further, kindergartens wanted to meet parents' desires for an academic program that were not considered appropriate for young children. As a consequence, there were wide variations in the quality of preschool education (Feng, 2015).

Regional Disparities in Preschool Education Due to its vast territory and the marked regional disparities in economic development, China adopted a decentralized system for preschool education. Local governments were to take responsibility for funding and managing preschool education. This actually led to even more regional disparities. In Shanghai, the municipal government allocated more public funding to develop preschool education. In 2009, 7.93 % of total funding for education was allocated for preschool education, and the number of government-funded kindergartens accounted for 72 % of the total number of kindergartens (Su, 2010; Xiong, 2015). Shanghai thus had an enrollment rate of 98 % for 3- to 6-year-olds (Su, 2010). On the other hand, in Zhejiang province, 80 % of its kindergartens were privately funded (Department of Education, Zhejiang Province, 2009). The difference in funding sources resulted in differences not only among more developed parts of the country, such as the municipality of Shanghai and Zhejiang province, but across more- and less-developed regions. Some less-developed western provinces did not allocate sufficient public funds for preschool education. With the devolution of responsibility to provincial governments, the central government did not exert sufficient control in terms of regulating the development of preschool education across provinces, different regions in a province, and between urban and rural areas. Some of the problems of preschool education in the PRC between 1978 and 2009 were a consequence of China's economic reform and subsequent rapid growth. The pace of change far outstripped the government's ability to deal with the various problems that arose. Furthermore, as a country used to a planned economy, China lacked the experience

and resources to solve these issues. Thus, the reform policies were often vague, and the path to reform was difficult; but reform is an exploration. To their credit, early childhood educators and educational administrators at various levels did make relentless efforts to tackle the challenges and difficulties associated with the reform and to find appropriate solutions for the problems that arose (Feng, 2015).

Development of ECE in China (2010 Onward)

After 2009, preschool education was accorded considerable attention by the government. In May 2010, the State Council passed the *National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020)* (Ministry of Education, 2010). The issue of these guidelines was another watershed moment for ECE in China, as preschool education was listed as one of the six major tasks for education development, for the first time. A policy was formulated to universalize one-year preschool education all over the country, mandate two-year preschool education in more developed areas, and require three years' preschool education in the most developed areas before 2020. The government would also focus on the development of preschool education in rural areas. Therefore, it was necessary to articulate the responsibilities of the government and establish a preschool education system that would be regulated by the government but that integrated both public and private provision (Ministry of Education, 2010).

On November 3, 2010, the State Council executive meeting once again affirmed the importance of preschool education. It was recognized as an important part of the national education system, and the proper care and education of hundreds of millions of children was considered integral to the future of the nation. The state would manage and implement a system for preschool education which would include the urban and the rural areas, and the kindergartens, so that all children could receive a high-quality preschool education.

On November 21, 2010, the *Suggestions on Current Development of Early Childhood Education* document was issued (The State Council, 2010a) and further emphasized the government's role in preschool education. The document addressed the problem of inadequate and unfair public funding support in the development of ECE and noted that the government would increase financial resources for preschool education, reexamine the way of funding preschool education, subsidize young children from poor and needy families, and prioritize and promote the development of ECE in rural and western areas through public funding.

At the same time, the State Council convened the relevant ministries to develop national guidelines and to propose specific measures for promoting preschool education. Most notably, it was decided that 50 billion yuan was to be invested to promote preschool education in rural areas in the middle and western regions from 2011 to 2015. It is the first time in China's history that the central government has apportioned special funds for preschool education, and this was a very significant development, for three reasons (The State Council, 2010b).

First, this development is a concrete manifestation of the implementation of the government's responsibility in the development of preschool education. It is also

considered as an important guarantee for the implementation of the *Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2010). Second, it is an important measure to promote equality at the starting point of school education, given that administrative and financial responsibility and funding were devolved to provincial and local governments. In poor and rural areas, limited funding had been allocated to preschool education, and this was not conducive to the development of preschool education in poor areas. This time, the central government is committed to provide financial support expenditure for the following: the expansion and reconstruction of kindergartens in the middle and western regions and in the poverty-stricken areas in the eastern region; private kindergartens which charge low tuition fees and serve the public and support the collective body, the establishment of kindergartens by enterprises and institutions, a national teacher training program for kindergarten teachers in the middle and western regions, and for local governments to establish a subsidy system for preschool education for poor children (Ministry of Education, 2010). These policies prioritize the needs of underprivileged children, to rectify the previous unfair distribution of public funding for preschool education.

Third, it recognized the importance of establishing a comprehensive state-funded system (Liu & Pan, 2013). As noted earlier, preschool education was thought of as a social welfare benefit, and it did not receive much public finance. The government's new policy to develop preschool education included funding. China's preschool education has entered a new phase. However, the process of system development is a long and hard task. From the perspective of sustainable development, preschool education does not only need special support from public finance during special periods for certain situations. It is more important to establish a long-term mechanism. Therefore, the nation needs to start from actual conditions, look into the future, and design an efficient and effective system.

According to the *Evaluation Report of National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan* (2010–2020) (Ministry of Education, 2015c), great achievement has been made in terms of:

1. A substantial increase in gross enrolment rate of ECE, from 50.9 % in 2009 to 70.5 % in 2014
2. A rapid expansion of resources for ECE, with an increase of 51.88 % in the total number of kindergartens and 87.05 % in the number of preschool teachers
3. Particular support for rural areas to develop ECE, with an increase of 13,899 kindergartens in rural areas, from 2011 to 2014
4. Initial establishment of ECE network to benefit children universally, by supporting the establishment of different types of public kindergartens and private kindergartens providing ECE services with universal benefits
5. Substantial increase in financial investment in ECE, with a total investment of ¥ 69 billion from the central government and over ¥ 200 billion from local governments from 2010 to 2014
6. The establishment of financial support for parents, with over 8 million children benefitted from the support
7. Significant improvement in preschool teachers in both quantity and quality

8. Gradually regularized ECE monitoring system
9. An overall satisfaction with ECE from society, with the satisfaction rate from parents ranging from 70–90 % and the average satisfaction rate from principals 82.85 %

Support for Migrant and "Left-Behind" Children A recent survey considered the needs of parents who were migrant workers in different provinces and municipalities and who had preschool children. They found that there was a great demand for preschool education that was convenient, and of low cost, but that parents wanted children to have an academic preschool curriculum which focused on reading and mathematics. Many of their children had access to ECE. However, most of the kindergartens were unregistered and of low quality. Results also showed that most of the migrant families who brought their children into cities planned to remain in the cities with their children (Feng, 2015). Therefore, there is an urgent need to provide high-quality preschool education to children of migrants. Similarly, there is a pressing need for high-quality ECE for children who are left behind in rural areas, when their parents migrate to urban areas. Studies have found that left-behind children were more likely to have problems in social development. For instance, they have psychosocial difficulties and emotional difficulties, experience bullying, and have poor daily living habits. These problems are partially due to their separation from parents (Wen & Lin, 2012; Ye & Pan, 2011; Fan, Su, Gill, & Birmaher, 2010). More measures should be adopted to enhance parent-child interaction for these children, and more opportunities should be created for children to have reunions with their parents.

Status of Kindergarten Teachers While the *Teacher Law of the People's Republic of China* (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 1993) safeguards the rights and benefits of teachers, the legislation only includes teachers in publicly funded kindergartens. However, as noted earlier, most kindergarten teachers work in private kindergartens and are not formally recognized as "teachers," as they do not have *bianzhi*, a hallmark of a formal teacher, especially in rural areas (Hu & Robert, 2013). Therefore, these teachers do not receive the same wages, benefit, and privileges provided to teachers in publicly funded kindergartens. A survey in Anhui province found that in rural areas, about 76 % of the kindergarten teachers had a strong wish to leave their job. Teachers who were younger, who had higher educational qualifications, and who received relatively lower wages reported that they were more likely to resign than other teachers (Feng, 2015). Hence, teacher wastage and attrition continue to be problems in the preschool sector.

Conclusions

It is clear that the PRC has entered a new and positive era for preschool education, bolstered by facilitative and sensible government policies and measures. Effective implementation of reform measures is not an easy task, and there will undoubtedly

be challenges in making changes. There may also be some unexpected consequences. However, the will and the skill to make changes are in place, and preschool education in the PRC is poised to have a bright future.

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Chapter 5
Trends in Government Expenditure in Early Childhood Education in China: Practices in Shanghai, Guizhou, and Ningshan

Jing Zhou, Jin Sun, and Diana Pei Ling Lee

Early childhood education (ECE) is now recognized as a crucial component of "building the wealth of nations" (UNESCO, 2010) and is an important mechanism to narrow the income-based achievement gap (Rao et al., 2013). Multiple studies have addressed the importance of investing in early childhood education from the perspectives of neuroscience (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000), economic returns (Heckman, 2004; Lynch, 2004), and program evaluation (Rao et al., 2012). As a result, the past decades have witnessed the rapid development of early childhood globally, in terms of both access and quality improvement. This indicates that countries have invested more and more attention and resources in ECE, a sector of the education system that has been neglected for a long time.

As a developing country with a population over 1.3 billion, and as a vast land area with very uneven economic development, the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has attached great importance to promoting the development of education. In fact, the promotion of science and education has been a vital strategy to build a harmonious society, rich in the quality of human resources. A corollary to this is that the government has allocated substantive fiscal support to promote the development of education to support the country's remarkable economic growth. However, most of the fiscal resources for improving education nationwide have been spent in primary, secondary, and higher education sectors

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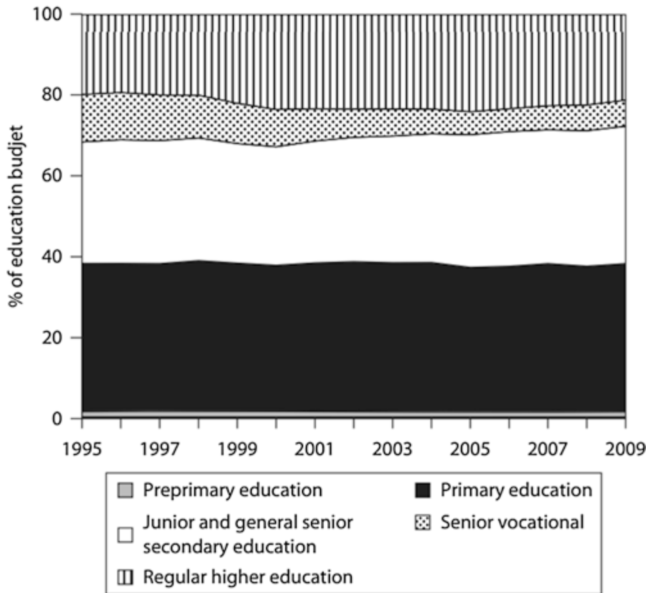

Fig. 5.1 Budgetary expenditure on different levels of education in China from 1995 to 2010 (Source: Wu, Young, and Cai. 2012)

(Wu, Young, & Cai, 2012), and historically, the budgetary expenditure in ECE was insignificant compared to that in other educational sectors (see Fig. 5.1). Consequently, despite the substantial increase in access and quality of other levels of education sectors in the PRC, access to ECE is still a luxury for many children, especially for those in rural areas. The national gross enrollment rate in early childhood education for 3-year-olds was 54 % in 2010 (UNESCO, 2012), which means almost half of the preschoolers in China did not have access to kindergartens at that time. The quality of early childhood education could not be guaranteed either; concerns around this led to a landmark policy that clearly articulates, for the first time, the government's crucial responsibility in improving the development of ECE in China. China's *National Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan* (2010–2020) (Ministry of Education, 2010) has profoundly influenced the implementation and development of early childhood education in China.

In this chapter, we introduce the finance system of ECE in the PRC and then discuss the new strategies in fiscal expenditure in ECE against the launch of the National Development Plan of 2010–2020 (the *Plan*). One significant highlight of this policy is the recognition and support of development of ECE in rural areas. As a result, the investment in ECE in rural areas, from both the central government and from governments at all levels, has been substantially increased. We therefore introduce the fiscal investment in ECE in regions with contrasting development levels, against this policy initiative. Shanghai is a municipality in China, which is highly

developed, with a tradition of educational excellence. The Shanghai government has been placing great attention to improving ECE development, even in the era when ECE was neglected nationwide. Guizhou province is a "backward" province compared to provinces in the east in China. The fiscal investment on ECE has been significantly improved against the issue of the Plan, and great progress has been achieved. We further elaborate the specific efforts from a local rural government, with an example of Ningshan, a financially distressed county in Shaanxi province. Although the measures taken in these three regions might not necessarily represent situations in regions with different levels of societal and economic development, these successful experiences reflect the active and locally appropriate actions being taken in China. Implications and suggestions are then discussed.

The Development of Financial System of Early Childhood Education in China

The financing of early childhood education in China was centralized before the opening-up policy in the 1980s. The progression of reform of corporations, institutions, and governments since the mid-1980s brought significant changes in the financial system of early childhood education. The financing of basic education was requested to be decentralized, which directly led to financial difficulties for the kindergartens that were affiliated with enterprises (Cai & Feng, 2007, 2014). As discussed in Chap. 4, many public kindergartens had to face the situation of "being closed, merged, transferred, or sold," and the number of private kindergartens sprung up significantly.

As a result, public finance in ECE was very limited, and severely underfunded, before the launch of the National Development Plan of 2010–2020. As Li (2012) points out, the public expenditure on ECE was only around 0.03 to 0.05 % of GDP in the past 10 years in China, while the average public expenditure on early childhood education in EU countries was 0.5 %. The ratio of public expenditure on early childhood education to public expenditure on education has also been quite low. For example, early childhood education accounted for 7 % of enrollment in public institutions, but received only 1 % of the education budget (Wu, Young, & Cai, 2012).

Furthermore, the public budgetary spending mostly went to public kindergartens, which only account for a small proportion of pre-primary educational institutions. The number of public kindergarten shrank rapidly, with only very few children having access to public kindergartens and enjoying financial support from the country (see Chap. 4, this volume). As a result, the disadvantages of kindergartens run by rural authorities and collective units were accentuated in terms of teacher qualifications, fees, resources, and financial security. The problems of "hard to get in kindergartens" and "too expensive to afford early childhood education" became exacerbated, especially in 2011 and 2012.

There is also severe regional inequality in terms of expenditure on ECE in the PRC. According to Gong et al. (2013), there are large interregional differences in expenditure on early childhood education in China. For example, in 2009, per-student expenditure of Beijing, the highest-spending province, was 12 times that of Guangxi, the lowest-spending one. In additional to marked provincial differences, within-province differences in expenditure on early childhood education also exist (Gong, Zhu, Liu, & Ma, 2013). Even within a province, urban areas are better funded than rural areas. The per-student public financial spending in the north area of Jiangsu province, a relatively poor area in the province, was ¥[1]523.14 for urban areas, and ¥ 18.98 for rural areas, while the average for the province of per-student budgetary expenditure was ¥ 1344 in Jiangsu (Bo et al., 2012). Furthermore, government funds can only be used to subsidize public preschools, which were located in the center of the township, and private preschools received almost no subsidies (Bo et al., 2012).

China's decentralized system of finance may explain the lack of public expenditure in early childhood education, as a whole, and the vast regional disparities, both of which are closely related to the disparity in access to, and quality of, early childhood education in China. The current decentralized system of finance has allocated the heaviest financial burdens to the lowest levels of government, county governments in rural areas, and district government in municipalities (Wu, Young, & Cai, 2012). For example, in 2008, governments at the county and township levels provided 45 % of total budgetary spending on education, while the central and provincial governments provided 10 % and 45 % of the finances, respectively (Wu, Young, & Cai, 2012).

The National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020)

The Chinese government launched a landmark policy, the *National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020)* (Ministry of Education, 2010), to improve ECE. The *Plan* explicitly states that, by 2020, one year of universal early childhood education should be available in all regions; most regions should achieve 2 years of early childhood education; and 3 years of preschool education should be mandated in certain regions. The responsibility of government in facilitating early childhood education is explicitly specified in the *Plan*, with associated public budgetary expenditure slated to increase. Furthermore, the development of ECE in rural areas is particularly emphasized.

The State Council has further issued ten specific guidelines in *Suggestions on Current Development of Early Childhood Education* (*hereafter referred to as "Suggestions"*) (The State Council, 2010), to help implement the *Plan*. The

[1]¥ is the symbol used to denote the Chinese yuan. USD1 = ¥ 6.5.

articulation of guidelines to support the implementation of educational policy is also common in primary education in China (Rao, Pearson, Cheng, & Taplin, 2013). In terms of financial investment, the *Suggestions* focus on expanding multiple channels to invest in ECE. In particular, the *Suggestions* require government at different levels to include the budgetary spending on ECE in their budgetary plan and mandate that the newly added education budget should be used more to support the development of ECE. The proportion of fiscal investment in ECE should be reasonable and should be increased significantly in the next 3 years. The standards for per-student expenditure and per-student financial allocation for public kindergartens should be decided according to the actual situation in different regions. There should be incentives to encourage different sectors of society to donate and/or to run kindergartens. Families should share the cost of ECE at a reasonable level, and a funding mechanism for ECE should also be established for families with needs. In addition, there will be earmarked funds from the central government to support the development of ECE in particular regions, and local governments should also increase investment, to primarily support the development of early childhood education in remote, poor, and ethnic minority areas. The use and management of the funding for early childhood education should be regulated.

Against this background, the central government has allocated special funds annually to support ECE, particularly for the middle and western areas, as well as for the disadvantaged children in urban areas. Local governments have been requested to assume major responsibility to enhance access to, and quality of, ECE. They have been required to make a *Three-Year Action Plan for Early Childhood Education* for each county, according to the local situation, as stated in the *Suggestions on Current Development of Early Childhood Education* (The State Council, 2010).

From 2011 to 2013, the period of the first *Three-Year Action Plan for Early Childhood Education*, the investment from the central government on early childhood education was ¥ 50 billion, and the investment from local governments was more than ¥160 billion (Ministry of Education, 2014a). The ratio of public expenditure on ECE to public expenditure on education increased from 1.7 % in 2010 to 3.4 % in 2012 (Ministry of Education, 2014a).

The second *Three-Year Action Plan for Early Childhood Education* started in 2014. According to the *Advice for Implementing the Second Three-Year Action Plan for Early Childhood Education* (Ministry of Education, National Development and Reform Commission, and Ministry of Finance, 2014), the investment in ECE will further increase. In particular, the local governments were requested to develop and meet regional-specific standards of fiscal allocation for each preschool child. The standard cost for ECE should also be adjusted, and tuition fees should be controlled so parents can afford them. There should also be particular financial support for the ECE development in rural, remote, poor, and ethnic minority regions. Government financial support for economically disadvantaged children, orphans, and children with disabilities should be increased. Furthermore, the central government will continue allocating special funds to encourage and guide the ECE development in different regions. The budget will support local governments to develop the financial

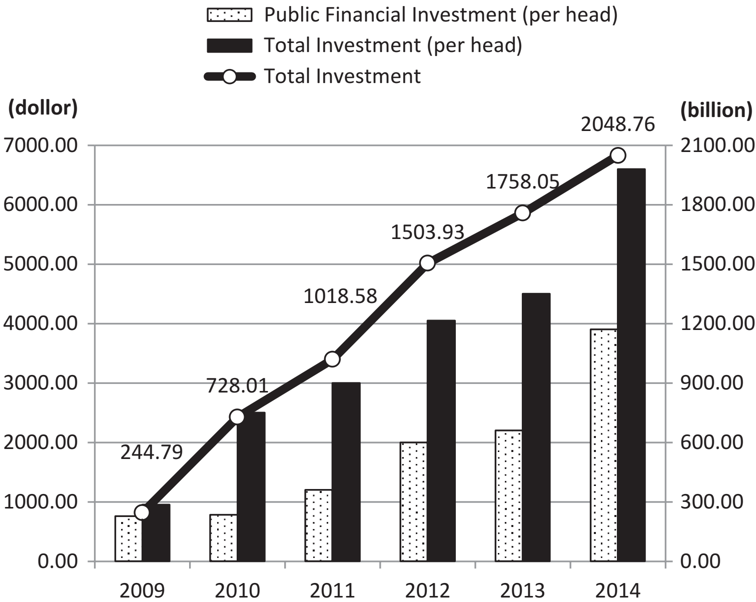

Fig. 5.2 Financial investment in ECE from 2009 to 2014

support systems in different regions, implement national training programs for preschool teachers, expand ECE resources, reconstruct or build new public kindergartens, attract community and social resources to establish kindergartens providing universal ECE, improve kindergarten conditions especially in the middle and western areas, and guide and stimulate local governments to improve the public preschool system. Figure 5.2 shows the substantial increase of public expenditure on ECE from 2009 to 2014, after the issue of the National Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan. Given the tremendous support, especially the fiscal support, from the government, great achievement has been made since the launch of the *Plan* (see Chapter 4).

With the progression of the second *Three-Year Action Plan for Early Childhood Education*, the focus of national investment strategy has become more and more explicit. A regional-specific and appropriate ECE development plan to provide universal benefit ECE is highly encouraged, with the support from both central and local government. Policy priorities are given for children and families with disadvantages and in the rural, remote, poor, and ethnic minority regions.

In the following sections, we discuss the practices followed to enhance the development of ECE divergent regions in China: Shanghai, Guizhou Province, and Ningshan, a county in Shanxi Province. These regions differ greatly in social and economic development, and the provincial governments are taking active but different locally appropriate investment approaches to enhance the development of ECE.

Public Funding and Early Childhood Education Services in Shanghai

As a central city of reform in China, Shanghai has achieved remarkable economic and social development in the past 20 years. Despite its economic growth, ECE in this city is not commercialized; it remains a social priority and is viewed as a social welfare benefit.

The Shanghai government has taken steps to boost its public expenditure in ECE. In 2006, the municipal government put forward a set of guiding principles of "Ensuring public welfare, promoting balance, enhancing quality and stimulating vitality" in the development of ECE. It aimed to provide sufficient resources for the delivery of public ECE services to cater to citizens' needs. Improvements were made to the kindergarten monitoring system to enhance the quality of preschools. Government funding of ECE and public expenditure per student were increased annually. A subsidy scheme for preschool children from needy families was also established. As shown in Fig. 5.3, public expenditure on early childhood education has increased markedly from 2004 to 2013. Both the quantity and quality of early childhood education have improved significantly as a result.

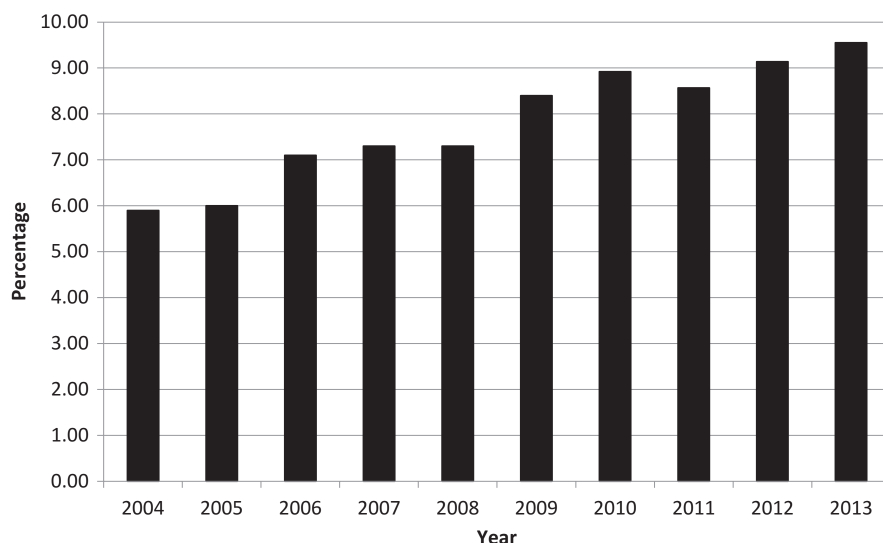

Fig. 5.3 Public expenditure in early childhood education as a percentage of total education expenditure of the Shanghai City Government (Shanghai Education Commission, 2014)

Access to Early Childhood Education

Shanghai has achieved universal three-year ECE. In 2014, there were 1,462 kindergartens in Shanghai, of which 930 were public kindergartens. Kindergarten enrollments totaled 502,900, and 41 % were kindergarten-age nonpermanent residents of Shanghai (Shanghai Education Commission, 2015a). Owing to the impact of the third baby boom in the city from the 1980s to 1990s, many young women have reached childbearing age. Meanwhile, large numbers of non-registered residents have flocked into the city in the past few years, leading to an influx of non-registered babies. This, coupled with the previous baby boomers' children, places great pressure on kindergarten admissions. Consequently, the Shanghai Education Commission increased the number of kindergartens, taking into account parents' needs, to determine the location and modes of service. This strategy was enacted to meet the anticipated population growth and to ensure that more kindergarten-age children have access to ECE.

Kindergarten Expansion

All levels of government have increased their spending on ECE to improve the infrastructure and teaching facilities in the kindergartens. This has enhanced the quality of services. By constructing new kindergarten campuses, by expanding or relocating old ones, and by reassigning public funds for the procurement of educational resources, about 400 additional kindergartens have sprung up across the city. Land coverage of kindergartens in Shanghai increased from almost 4 million square meters in 2005 to 6.5 million square meters in 2010, while floor space has expanded from 2.5 million to 4.2 million square meters in the same period (The General Office of Shanghai Municipal People's Government, 2011). Of all the kindergartens in Shanghai, up to 70 % were publicly funded, and all received support from the government, with initial funds for facilities. In the third round of Three-Year Action Plan, the Shanghai government will establish and renovate 90 kindergartens, which will increase the land coverage by about 30,000 square meters (Shanghai Education Commission, 2015b).

Staff Development

Early childhood teachers are usually trained in teachers' colleges and Normal[2] universities. Secondary school graduates who have not studied ECE can also receive training to serve as kindergarten teachers in preschools in suburban and rural areas.

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[2]The terms normal school and normal universities are used to denote institutions that engage in teacher training.

The Shanghai Education Commission offers free or subsidized induction training to all new kindergarten teachers and annual professional development to all kindergarten principals. Improved in-service training programs are also provided to all kindergarten nurses and serving teachers. Together with all the qualified health-care teachers, nurses, and nutritionists working in kindergartens, the qualifications of kindergarten staff have improved significantly. By 2014, there were 53,400 teaching staff in kindergartens in Shanghai, including 34,900 specialist teachers, of whom over 99 % had at least attained postsecondary qualifications and over 98 % principals had earned at least an associate degree and beyond (Shanghai Education Commission, 2015a; Shanghai Municipal Statistics Bureau, 2015). Furthermore, a scheme titled "Cultivation of Renowned Principals and Outstanding Teachers" has been implemented to cultivate talent in ECE and create role models who can serve as lead teachers in professional development. Through a range of professional development activities, such as kindergarten-based action research, curriculum planning, and mentorship, a community of key principals and teachers in districts and counties has been formed.

Quality of Kindergartens

The Shanghai government funds research in childcare and teaching and actively promotes curriculum reform in kindergartens. It strategically pairs up high-quality city kindergartens with their counterparts in rural areas and establishes corresponding mentorship schemes between principals, teachers, and curriculum development teachers. Exemplary practices of the city kindergartens have begun to influence the rural ones, and rural teaching staff's school management skills and knowledge have improved (The General Office of Shanghai Municipal People's Government, 2011). The government assists privately run kindergartens in enhancing their quality by matching them with public kindergartens, and ten private kindergartens have reached the status of "first-class kindergartens." There were 383 first-class kindergartens, accounting for 31 % of the total number in Shanghai (The General Office of Shanghai Municipal People's Government, 2011). Education for children from birth to 3 years has also started to gain importance, and 95 % of the parents and caregivers of children in this age group, who live in the city, have access to four parenting sessions each year (The General Office of Shanghai Municipal People's Government, 2011).

The example of Shanghai shows that, with the government attaching more importance to early childhood education, and by increasing public expenditure, early childhood education can indeed develop rapidly. The Shanghai experience demonstrates that, in China, development and progress of ECE cannot rely solely on market forces. The Shanghai case also underscores the fact that government-directed expenditure is essential to ascertain quality. What is more important is that it can ensure that all children have equal access to high-quality ECE.

Fiscal Investment in Guizhou Province

Guizhou is located in the southwestern part of China. Guizhou is mountainous, relatively poor, and economically underdeveloped. The per capita GDP of ¥ 26,393 in 2014 make it the least developed of all provinces in the PRC (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2014).

Before 2006, the special fund for ECE provided by the provincial government was ¥ 400,000 per year. From 2006 to 2011, the provincial government allocated an annual investment of ¥ 1,000,000 in ECE to support kindergarten construction and preschool teacher training. Since the implementation of the first Three-Year Preschool Education Action Plan in 2011, different levels of government have highly emphasized preschool education and included it as an important livelihood project. By 2015, different levels of governments had invested a total of ¥ 7.718B (including ¥ 550 M from the special fund from the provincial government; ¥ 373 M from the provincial, municipal, and county governments; and ¥ 3.2B from the central government) in Guizhou to help with kindergarten construction (Department of Education, Guizhou Province, 2015).

As a result, there is an increase of 1650 public kindergartens in the county and municipal communities and 3290 in the villages. The number of children in preschool has increased by 470,000, and the gross enrollment rate has increased from 55 % in 2011 to 80 % in 2015. The problem of difficulty in access to ECE has been greatly relieved. Among the nine prefecture-level cities and autonomous prefectures, four have established the public fiscal investment standard for each preschool child, with the highest standard of ¥ 800 per child and the lowest of ¥ 200 per child a year. The regulation of standards has provided solid and important financial support for kindergartens' normal operation (Department of Education, Guizhou Province, 2015).

Implementing Free Early Childhood Education in Ningshan

Since the launch of the *Plan*, some financially sound counties have initiated actions to implement free ECE. Ningshan, an economically underdeveloped county in Shanxi province with public revenue of ¥ 30.75 million, and an annual income per capita of ¥3800 in 2010, also initiated, in 2011, its 15-year free education program, which includes 3 years of free early childhood education (Cai & Hai, 2014). How could the local authority implement this policy against the financial difficulties? Cai and Hai (2014) further investigated experiences of initiating free ECE in Ningshan, and their observations are elaborated below.

Due to the global economic crisis in 2008, a considerable number of migrant workers returned to Ningshan, but only less than 20 % of them had received high school education or above. These returning residents actually aggravated the poverty level of Ningshan. To improve the situation, the local government decided to

launch its 12-year free education program, including 3 years of high school education, in their free education system, and subsequently initiated a 15-year free education program to include 3 years of free early childhood education.

Indeed, after the launch of this initiative, the Shanxi provincial and Ankang municipal governments both embarked on provincial and municipal-level strategies to implement *3-year free ECE*. These strategies with their associated financial provision have provided necessary and important support for Ningshan to fulfill its initiation of *3-year free ECE*. However, it is not practicable to rely solely on financial allocation from the Education budget to support the free early education initiation. The education expenditure accounts for almost 40 % of Ningshan's annual revenue, and the annual expenditure related to the implementation of *the 15-year free education program* is around ¥13 million. The local government therefore strategically decided that the financial shortage related to *the 15-year free education program* can be made up from incremental revenue from the new local industries such as tourism, green mining, and health food and from provincial-level tax. The Ningshan government also embarked on other strategies, such as seeking donations from corporations and individuals to support its significant 15-year free education program.

In Ningshan, ECE is free, and the annual tuition fee of ¥900 is waived for all children from 3 to 6 years enrolled in public kindergartens, preschool classes in primary schools, and in nonpublic kindergartens approved by the education authorities. At the same, the tuition fee support is not subject to the residential registration policy, that is, all 3- to 6-year-olds enrolled in eligible kindergartens can enjoy the free ECE in Ningshan. As a result, the enrollment rate of early childhood education in Ningshan increased substantially from 53.75 % in 2009 to 92.40 % in 2013 (see Table 5.1).

The *3-year free ECE* program also included a nutrition subsidy for eligible children to enhance their nutritional status. In Fall 2013, each eligible child received a financial subsidy of ¥4 per day for the 200-day school year. With the help of the nutrition improvement project, the rates of development delay and being underweight in children in Ningshan were reduced by 30 % and 16 %, respectively.

ECE provision was expanded and kindergarten facilities were updated because of government spending. Fourteen standardized public kindergartens were established or were under construction from 2011 to 2013. The expenditure for equip-

Table 5.1 Kindergarten attendance and enrollment rate in Ningshan from 2009 to 2013

Year	No. of children attending kindergarten	3-year enrollment
2009 S2	1061	53.75 %
2010 S2	1196	61.06 %
2011 S2	1415	83.40 %
2012 S2	1751	86.20 %
2013 S2	1997	92.40 %

Note. S2 = semester 2. Source: Cai & Hai (2014).

ment updating, refurbishment, and purchase of teaching materials increased from 4.73 million to 29.8 million from 2011 to 2013. Special funding was also provided to support the construction of rural kindergartens and to support the development of nonpublic kindergartens providing basic ECE service in the community.

Implications and the Way Forward

The development of early childhood education in China has entered a very positive era with ECE being integrated in the national development plan. Great effort has been exerted by different levels of government to improve both access to, and quality of, early childhood education. Among these sustained efforts, putting in place an appropriate investment mechanism is vital. In particular, the initiatives and practices of Shanghai, Guizhou, and Ningshan to implement regionally appropriate measures to improve the development of early childhood education are inspiring. Based on these experiences, some issues are important, in terms of establishing a sound investment mechanism to support the development of ECE.

First, government at different levels should play a key role in the development of ECE, including allocation and monitoring of investment, to ensure the suitability of ECE development. Early childhood education should not be totally market-oriented, and the government has to take responsibility to ensure the sustainable development of ECE. In economically disadvantaged areas, the higher levels of government should play a more important role to improve the financial management system. The level of commitment from governments on ECE usually determines the level of support provided. Despite highly contrasting levels of economic development and levels of governments, Shanghai, Guizhou, and Ningshan governments have prioritized ECE as a meaningful investment for the long-term good of the society, and such commitment has been shown to be pivotal in implementing related policies smoothly.

Second, with the increase in investment in ECE, great efforts should be placed making ECE universal. In particular, it is important to establish more public kindergartens and to include kindergartens affiliated with enterprises and communities into the system of public kindergartens. It is also important to strengthen the accreditation, support, and monitoring of private kindergartens.

Third, there should be locally sensitive and appropriate measures, in terms of the amount, type, and monitoring of subsidization for early childhood education, based on a careful examination of local social, economic, and educational situations. Ningshan's government has put in great effort to improve the enrollment rate, children's health situation, and the hardware of kindergartens, while Shanghai has focused more on quality improvement. Indeed, different measures adopted by the two local governments are dependent on the status of early childhood education in the region and on financial affordability.

Fourth, the policy needs to be reviewed regularly and adjusted accordingly. For example, in Ningshan, the subsidy for public and private kindergartens is the same.

However, public kindergartens are overcrowded as they charge lower fees than private kindergartens. At the same time, most of the financial support has been provided to public kindergartens, which have more resources and better-qualified teachers than private ones. Hence, private kindergartens are disadvantaged. Policy adjustments are needed to address these problems.

Last, but not the least, the investment for kindergarten teacher training should be enhanced. Teachers' qualification is a key proxy of preschool quality (Sun, Rao, & Pearson, 2014). Expansion of ECE in China calls for the building of a well-structured team of kindergarten teachers with moral integrity, deep affection for children, and solid teaching skills. As discussed in Chap. 6, the Chinese government has adopted a series of measures to expand financial input to improve the qualifications, working conditions, salaries, and welfare of kindergarten teachers since 2011. However, the situation in rural areas is far from satisfactory. In Ningshan, the local government has made great efforts to ensure there will be sufficient number of kindergarten teachers to meet the increasing enrollment demands in ECE and to ensure that the kindergarten teachers on government payroll can receive a reasonable salary. However, most teachers working in the kindergartens are not registered in the government system, and their salaries and benefits are therefore not protected by these policies. Funding for rural kindergarten teachers' professional development is also rare. Therefore, it is important to establish a reasonable funding mechanism to improve the situation of the workforce catering to ECE.

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Chapter 6
Early Childhood Teacher Education in China

Yong Jiang, Li-juan Pang, and Jin Sun

The People's Republic of China (PRC) has undergone dramatic changes and fundamental reforms since the enactment of "open door" policy in the 1980s. A remarkable increase has been observed in the quantity of early childhood settings and educators. Improvements have been made in the quality of early childhood services, and the academic and professional qualifications of teachers have been enhanced. In the *National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan* (2010–2020) (Ministry of Education, 2010), the Chinese government stated the target of universalizing early childhood education (ECE) by 2020. Enhancing the professional capacity of preschool teachers has been outlined as one of the major objectives of this educational plan. However, millions of teachers have to be recruited, trained, and receive professional development opportunities to achieve the goals for 2020. Accordingly, new training modes, increased and enhanced professional training opportunities, and better-defined teacher competences and skills are an urgent need. In this chapter, we critically review the unique teacher education system in China, analyze recent developments in teacher education and professionalism, and consider the challenges facing early childhood educators in China. Finally, we discuss the national strategies and future directions to address these challenges.

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The Unique Teacher Education System in China: "Shifan"

China has a unique teacher education system "Shifan." Although some university-level Shifan are comprehensive universities, most of the college-level Shifan are independent colleges to serve teacher education only. The English translation of Shifan is "teacher model" (Zhu & Han, 2006). The teacher education system in China has its root in rural education. In 1927, Tao Xingzhi established Xiaozhuang Rural Experimental Normal School, which followed the mission of "improving rural education in the country." However, the modern teacher education system in the PRC was developed based on the French and the former Soviet Union systems of teacher education and has been followed since the PRC was founded in 1949. It is a hierarchical three-level system, which consists of normal schools, normal colleges, and normal universities. Basically, normal schools are 3-year institutions that enroll graduates from junior secondary schools. After completing a 3-year course in normal schools, an individual is regarded as a qualified kindergarten teacher, holding the equivalent of a high school graduation diploma. Normal colleges typically provide 3-year training to high school graduates, or a 2-year top-up program to holders of a normal school diploma. Graduates of normal colleges hold the equivalent of an associate degree. Normal universities, the highest level of teacher education institution in China, provide a 4-year bachelor's degree to high school graduates and a 2-year top-up program for graduates from normal colleges who already possess an associate degree (Zhu & Han, 2006). This current system, however, is currently undergoing a shift from traditional "Shifan" or "model teacher education" to "teacher education." This following section will consider the "Shifan" system and its changes, with a focus on the dichotomy of preservice and in-service teacher education systems.

Preservice Teacher Education System

Normal schools have been the major provider of preservice teacher education in China since the 1990s. When China opened the door to the world in 1978, the educational authorities decided to strengthen and develop "Shifan" to promote teacher professionalism. Accordingly, an increase in the number of normal schools was observed, gradually growing from 22 in 1979 to 68 in 1991 (Chinese Preschool Education Research Committee, 2003). However, all these normal schools were planned and financed by the central government and therefore controlled or limited by educational authorities. All the normal schools shared the same system, curriculum, pedagogy, and even textbooks. The whole preservice teacher education system was very rigid in content and structure and rarely addressed changing needs of teachers, children, and society. The preservice teacher education system can be

Table 6.1 Preservice teacher education system in China

Levels	Types	
High school level (by 1999)	Normal school	3-year; 3+2 pattern
	ECE class in ordinary normal school	3-year curriculum
	ECE class in vocational high school	
College level	Normal (junior) college	2 or 3-year;3+2 system
University level	Bachelor's degree	4-year curriculum
	Master's degree	3-year curriculum
	Doctor's degree	3-year curriculum

Source: Chinese preschool education research committee, 2003

characterized as a form of "planned economy," whereas the industry of early childhood education (ECE) had become a "socialist market economy with chinese characteristics." To address this mismatch, the central government issued the *Decisions to Deepen the Education Reform and Fully Promote the Quality Education* in 1999 (The State Council, 1999) and open the "market" of teacher education to those non-normal universities and colleges. This bold move broke the monopoly of normal schools and teacher colleges and intensified market competition in the system of preservice teacher education. Accordingly, many non-normal universities and colleges have joined the market and started to provide various preservice teacher education programs, which form a three-level and multimode teacher education system (see Table 6.1).

In March 1999, with the release of *Suggestions for the Layout Adjustment of Normal Schools* (Ministry of Education, 1999), the Ministry of Education further transformed this three-level system into a two-level one (college level and university level), and normal schools were either closed or upgraded to normal colleges. Consequently, normal schools "vanished," whereas many new teacher colleges were established. For example, in 1985, the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) ECE program was only available in five normal universities. However, by 1990, 17 normal universities offered B.Ed (ECE) programs. In 2008, 128 normal universities and 389 teacher colleges provided preservice teacher education programs. This has dramatically changed the landscape of the ECE preservice teacher education system. This has been described as having a hundred flowers in bloom, with varying contents, structures, and modes. Although thousands of students have graduated from the various ECE teacher education programs, there is an immense shortage of ECE teachers, given the goal of having universal ECE by 2020. According to unofficial estimates, China needs to recruit 3 million additional ECE teachers by 2020. It is not possible for the existing preservice teacher education providers to produce such a huge number of qualified teachers between 2015 and 2020. Therefore, China has to strongly rely on the in-service teacher education system.

In-Service Teacher Education System

In developed countries, preschool teachers must have a bachelor's degree to register as qualified professionals (ILO, 2012). In China, however, the majority of preschool teachers are graduates from normal schools or colleges and do not have a bachelor's degree. Hence in the Chinese context, in-service training is even more important for their professional development and improvement.

The rapid development of in-service education for early childhood teachers is closely related to the emphasis on lifelong learning and continuous education. In 1993, the *Chinese Education Reform and the Development Outline* was enacted, and the importance of continuing education was emphasized in this document (Chinese Preschool Education Research Committee, 1999). A system of in-service education of preschool teachers was formed accordingly.

Today, many normal colleges and universities have established ECE programs at different levels and with different modes, for example, evening schools, "television" universities, open universities, and other forms of distance education. This has provided multiple ways of professional development and in-service education and become the main approach to promote early childhood teachers' qualification in China. The number of early childhood teachers with a bachelor's degree or above has increased from 9740 in 2001 (Pang, 2009) to more than 250,000 in 2013 (Ministry of Education, 2013a). Most of these teachers obtained their degrees through participation in continuing education programs offered by normal universities.

A nondegree educational qualification for early childhood teachers has also been brought into the continuing education system, with legal and financial support from the Chinese government. In 1999, the *Rules of Continuing Education for Primary and Secondary School Teachers* (*including Kindergarten Teachers*) required that the training time for the new teachers should not be less than 120 hours, on-the-job training time should not be less than 240 hours every 5 years, and that mean teachers must receive a high standard of training (Pang, 2009). Many provinces have put training of preschool teachers into their plans of teacher continuing education (replace with "continuing teacher education") in various forms, including training sessions, teaching and research activities, academic symposia, and visiting and learning at home and abroad.

Additionally, school-based training has also become a popular form of in-service training in early childhood settings. The *Guiding Framework for Kindergarten Education* (Ministry of Education, 2001) explicitly states that school-based training is an important form of teachers' professional development (Pang, 2009). This actually requires teachers to develop via observing, analyzing, studying, and solving problems in their daily teaching practices. Accordingly, the major form of in-service professional development for early childhood teachers has become school-based training, which accounts for 42.9 % of all the in-service training activities for Chinese early childhood teachers (Pang, 2009).

Recent Developments in Chinese Teacher Education and Professional Development

The unique teacher education system in China has undergone dramatic changes and rapid development over the last 20 years, and an important shift has been observed by Zhu and Han (2006). They propose a three-stage conceptual framework to analyze the development of teacher education system in China: the eras of *Shifan*, post-*Shifan* (1999), and professional teacher education. As noted earlier, in recent years, the 2- or 3-year normal colleges have been upgraded into 4-year ones, whereas the original 4-year normal colleges have been converted to normal universities. Some normal universities have transformed into comprehensive ones, to educate students for all occupations and professions, while some other normal universities have moved to being research-focused universities. All these changes have brought about dramatic developments in the quantity and quality of early childhood teachers in China.

Increase in the Quantity of Full-Time Early Childhood Teachers

Soon after China opened its doors to the world, the central government issued the *National Nursery Job Meeting Minutes* in October 1979, emphasizing the importance of ECE for the future of the country and the need to improve the quantity and quality of early childhood teachers (Chinese Preschool Education Research Committee, 1999).This policy has brought about a significant increase in the number of preschool teachers. In 1980, for instance, the number of preschool teachers in China was about 400,000 (including principals), and by 1997 the figure reached 1 million (Pang, 2009). During the following years, the number of early childhood teachers also declined due to the declining child birth rate and changes in national policies. However, the number has increased again after 2001. In 2008, for example, the number of full-time teachers reached around 0.9 million, which is an increase of 8.7 % over the previous year and double the number in 1980[1] (see Fig. 6.1). Recently, as a consequence of the launch of the *National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan* (2010–2020) (Ministry of Education, 2010), the number of early childhood teachers has reached 1.6 million, reflecting the rapid development of ECE in China.

[1] All data except that of 2008 in the text are taken from the yearbook of China's education over the years, Education Statistics Bulletin, and the education statistics published on the official website of the Ministry of Education. The data of 2008 are from the Ministry of Education.

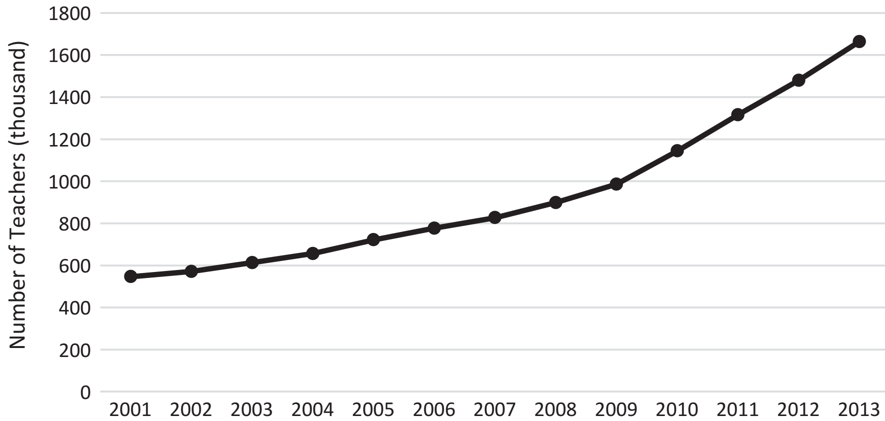

Fig. 6.1 Numbers of full-time preschool teachers in 2001–2013

Improvement in the Quality of Preschool Teachers in China

Early childhood educators have typically been perceived as "nannies" who do not need any academic or professional qualifications. Therefore, the educational background of preschool teachers in China was generally low until the early 1990s, with the majority of them only receiving primary and junior secondary school education. In 1990, 46 % of preschool teachers did not have a high school diploma, and nearly 70 % of them needed to receive professional training in ECE to obtain a professional certificate (Chinese Preschool Education Research Committee, 2003).

Since the mid-1990s, the educational background of preschool teachers in China has improved rapidly, due to the development of ECE in the country. The proportion of junior school graduates reduced rapidly, while the proportion of normal school graduates rose. As shown in Fig. 6.2, the proportion of normal school and college graduates continuously increased from 27.29 % to 67.15 %, among whom, the proportion of teachers with college diploma or above significantly increased from 1.77 % to 9.13 % (Pang, 2009). Many normal schools were upgraded to colleges or universities in the early 2000s, and, as a consequence, the proportion of teachers with normal college diploma or above increased significantly. From 2001 to 2013, the proportion of teachers with a bachelor's degree or above increased to 15.75 % from 1.81 %, and more than 97 % of the preschool teachers had obtained the academic qualification of normal or junior college diploma or above. It is expected that the enhancement of teachers' academic qualification can contribute to the improvement of the quality of early childhood services.

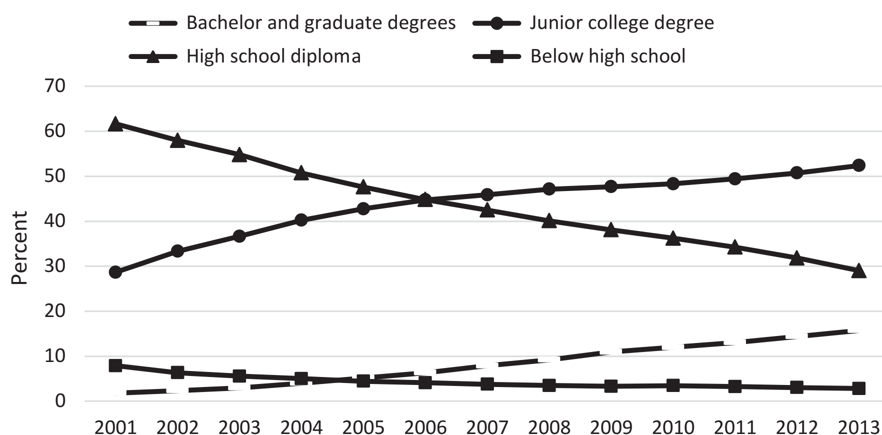

Fig. 6.2 Trends in preschools teachers' educational background in China 2001–2013

Challenges Associated with Enhancing the Professional Qualifications of Preschool Teachers

Although the quantity and quality of preschool teachers in China has been enhanced, challenges remain in meeting societal needs and teachers' professional development needs. These challenges include (1) shortage of early childhood teachers, (2) low social status and remuneration, (3) insufficient opportunities for preservice and in-service training, and (4) urban-rural gap in teacher qualifications. All these problems have affected the quality and limited the development of early childhood education in China. This section will elaborate on these challenges.

Challenge 1: Shortage of Early Childhood Teachers

Table 6.2 shows the numbers of preschool teachers and children from 2001 to 2013. The ratio between teachers and children has remained at a low level, although a slow decline is indicated with the overall growth of teaching staff in China.

According to *the Standards of Equipment of Kindergarten Staff (Trial Version)* (Ministry of Education, 2013b), the teacher-child ration in full-day kindergartens should range from 1:5 to 1:7 (including care providers) and that for half-day kindergartens should be 1:8 to 1:10 (including care providers). Therefore, there is a severe shortage of preschool teachers in China based on national standards. Although the shortage is caused by the rapidly increasing number of kindergartens, policy-related problems should not be neglected. As discussed in Chap. 5, the major financial source for the development of ECE is the input from regional governments, while the governments are always inclined to invest more in the higher levels of the education system, to the detriment of ECE. As a result, the fiscal resources for ECE

Table 6.2 Number of early childhood teachers and children in 2001–2013

Year	# of early childhood teachers	# of children in preschools	Teacher-child ratio
2001	546,203	20,218,371	1:37.0
2002	571,227	20,360,245	1:35.6
2003	612,856	20,039,061	1:32.7
2004	656,083	20,894,002	1:31.9
2005	721,609	21,790,290	1:30.2
2006	776,491	22,638,509	1:29.1
2007	826,765	23,488,300	1:28.4
2008	898,552	24,749,600	1:27.5
2009	985,889	26,578,141	1:27.0
2010	1,144,225	29,766,695	1:26.0
2011	1,315,634	34,244,456	1:26.0
2012	1,479,237	36,857,624	1:24.9
2013	1,663,487	38,946,903	1:23.4

are limited, and the social status and remuneration for preschools teachers have remained at a low level, compared to teachers in primary and secondary schools. It is therefore difficult for kindergartens, especially the private ones and those in the rural areas, to recruit sufficient teachers to maintain a desirable teacher-child ratio. In addition, since the marketization of ECE in 1990s, private kindergartens have received no financial support from the government. Hence, they have to generate enough income to be financially viable. Against this background, many kindergartens had adopted a strategy referred to as “reduce staff and increase efficiency” to maximize profit (Pang, 2009).

An important policy to address this problem is to retrain redundant teachers in primary and secondary schools and to allocate more financial support to the ECE sector (Sun, Rao, & Pearson, 2014). With the drop in China’s birth rate, there are more qualified teachers for primary and secondary schools than currently required. These teachers should be encouraged to be retrained to work in kindergartens to mitigate the shortage in ECE. Meanwhile, regional governments are now required to facilitate the development of ECE. Multiple regional-appropriate strategies have been initiated in different regions, and support for the professional development of early childhood teachers is one of the priorities. It is therefore expected that there will be less shortage of early childhood teachers, and the requirement of teacher-child ratio can be at least partly achieved.

Challenge 2: Low Level of Social Status

The *Education Law of the People*’*s Republic of China* (Ministry of Education, 1995) specified that preschool teachers should receive the same political and economic privileges as primary and middle school teachers. However this is not the

case. Preschool teachers lack stability in employment and receive low remuneration. As a result, it is difficult for preschool teachers to enjoy the basic rights specified in the *Teachers Law of the People's Republic of China* (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 1993).

Many preschool teachers have temporary positions, and this adversely affects their conditions of service. The temporary nature of the teaching positions has significantly influenced the stability of teaching staff in kindergartens, and the turnover rate has been very high. A national survey conducted in 15 provinces in 2008 showed that half of the preschool teachers in China had a temporary work contract, or even did not even have one (Yi, 2009). Yi (2009) further pointed that the salary level of preschool teachers is at low or low-to-middle levels in China. Li (2008) conducted a survey of about 185 early childhood teachers in Dalian and found that 19.4 % of early childhood teachers received a monthly salary between ¥700 and ¥1000, 49.2 % between ¥1000 and ¥1500, 20 % between ¥1500 and ¥ 2000, and only 5.7 % earned more than ¥2000. Furthermore, 5.7 % of preschool teachers had an annual salary below ¥700, while the average monthly salary of a post with similar requirements in Dalian was ¥2017.

The lack of employment stability and the low remuneration for preschool teachers are actually associated with the unfair staffing system in China. As introduced in Chap. 5, public schools receive fiscal allocation from regional governments, and there is a rigorous staffing system in Chinese schools. Only formal teachers in the public schools are considered as registered teaching staff in the system, and their salary and other benefits are usually covered by the financial allocation from the government. Unfortunately, there is no separate staffing system for preschool teachers, and they are included in the staffing system for primary school teachers. That means, given a specific "quota" of teaching staff, primary school teachers are given priority over preschool teachers in the staffing system, and the staff quota allocated to preschool teachers can be easily replaced by primary teachers. For example, as Pang (2009) points out, some regional governments eliminated preschool teachers from the public staffing system to meet the requirement of reducing redundant teaching staff, while in some other places, there were only deductions, but no increase in the places for preschool teachers in the staffing system, to gradually phase out public preschool teachers in the staffing system.

These situations not only affect career identity and work satisfaction of preschool teachers but also affect the motivation of potential students to engage in continuing professional development to upgrade their qualifications and skills. The *plan* therefore explicitly states that the wages of the early childhood educators should be increased and that their rights and interests should be protected. Measures to enhance remuneration and working situations for preschool teachers are specified in the *3-year Action Plans for Preschool Education* of different regions (Sun, Rao, & Pearson, 2014). The situation is expected to improve by adopting and implementing relevant legislation.

Challenge 3: Problematic Qualification and Professional Development Systems

Yi (2009) points out that only around 50 % of preschool teachers in Eastern China obtained teacher certificates to indicate that they were qualified as teachers in 2007, and the situation was even worse in the Western areas. Yi (2009) further found that a large number of academically qualified teachers in kindergartens had not received professional training related to ECE. The opportunities of professional development for in-service teachers are also rare. Why are there so many problems facing preschool teachers who want to engage in professional qualification and upgrade their qualifications? The problematic qualification and professional development systems for Chinese early childhood teachers might explain the phenomenon.

There is actually legislation specifying the necessary qualifications for preschool teachers in China. The latest *Professional Standards for Preschool Teachers (Trial Version)* (Ministry of Education, 2012) was issued in 2012, and preschool teachers are required to possess basic professional attitudes, knowledge, and competences related to ECE. Although this document may guide the training and professional development programs for early childhood teachers, it still has not specified very clearly what types of training a qualified teacher should have received or how to evaluate a teacher's performance according to these standards. Therefore, the problem related to the level of acknowledgment of professional training becomes apparent while implementing related legislations.

On one hand, educational background is considered more important than professional training. Since 2001, teachers' qualification level has been examined mainly by educational background. Only those with high school education are considered qualified teachers. Therefore, to improve staff's qualification levels in a short time, kindergartens recruited a great number of teachers with acceptable education background, but a great portion of them did not receive any training in ECE. To obtain the certificate for working as a preschool teacher, those without a first degree in ECE had to pass some examinations. However, there are no specific requirements related to the number of hours of professional training, and days of working in a kindergarten, before granting the certificate.

On the other hand, there is a tradition of "downward accommodation" in the teachers' qualification accreditation system in China. This means that teachers who are qualified to teach in primary schools are also considered qualified to teach in kindergartens. This strategy might be useful to extend the pool for early childhood teachers. However, the importance of professional training in ECE is neglected, and this has resulted in problems in the quality of teaching.

More importantly, opportunities for in-service training for early childhood teachers are rare. Most of the in-service training is degree education, and teachers are encouraged to improve their educational background via attending continuing education programs offered in different institutes. However, it is more important for teachers to have support for their daily teaching practices. Although kindergartens are encouraged to conduct school-based studies to enhance their professional competences, it is difficult to guarantee the quality of these school-based initiatives.

To address these problems, the educational authorities issued the *Notice on the Implementation of the National Training Program for Preschool Teachers* (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance, 2011). As elaborated in Sun et al. (2014), earmarked funds have been distributed at the national level on an annual basis since 2011, to provide in-service training to principals, key teachers, and preschool teachers who have moved from teaching in primary and secondary schools to early years' education in the central and western areas of China. At the same time, senior students majoring in ECE, and preschool teachers in cities and towns, have been encouraged to complete internships or teach in kindergartens in rural areas for a few months. The national training program has significant implications for the development of ECE in China by enhancing early childhood teachers' professional development. For example, around 1600 kindergarten principals and key teachers in Guizhou (Meng & Shi, 2011) and 917 in Gansu (Li, 2011) participated in the national training program for preschool teachers in 2011, and they are expected to bring positive changes to their preschool classrooms.

Challenge 4: Urban-Rural Gap in Teacher Development

The majority of Chinese live in rural areas. Urban-rural disparities are reflected not only in economic development but also in social and educational development. In terms of ECE, according to the officially released figures, there were over 17 million 3- to 6-year-olds from rural areas attending prior-to-school programs, while another nearly 32 million did not (Ministry of Education, 2007). This has highlighted the problems in access to services in rural China, and the lack of early childhood teachers is one of the causes for the dearth of ECE services in those areas. As shown in Fig. 6.3, the number of preschool teachers in urban areas was far more than that in rural areas.

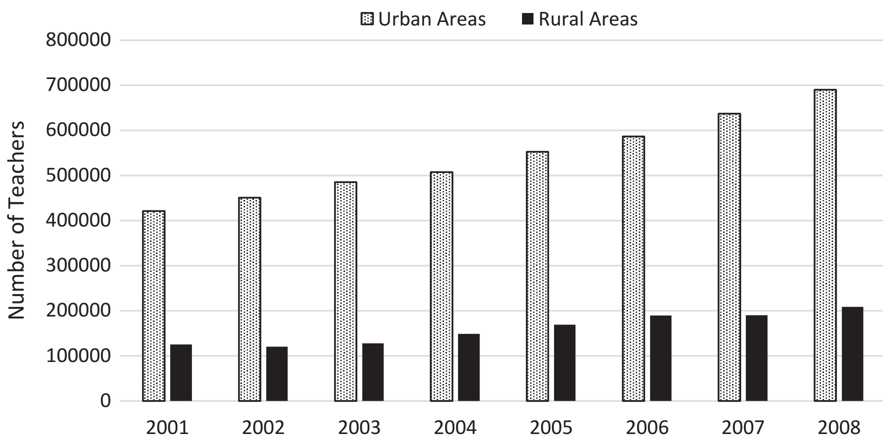

Fig. 6.3 Number of preschool teachers in urban and rural areas

The program quality in rural areas is also much lower than that in cities, and the severe shortage of qualified preschool teachers in poor and rural areas is an important contributory factor (Sun, Rao, & Pearson, 2014). In 2008, the ratio of full-time qualified preschool teachers to children in early childhood education settings in rural areas was 1:51, while the corresponding ratio in towns/counties and cities was 1:25–1:28 and 1:16–1:19, respectively (see Zhang & Liu, 2017, Chap. 8). It is extremely difficult to recruit qualified teachers in rural areas for a variety of reasons, including low pay and status of preschool teachers. Therefore, graduates from senior or even junior high schools are employed in rural ECE programs, and they usually do not have any professional training. Further, the basic remuneration and allowance of preschool teachers in rural areas are not guaranteed. Yi (2009) found that there were 169,500 full-time preschool teachers in rural areas in 2005, which accounts for 23.5 % of all full-time preschool teachers nationwide. However, most of these teachers cannot be formally registered in the public school staffing system, and they can only receive salaries which are low, without any medical insurance or pension benefits.

National Strategies and Future Directions

To address the above challenges, the central government issued the *National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020)* (Ministry of Education, 2010). It has outlined the national plan and issues to promote the remuneration and qualification of preschool teachers, and so did the ten specific guidelines in *Suggestions on Current Development of Preschool Education (Suggestions)* (The State Council, 2010). Against this background, great efforts have been made at both national and regional levels to improve the qualification and working situations of preschool teachers in China. In the following section, we will link the situation of ECE with those strategies and suggestions outlined in the *National Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020) (plan)* (Ministry of Education, 2010) and *Suggestions on Current Development of Early Childhood Education (suggestions)* (The State Council, 2010).

National Strategies

The *suggestions* explicitly state that the work of preschool teachers, who have been working in the poor and rural areas in government-funded kindergartens for a long time, should be recognized by a salary increment. In their 3-year action plans for preschool education in different regions, many provincial governments have requested more support to enhance the remuneration, quantity, and quality of preschool teachers in rural areas (Sun, Rao, & Pearson, 2014). For example, vocational institutes take responsibility of teaching training for rural kindergartens in Jiangxi

Province. Since 2011, students who want to work in rural kindergartens can request a specified kindergarten to pay tuition fees for a teacher training course. The students are then obliged to work for that kindergarten for a specified amount of time after completing the training (Xu, 2011). Incentives are also offered to university graduates who are willing to work in kindergartens in rural areas in Zhangjiakou (Zhou & Wang, 2011). Furthermore, partnerships have been established between model and other kindergartens, especially those in rural areas, to improve teachers' teaching skills in Baoding (Chen, Zhou, Chen, & Hou, 2010). Distance education has also been recommended for preschool teachers in rural areas who are not able to undertake full-time training for school-related or personal reasons. As a result of the ongoing substantial efforts at both the national and regional levels, around 10 million preschool-aged children have benefited from the 3-year action plan (China Education Network Television, 2014), and the quantity and quality of ECE has been enhanced accordingly.

To enhance the quantity and quality of preschool teachers in China, it is important to enhance the recognition of their professional status. It is particularly necessary to increase public awareness of (i) the importance of early years and ECE, (ii) the nature of work of preschool teachers, and (iii) the training required to be a properly qualified preschool teacher. Increased public awareness and recognition of the importance of ECE and the important work that preschool teachers do to prepare the next generation is necessary in Chinese society. It is only then that sufficient resources and support will be provided to enhance the initial and continuous professional development of preschool teachers.

Future Directions

A reasonable policy system should be established to serve as the fundamental guarantee for healthy development of ECE and of early childhood teachers in China (Zeng, 2005). In particular, strategies to increase early childhood teachers' identity recognition, especially those in the nonpublic schools and in the rural areas, are needed (Pang, 2009). Currently, only early childhood teachers in public kindergartens are included in the national teacher policy arena and are eligible to enjoy the standard remuneration and allowance stipulated. However, a great number of early childhood teachers work in the community kindergartens, in private kindergartens, or in rural areas. They are excluded from the system, and this has caused a high level of instability of early childhood teachers and hindered their qualification improvement. The qualification system for early childhood teachers should also be enhanced. The current policy places more emphasis on academic certificates than on professional qualifications of teachers. Although the *Professional Standards of Preschool Teachers (Trial Version)* (Ministry of Education, 2012) was issued in 2012, there is no explicit mention of the academic and or professional qualifications required to be deemed an early childhood teacher.

In addition, the teacher education system should be further enhanced. Nowadays, with the rapid development of ECE and the need of early childhood teachers nationwide, many institutes have launched programs to provide both preservice and in-service training to meet the demands from society. However, the institutes might not be ready to provide high-quality training to the students. Therefore, an increase in the number of early childhood teachers with higher levels of qualifications does not necessarily lead to an improvement in the quality of ECE. Furthermore, resources for in-service professional training are limited and unevenly distributed. There is a great training need for teachers working in the private and rural kindergartens, but they rarely get opportunities for professional development (Xia, 2008). As Liu (2008) points out, there are many problems related to the mode and contents of current in-service training system, including a disconnection between teachers' needs and training contents provided, a lack of match between training contents and teachers' diverse backgrounds, unreasonable training time, inefficient training organization and management, and limited evaluation of the quality of the training provided.

In China, the relatively closed ECE teacher education system has been transformed into a more open one to improve professionalism. The market economy has been in place, and higher education institutions are now providing high-quality preservice training. Diversified teacher education programs are housed at different levels of universities and colleges, and the national standards of teacher qualifications, and university accreditation, and curriculum are also on the way. We have strong reasons to be optimistic, although we have to bear in mind that there are still huge urban-rural gaps in the development of ECE and early childhood teachers. We anticipate that with all national strategies enacted, a new era of professional teacher education is imminent.

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Chapter 7
Early Childhood Curriculum Development in China

Yong-ping Yu

Before the twentieth century, the care and education of young children was considered a family responsibility. The establishment of the first kindergarten in China in Wuhan in 1903, and the "Statute of Charter Schools," formally acknowledged the role of educational institutions in the upbringing of young children (China National Society of Early Childhood Education, 2003; Tang & Zhong, 1993; Zhu, 2005). A corollary to the establishment of preschools is the need for a curriculum to meet educational goals. During the past century, curriculum guidelines for young children have undergone many changes, reflecting sociopolitical and economic changes in China and the burgeoning body of research on early childhood education in China. This chapter outlines major influences on Chinese early childhood education (ECE) curriculum from a historical perspective, considers challenges for curriculum development and implementation, and provides suggestions to further enhance the early childhood education curriculum.

Curriculum Reform

1903 to 1922: Japanese and Western Influences

There was a very strong Japanese influence on all aspects of kindergarten education in China from 1903 to 1922 (Yi, 1994). The Statute of Charter Schools, namely, *Gui-mao Education System* (China National Society of Early Childhood Education, 2003), was closely based on a similar Japanese document entitled "Early Childhood Care and Education and Kindergarten's Facilities," and Japanese teachers taught the

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children using Japanese materials and instructional methods. This is not surprising, as China did not have experience to build upon, when it first provided preschool education. During this period, some Western countries also established faith-based kindergartens in China. These kindergartens had Western characteristics, and the Christian religion was manifest in the facilities, toys, curriculum, teaching methods, and children's daily routines.

1920 to 1940s: Western and Chinese Influences

In 1922, the Northern Warlords (1912–1927) established the *Ren xu School System* (China National Society of Early Childhood Education, 2003) which was based on the "6+3+3" school system in the United States (USA). Chinese schools started to learn from America, and Dewey's progressive education theories and practices were imported and feted by Chinese educators. Accordingly, the US kindergarten curriculum was widely adopted and became very popular in China. Meanwhile, Christian religious curricula, Japanese curriculum, Frobel's approaches, and the Montessori curriculum were also followed in China. However, all these imported curricula were culturally and contextually inappropriate. Chinese educators began to explore ways of developing a localized and Chinese early childhood curriculum to meet the developmental needs of young Chinese children.

The First Locally Developed Curriculum In 1923, Chen He-qin and Zhang Zong-lin established the first kindergarten to undertake educational research in China the Gulou Kindergarten in Nanjing, wherein they developed and piloted a localized curriculum that could best fit the Chinese context (Yu, 2013; Zhu, 2005). After a decade of exploration, they found that the theme/unit approach could be used to deliver an integrated curriculum to young Chinese children. They developed the unit-based integrated curriculum, which was cohesive and organized into units. This curriculum highly valued young children's learning experiences, daily life, and activities. As it was shown to be workable and practicable in pilot studies conducted in Gulou Kindergarten, this curriculum was deemed to be culturally and contextually appropriate and is widely regarded as the first locally developed early childhood curriculum.

The unit-based integrated curriculum was taken as the national standard and was included in the *Kindergarten Curriculum Standards* issued by educational authorities in 1932 (Yu, 2013). Most kindergartens in China adopted this curriculum model in the 1930s and 1940s. In short, the years between 1920 and 1940 witnessed the emergence and development of this first Chinese early childhood curriculum, the unit-based integrated curriculum.

Curricular Changes with the Establishment of the PRC

With the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the government immediately launched a series of political, economic, social, and cultural reforms in the country. China turned to its political ally and role model, the former Soviet Union, to develop its educational system, and reforms were undertaken so China could emulate the Soviet educational model (Huo, 2014). Soviet curricula and pedagogical methods were simply transplanted into China. In August 1951, with the assistance of Russian ECE experts, the Ministry of Education drafted the *Kindergarten's Temporary Curriculum (Draft)* and *Kindergarten's Temporary Teaching Outline (Draft)* (China National Society of Early Childhood Education, 2003; Tang & Zhong, 1993). These documents deemed that the subject-based curriculum was the model that was to be followed. Physical education, language, environment learning, art, music, and mathematics were taught as separate subjects. Instructional approaches that reflected the unit-based integrated curriculum, American curriculum, faith-based curricula, and Montessori curriculum were prohibited. Instead, the subject-based curriculum imported from the Soviet Union was considered the appropriate curriculum model for preschool education in the PRC.

This adoption of the Soviet model, however, was somewhat problematic. Between 1956 and 1966, large-scale research to develop curriculum materials more appropriate to the Chinese context was launched. During the same period, the Chinese government also took over all the church kindergartens, thereby effectively ending the influence of religion on the curriculum. The result of both these developments was that the Russian subject-separate curriculum continued to be the only curriculum model considered appropriate for the whole country.

The years between 1966 and 1976 saw the politicization of all aspects of the curriculum, from content to activities, as part of the Cultural Revolution. The development of Chinese early childhood curriculum was also suspended during this period.

The 1980s–2001

Economic liberalization and the PRC's ratification of international treaties related to child development had positive influences on the development of the ECE curriculum in China. The opening up of China enabled Chinese early childhood experts to be exposed to diverse and outstanding early childhood curriculum models from overseas, while the PRC's ratification of international treaties to promote and protect children's rights supported the move to provide high-quality early education.

In the 1980s, experts in Nanjing Normal University conducted research in four key areas, namely, educational objectives, learning experience and content, ways of organizing learning experience, and content and educational evaluation. They recommended an integrated curriculum structure that had a strong theoretical basis. Drawing upon theories from psychology, philosophy, and sociology, they

recommended that Chinese scholars develop new theories to further their understanding of the complex interrelationships among play, learning, curriculum, and development in the early years. The experts from Nanjing Normal University felt that this would guide the further development of Chinese early childhood curriculum.

Soon after economic liberalization, the Ministry of Education published *Kindergarten's Educational Guideline (Draft)* (Ministry of Education, 2001) and declared that kindergartens must continue to use the subject-separate curriculum which was introduced in the 1950s. However, problems remained with implementing this subject-based curriculum. A notable problem was that ECE was more like primary education, and there was an emphasis on didactic teaching of academic content rather than on play. This led to another curriculum reform, and a number of different curriculum models were tried out. The theme-based curriculum model was favored. Integrated learning units which center on a topic/theme were created and were used to integrate learning across curricular areas. Once a theme (e.g., food, belonging) was identified, subthemes/topics were chosen, specific activities were selected, and the theme was implemented. By the mid-1990s, the integrated theme-based curriculum model was adopted by many kindergartens. However, the process of implementation of the integrated theme-based curriculum proved to be problematic. The primary drawback of this curriculum was that it often required considerable teacher expertise to develop and implement it appropriately. For example, teachers needed to develop simple to more complex tasks and activities for children to master within a subtheme, and this was not an easy for them to do.

There was a need to combine the advantages of the subject-based and theme-based curriculum models, to avoid their disadvantages (Yuan, 2004), and to follow the guidelines specified in the *Kindergarten Working Rules (Draft)* (The State Education Commission, 1989). Hence, some early childhood education experts developed a domain-based curriculum, which is considered a notable achievement.

The *Kindergarten Educational Guideline (Draft)*, published in 2001, divides the curriculum into five domains, namely, health, language, society, science, and art and states that each domain should be taught in sufficient depth. In essence, under the guidance of *Kindergarten Working Rules (Draft)* (The State Education Commission, 1989) and *Kindergarten Educational Guideline (Draft)* (Ministry of Education, 2001), children's holistic development in these five domains is addressed.

Factors That Led to Curriculum Reform

There were numerous curriculum reforms in the twentieth century that led to changes in the recommended curriculum for kindergartens. For example, there were shifts from the Japanese model to the unit-based integrated curriculum. But from the 1980s, there has been an appreciation of various curriculum models, and a more eclectic, child-centered curriculum has been adopted. These reforms were due to socioeconomic and political factors.

All over the world, curriculum is closely related to politics, economy, culture, and the needs of the nation. It is fair to state that the major reforms in early childhood curriculum that have taken place over the past 100 years in China were either a reactive or passive response to sociopolitical events, such as the May Fourth Movement, the foundation of the PRC, the Cultural Revolution, and the economic liberalization associated with the opening up policy. However, the specific cause of each curriculum reform was different. For example, sociopolitical events led to curriculum reform after the May Fourth Movement; political factors caused the curriculum reform associated with the establishment of the PRC and the Cultural Revolution, while the desire for economic development contributed to curriculum changes after economic liberalization and the opening up of the PRC.

The impetus for curriculum reform came from either the government or from research undertaken by Chinese early education experts. For example, in the 1950s, Soviet influences on the curriculum were prominent, but research undertaken by Chen He-qin led to the unit-based integrated curriculum.

Developments After 2001

A number of experts in ECE have supported the development of ECE curriculum in the 21st century. They have provided advice on curriculum objectives, contents, and research priorities. It was felt that ECE curriculum objectives should be comprehensive, integrated, holistic, and developmentally appropriate. The content should support active exploration and experiential learning on the part of the child (Feng, 2000; Yu, 2015). Feng (1998) provided three principles for establishing curriculum objectives: facing the future, prioritizing goals that are important but not articulated in documents, and promoting critical thinking in children. Further, with curriculum reform, earlier curriculum objectives are often disregarded, and Sun (2001) highlighted the importance of examining the reasons for not retaining earlier curriculum objectives.

Curriculum content is typically chosen to help children attain curriculum objectives. However, it was felt that it is important not to “overload” children with too much content. Yu’s (2000) research specifies the reasons and types of curriculum overload, and strategies to avoid it. A broad and comprehensive curriculum can become unmanageable for both teachers and for the children who are subject to it.

There has been considerable research into implementation of the early childhood curriculum in China in recent years. For example, Liu (2000) explored the implementation of play in early childhood curriculum, while Peng (2005) examined a form of play-based teaching. Zhao (2006) explored scaffolding strategies used by kindergarten teachers, and Zhang (2006) and Yuan (2008) examined implementation of group-based learning activities in kindergartens. Yu (2007) encouraged teachers to create a learning environment that supports children’s construction of knowledge and to become self-directed learners.

Before 2000, few researchers in the field of ECE focused on curriculum evaluation. While more attention has been placed on evaluation after 2000, there is still a dearth of research in the area. One way of evaluating the effectiveness of curriculum implementation is through assessing students' learning. Peng (2002) pioneered the use of portfolio assessment in ECE in China, and Zhu (2005) provides strategies for documenting children's learning. Assessment in early childhood has tended to be formative rather than summative, and dynamic rather than static. There has been a move toward documenting children's growth and development, rather than a focus on norm-referenced assessment. Yu (2006a) developed a kindergarten curriculum evaluation system which includes evaluation of projects, curriculum implementation, and curriculum management.

A number of different curriculum models, including the Bank Street, the Montessori, and Montessori and Reggio Emilia approaches, have been adapted for use in China, taking into account the national, local, and kindergarten context.

Supporting children's transition from kindergarten to primary school has become a priority, and research has considered factors that are associated with good adjustment to primary school. Qin and Hou (2005) examined transition practices in five cities and surveyed kindergarten and primary school teachers in Nanning, Liuzhou, Guilin, Beihai, and Baise. They found that both kindergarten and primary school teachers did not have a good understanding of curriculum-related factors that could support children's transition from early childhood settings to formal schooling. Other researchers have highlighted strategies that can support successful transition to primary school.

After 2001, increasing attention was also accorded to curriculum management and educational resources. Researchers have studied both the influence of government curriculum documents and the individual kindergarten in the management of the curriculum. Curriculum reform always entails changes, in which the kindergarten manages the curriculum (Zhu, 2002). Research has also highlighted the important role of the kindergarten principal in leading state-mandated curriculum changes (Tian, 2003, 2007; Lu & Chen, 2004; Wang & Yang, 2006). Yu's (2005, 2006b) research has also illustrated the importance of appropriate educational resources to effectively implement the desired curriculum. For example, local resources and folk literature can be used to attain curriculum objectives.

Publications on the kindergarten's curriculum, such as "Curriculum of Early Childhood Education" (Shi, 1999), "Kindergarten's Curriculum" (Feng, 2000), "Curriculum's Axiology" (Yu, 2000), "Kindergarten's Curriculum" (Zhu, 2003), "Kindergarten's Curriculum Evaluation" (Yu, 2006a), and "Multiple Perspectives on Kindergarten's Curriculum" (Yu, 2006c), lend credence to the notion that the academic study of kindergarten's curriculum has taken shape and is becoming increasingly mature.

Recent Challenges for Curriculum Development and Implementation

Despite notable strides made in early childhood curriculum in the twenty-first century, challenges remain. These include problems associated with implementing overseas curriculum, and the high level of support required to implement reform.

As noted earlier, the state had issued guidelines for ECE curriculum, but kindergartens have had autonomy to choose curriculum models to attain the objectives specified in the guidelines. Curriculum models were transplanted from other cultures, but there were problems associated with this approach. It was felt that China should continue to learn from other countries, but it was recommended that scholars and teachers make suitable modifications, to take into account Chinese culture and context, when using curriculum models imported from other cultures. This would ensure that the imported curriculum approaches were culturally and contextually appropriate.

Effective curriculum implementation requires a high level of support of local educational authorities and of teachers. Senior education officials promoted the curriculum reform. However, provincial and local educational officials were responsible for ensuring that curriculum reform was implemented. These officials sometimes lacked a deep understanding of the rationale for curriculum reform and kindergarten practices. This influenced their ability to support and oversee the implementation of curriculum reform.

As those responsible for the implementation of curriculum, teachers play the most important role in curriculum reform. The value of well-designed curriculum is diminished when teachers are not empowered to deliver it appropriately. For example, for decades, kindergarten teachers followed subject-based curriculum. They were suddenly requested to deliver play activities, and an integrated curriculum, by educational authorities in 1989, but they had not received sufficient training to effectively implement these changes in early childhood pedagogy. The large gap between teachers' abilities and the professional preparation required to move away from traditional modes of instruction affected the success of the educational reform. For example, Cao (2014) observed 11 episodes of teacher-child interactions in language activities in classrooms for 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds and found that teachers were good at providing emotional support to children, while there were more problems in providing support for language learning. In a more recent study, Li et al. (2016) found that the classroom teaching quality was low, in terms of teacher-child interactions, based on their observations of 178 classrooms in Zhejiang Province coded with the Chinese Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale.

Promotion of Further Early Childhood Curriculum Development in China

To further promote curriculum development, adequate attention must be given to teacher quality, to stability of the teaching force, and to research. Teachers play the most important role in curriculum development and directly implement the curriculum. Hence, they are a key factor in determining the success of a curriculum reform. Currently, there is a need to address problems related to the stability of the teaching force, and teacher quality. First, there is a relatively high turnover of kindergarten teachers, because of relatively poor conditions of service. Second, some teachers are less amenable to changing their traditional approaches to education (e.g., they may prefer to engage in subject-based teaching (Li, 2007)). Third, while they may have rich practical experience, many kindergarten teachers do not have higher education qualifications and lack deep understanding of child development and early education (Hua, 2007). Therefore, there is a need for continuing professional education. Fourth, there is a need to explore diverse methods for supporting teachers' professional development.

The common way is to organize lectures by experts to impart modern curriculum ideas. However, it is felt that a didactic approach has limited impact on fostering change in teachers' instructional practices. On the other hand, participatory training helps teachers understand the rationale for curriculum changes. It guides them to reflect on their experiences and to work on activities in small groups. Teachers can learn from their peers by sharing ideas and issues with them. At the same time, they can develop new ideas and learn how to solve problems related to teaching and learning.

There is need for even more rigorous research on the prevalence and effectiveness of different curriculum models. Notwithstanding learnings from curriculum theories and models imported from overseas, there is a great need for developing theories appropriate to the Chinese context and the conduct of theoretically motivated research.

Conclusions

Over the last century, there has been great progress in curriculum development, implementation, evaluation, and research. Curriculum models have been developed in China, or adapted from ones developed overseas, and curriculum research is increasing. There is a need to support kindergarten teachers as curriculum implementers and conduct more systematic research into early childhood curriculum in China.

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Chapter 8
Early Childhood Education in Economically Disadvantaged Rural Areas of China

Li Zhang and Qian Liu

Investing in early childhood education for disadvantaged young children not only provides them an optimal start in life but it also promotes social equity and yields substantial economic gains (Heckman, 2006). Over the past decades, numerous early childhood programs have been established around the world to help promote the development of children living in poverty and get a good start for school.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) has also attached great importance to early childhood education (ECE) for poor and rural children. About 57 % of China's population lives in rural areas, among whom tens of millions are estimated to be children below 6 years of age. Many of them suffer from poor living conditions and a lack of educational opportunities. Statistics suggest that an estimated 32 million 3- to 6-year-old children from these areas did not attend any prior-to-school programs (Rao, Sun, Zhou, & Zhang, 2012). Over the past three decades, the Chinese government has formulated many policies to facilitate the implementation of early education in rural areas. The diversity across rural regions has been recognized, and different models of ECE have been explored. This chapter reviews the development of early childhood education in economically disadvantaged rural areas in China from four aspects: policy, finance and administration, provision and access, and program quality. On the basis of this review, recommendations for the further development of ECE in these areas are advanced.

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Early Childhood Education Policies in Rural China

Ever since the reform and opening up policy, ECE in China has attracted increasing attention from the government, and the enactment of policy has helped ECE establish a prominent place in the national education system (Corter, Janmohammed, Zhang, & Bertrand, 2006). To help children from poor and rural areas gain the opportunity of attending preschools and to improve the quality of early childhood services, many policies, decrees, and regulations at the national level have been launched, specifying required efforts. Further, provincial and local governments have also formulated corresponding documents to promote ECE.

National Level Policies

ECE in rural areas has been the focus of many policies. In the early 1980s, *Concern about Early Childhood Education in Rural Areas* (Ministry of Education, 1983) pointed out that ECE was one of the key components of socialist education and called on educational departments of all levels to work in earnest to improve its quality (Ministry of Education, 1983). This was further stressed in *Suggestions on the Reform and Development in Early Childhood Education* (The State Council, 2003). This document underscored that action-oriented support and effort should be provided to ECE in rural areas (including those inhabited by ethnic groups) and remote, border, and poverty-stricken areas. In the recently released *National Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020)* (Ministry of Education, 2010), ECE was for the first time placed at a crucial position in the national strategies for education. To provide universal ECE was considered a major objective, and ECE in rural areas was given priority. The *Suggestions on Current Development of Early Childhood Education* (The State Council, 2010b), published later, indicated that great efforts to expand the educational resources in rural areas would be one of the critical tasks in the construction of the new socialist countryside.

Funding and administration is another significant topic that is frequently brought out in documents. In *Concern about Early Childhood Education in Rural Areas* (Ministry of Education, 1983), education funds for ECE were required to be included in local educational expenditures. Departments of education at the county level were assigned a key role in providing guidance for ECE in rural areas and in promoting the quality of central kindergartens (Ministry of Education, 1983). Central kindergartens are funded and managed by the provincial government. The regulations for pre-primary classes stipulated that the sponsors were normally the townships or villages, but for the affiliated separate pre-primary classes, the primary schools should shoulder the administrative and fund-raising responsibility (The State Education Commission, 1991). The recent State Council document stated that education funds for ECE should be included in the financial budget at all levels of

government, and special funds would be set up by the central government to assist the Central and Western areas, ethnic minority areas and border areas, in developing and enhancing early childhood education and early bilingual education (The State Council, 2010a). Further, to improve the financial input and management system of ECE in rural areas and to explore an effective way to enhance its development, the 3-year initiative for the development of early childhood services, and some pilot projects, would be implemented in some economically disadvantaged areas (The State Council, 2010a).

Documents such as *Concern about Early Childhood Education in Rural Areas* (Ministry of Education, 1983) stipulated that, in rural areas, ECE could take various forms, including independent kindergartens or pre-primary classes affiliated to primary schools. As pre-primary classes were regarded as a major form of early childhood provision and an important way of developing ECE in rural areas, supplementary regulations were successively formulated, such as *Opinions on a Further Step for Promoting Pre-Primary Education* (The State Education Commission, 1986), *Suggestions on Improving and Strengthening the Pre-primary Classes* (The State Education Commission, 1991), and *Guidelines for Evaluation of Pre-primary Classes* (The State Education Commission, 1996). These documents put forward detailed guidelines on learning environment, educational resources, class size, teacher-child ratio, and duration of each session. The *Ninth 5-Year Plan* (Ministry of Education, 1997) proposed that kindergartens should be established in most townships in the rural areas, while for the sparsely populated remote areas, ECE could be offered through seasonal or weekend classes, playgroups, children's activity centers, or mobile early childhood services (The State Education Commission, 1997).

In order to improve the qualification of teaching staff and to provide job security and benefits for preschool teachers, the policies also specified desired standards and practices. Two documents published in 1980s specified that early childhood teachers were required to be, at a minimum, graduates from junior high school and have professional training (Ministry of Education, 1983; State Education Commission, 1986). In terms of training opportunities, educational departments at all levels were encouraged to include ECE teacher training in the teacher training plans (The State Education Commission, 1991), and more institutes for educating and training ECE teachers were to be constructed (The State Council, 2003). The recent national education plan has laid emphasis on professional training for principals and core teachers in kindergartens in rural China (Ministry of Education, 2010). To ensure the stability of the teaching force, some documents proposed measures to improve teachers' social and economic status. The circular of the *Ninth 5-Year plan* (Ministry of Education, 1997) for ECE required the salaries of these teachers to follow the standards for primary and high school teachers (The State Educational Commission, 1997). For official teachers working in rural villages or more remote areas, an extra allowance would be offered (The State Council, 2010b). Teachers' social welfare and job security was highlighted in the policy documents (The State Council, 2003, 2010b).

Policies at the Provincial and Local Level

Different regions have been trying to promote ECE in rural areas through their policies. Hunan Province pointed out that ECE in rural areas should be considered in the general plan for socioeconomic development and in the performance assessment of all local governments (Department of Education, Hunan Province, 2008). Shaanxi Province also attached great importance to establishing central kindergartens in both counties and villages, with the objective of providing universal 3-year ECE in all rural areas (Department of Education, Shaanxi Province, 2009). Provinces like Qinghai and Inner Mongolia have stated their intention to develop and support ECE in agricultural and pastoral areas (The Government of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, 2008; The Government of Qinghai Province, 2010), while the Tibet autonomous region has promised to provide 1 year of free education for preschool-aged children (The Government of Tibet Autonomous Region, 2004). All these measures demonstrate that provincial governments have been dedicated to formulating preferential policies for ECE in rural areas and to improving access to these programs for rural children.

Increasing education funding and strengthening of management systems are other essential aspects of enhancing ECE. Some provincial or local governments have allocated funds to support early childhood education. From year 2011 to 2020, Guizhou Province said that it would, between 2011 and 2020, offer ¥500,000 to each newly built public kindergarten, in areas where there used to be no such kindergartens (The Government of Guizhou Province, 2011). The Guoluo Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture has said that an increasing amount of educational funds will be earmarked for developing ECE in agricultural and pastoral areas (The Government of Guoluo Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, 2009). Luonan County of Shaanxi Province stipulated that the annual funds for ECE would account for no less than 5 % of the total education funds and that from 2009, each eligible village kindergarten would be awarded ¥5000 to ¥10,000 (The Government of Luonan County, 2009).

In terms of the management system, the widely adopted mode has been for the local government to assume responsibility, while different levels of governments implement policies. Various local policies advocated that a multi-tier management network with central kindergartens in towns as models, and different levels of government (e.g., villages, towns, counties, etc.) monitoring the quality of provision (e.g., Department of Education, Hunan Province, 2008; The Government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, 2004; The Government of Luonan County, 2009). In addition, to strengthen and consolidate administration of ECE, full-time or part-time staff were to take charge of ECE at the county level, and principals of central kindergartens or administrative staff from the central primary schools were to shoulder the responsibility of management and guidance for all the early childhood programs in their villages, towns, or townships (e.g., Department of Education, Anhui Province, 2006; Department of Education, Hunan Province, 2008).

To establish a stable and qualified teaching force is a great concern for provincial and local governments as well. Issues such as selection of teachers, professional training and development, and social welfare have been mentioned. Generally, surplus teachers from primary or high schools and graduates from colleges or universities are encouraged to complement the teaching staff in rural areas (e.g., The Government of Fujian Province, 2010; The Government of Guizhou Province, 2011; The Government of Qinghai Province, 2010). Junior or senior students majoring in preschool education at urban colleges or universities are encouraged to undertake internships in kindergartens or pre-primary classes in agricultural and pastoral areas or impoverished areas, and preferential treatment is offered to them when they apply for these positions (The Government of Guizhou Province, 2011; The Government of Qinghai Province, 2010). As for teacher training plans, Guizhou Province has promised to conduct two rounds of training for all ECE teachers in rural areas and to provide training opportunities at the provincial level for 5000 principals and core teachers within the next 5 years (The Government of Guizhou Province, 2011). In Guangxi Province, principals and teachers from towns, counties, and villages receive professional training organized by the higher levels of educational department, at least once a year (The Government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, 2004). In addition, different regions have explored ways of improving the socioeconomic status of ECE teachers in rural areas. Cities such as Taiyuan (The Government of Taiyuan) and Shouguang (Shandong Province) and counties such as Miluo (Department of Education, Hunan Province) have stipulated that early childhood programs, or the local governments, would pay part of the insurance premium for ECE teachers, so that teachers can enjoy the benefits of insurance after retirement (Li & Ren, 2007; The Government of Taiyuan, 2010; Wei, 2004). In some provinces or regions, early childhood teachers from rural areas would be given priority in the assessment of professional title and in selection of excellent teachers (Department of Education, Hunan Province, 2008; Gannan Autonomy State People's Government, 2010).

Finance and Administration

The limited public expenditure on ECE in the past has limited its development. National statistics indicate that government annual expenditure on ECE accounted for only about 1.3 % of the total education budget and for only 0.03 %–0.05 % of GDP in the past 10 years. These figures are relatively low in comparison to other Asian countries (Li, 2010; World Bank, 2011; Zhou, Chen, & Guo, 2009). ECE services in rural areas are faced with greater challenges as they receive relatively smaller public funds and have a lack of other funding sources. The financial burden for developing ECE is then put on the county governments, and administration is regarded as the responsibility of towns, townships, village committees, and even primary schools (World Bank, 2011). In this section, the issues in funding and administration of ECE programs for rural children will be highlighted.

Funding

Early childhood education in China has typically obtained little funding from the government, and multi-source fund-raising has been advocated. ECE funds can come from the government, tuition fees, or donations (The State Education Commission, 1997). Developed areas are assigned a larger proportion of ECE financial funds than underdeveloped areas. In 2009, the total education budget for ECE was ¥19.52 billion, and the fund for the Central and Western regions was ¥6.71 billion (34.36 % of the total) (Jiang & Hu, 2011).

From 2010, when early childhood education was prioritized in the *National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020)* (Ministry of Education, 2010), the central government has allocated more than ¥100 billion to promote the 3-year plan for early childhood services. In terms of ECE in rural areas, ¥0.5 billion was invested in 2010 to establish 416 kindergartens in 10 provinces, and ¥1.5 billion yuan was invested in 2011 to establish 891 kindergartens in another 25 provinces (Yu, 2011).

Although the government funding is increasing, ECE in rural areas still faces great financial difficulties, as its funding is mainly supported by towns and townships. Before the rural tax and duty reform, towns and townships had the right to manage the revenue and expenditure for education. However, with the implementation of the reform and cancelation of extra charges of education funds, the financial power of towns and townships was transferred to the county level, while the administrative power of towns and townships for ECE remained (Jiang, 2008). The county governments allocate few budget resources to ECE, as they give priority to 9-year compulsory school education. Towns and townships are therefore faced with overwhelming financial difficulties in sustaining public ECE, and the programs suffer (Jiang, 2008). In recent years, although the number of rural children enrolled in ECE programs has remained at about 10 million per year (Department of Development and Planning, 2002–2010), the number of public programs for these children is shrinking. As shown in Fig. 8.1, the number of public kindergartens and pre-primary classes run by education departments and communities decreased by 44.44 %, while the number of private ones increased by over 240 % from 2001 to 2009. This indicates that many kindergartens and pre-primary classes in rural areas have to be self-financed and rely on tuition fees to meet operational costs. A survey on 786 central kindergartens in towns and townships of Liaoning Province indicated that only 9.4 % of the kindergartens were wholly sponsored by the government, while 72.9 % of them had to be self-financed (Luo & Li, 2010).

Further, there is great disparity in ECE funding allocation among different regions. For instance, the average expenditure per child in rural areas of Shaanxi Province was ¥107.09 in 2005, while that for Fujian Province was ¥247.21 in 2005 (Tian & Zhang, 2011; Zhao & Hu, 2008). The funding allocated for ECE is also not always used for ECE in some rural areas. In some cases, the tuition fees from ECE programs are used to meet primary school expenses rather than for enhancing the quality of ECE (Jiang, 2008).

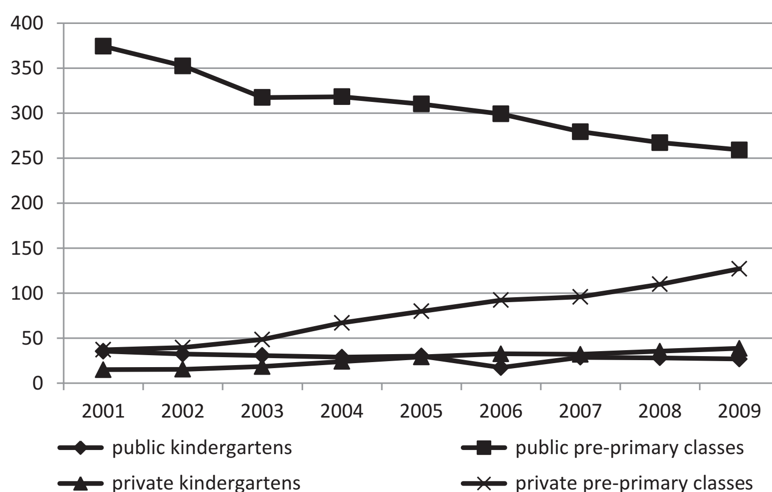

Fig. 8.1 Number of public and private kindergartens and pre-primary classes in rural China, 2001–2009 (Unit: 1000) (Sources: Educational Statistics Yearbook of China, various years)

Administration

In rural areas, county governments are in charge of developing and launching action plans and regulations and managing all ECE programs (The State Council, 2003). Towns and townships shoulder the responsibility of developing ECE, from setting up central kindergartens to raising funds and improving the conditions of kindergartens (The State Council, 2003).

On this basis, a three-tier administrative model (county, township, and village) has been established. The county offices of education are in charge of local ECE and monitor its quality. They play a leading role in providing guidance and support on curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher training for central kindergartens in towns and townships. In towns and townships, central primary schools are responsible for monitoring and promoting local early childhood education. They are expected to provide guidance to ECE programs and training opportunities for teachers throughout towns, townships, and villages. If there are public central kindergartens in the towns and townships, the central primary schools generally entitle these kindergartens to support rural early childhood care and education services in the villages. In villages, primary schools administer the early childhood education services offered by the affiliated kindergartens and separate pre-primary classes.

The three-tier administrative model is decentralized and relies heavily on the local government. Therefore, central administrative control for ECE is relatively weak (Jiang, 2008). Given the non-compulsory nature of ECE, the related official agencies of various levels were dismantled and restructured during institutional reform, leading to a severe lack of human resources for administering ECE. In some areas, early childhood education administrators work on a part-time basis, while

some other areas do not even have an ECE administrator (Pang & Han, 2010). Research indicates that some county governments do not develop action plans or regulations for ECE and that their role is merely to collect the statistics required by higher levels of government (Ding, 2005; Zhao & Hu, 2008). In these cases, the administrative role for ECE of county governments was transferred to the central primary schools. However, as there are no professional administrators, the central primary schools seldom provide support to the ECE programs (Ding, 2005). Therefore, the shortage of local government resources has seriously impeded the development of ECE in rural areas.

Provision and Access

Provision of Early Childhood Education Services

In a broad sense, ECE targets children from birth to age 6 or 7 (stipulated age for primary school entry) in China. The official documents indicate that children of this age are provided with three types of education programs: nurseries for children under 3 years, kindergartens for children from age 3 to 6 or 7 years, and pre-primary classes for children from age five to 6 or 7 years (Wong & Pang, 2002). In rural China, few nurseries are available, and children usually start early childhood education at age 3 or later. They attend formal programs such as kindergartens and separate pre-primary classes or informal programs including Grade 1 classes in primary schools, seasonal weekend classes, and playgroups (Rao et al., 2012).

Kindergartens, which are publicly owned and managed by local educational authorities or communities, are located in separate areas and furnished with basic equipment, toys, and educational materials to cater to children's needs. Following the *Guiding Framework for Kindergarten Education* (Ministry of Education, 2001), all-round development is stressed in these kindergartens in rural areas, and play-based pedagogy is adopted. Teachers usually receive some training in ECE. However, such kindergartens are primarily in larger towns, townships, and villages. In areas where there is a lack of public kindergartens, some private ones with primitive conditions, and low-quality teachers, take their place. The national statistics indicated that the number of kindergartens both publicly and privately owned in rural areas (including towns and counties) increased by nearly 25 %, from 83,858 in 2001 to 104,713 in 2009 (Department of Development and Planning, 2002–2010).

Separate pre-primary classes providing full-day or half-day early education services are another form of ECE in areas where it is difficult to run kindergartens (Zhu & Zhang, 2008). These separate classes are usually affiliated to rural primary schools to prepare children ready for formal schooling. Generally rebuilt from the existing classroom in primary schools, the learning environment of the pre-primary classes is arranged in a similar way to that of the classes for primary school children. Unlike the public kindergartens, the pre-primary classes provide few

educational resources and sometimes even have inappropriate basic facilities, such as oversized desks and chairs. Part of the Grade 1 content is taught through a group teaching method, and children have some time for free play each day. Senior or high school graduates who do not typically have formal teaching qualifications, and sometimes primary school teachers, are in charge of such classes. Similar to that of the kindergartens, the number of pre-primary classes has also experienced an increase, from 589,528 in 2001 to 640,378 in 2009 (Department of Development and Planning, 2002–2010).

In more remote areas that do not have either kindergartens or pre-primary classes, children under the age of 7 are allowed to attend Grade 1 classes. Although this kind of ECE is prohibited (The State Education Commission, 1991), the "sitting-in" experience gives children some exposure to formal learning environments before school entry (Rao, et al., 2012). However, as these classes are set for Grade 1 children, no specific facilities are provided for preschoolers. Children aged 3 to 7 attending Grade 1 classes use the same textbooks and follow the same schedule (Zhou, 2006). Grade 1 curriculum is taught through whole group instruction. And as Grade 1 children are the focus, younger children are always overlooked by the teachers, even if they have great difficulty catching up, and have to repeat Grade 1 year after year, till they reach the official schooling entry age (Zhou, 2006). Teachers who have professional qualifications for teaching primary school children, or substitute teachers who are not professionally qualified, take charge of these classes. This type of early childhood education provision has been reducing over the years.

Access to Early Childhood Education Programs

The gross enrollment ratio (GER) for pre-primary education in China increased markedly from 36 % in 1999 to 70 % in 2012 (UNESCO, 2015). However, these national figures mask large regional disparities. About 61 % of children below 6 years live in rural areas, and many do not have access to ECE programs (Bureau of Statistics of China, 2009; Rao et al., 2012). In 2007, the GER for children aged 3 to 6 years in rural areas was only 35.6 %, while that for children in cities was 55.6 %, yielding a gap of 20 % (Pang, 2009). In 2008, the ECE coverage of 3-year pre-primary education for rural children was only 37 % (Su, 2010), yet in 2009, the GER for 1-year pre-primary education for children in rural areas was 60 % (Hu, 2011). This sudden leap to meet the requirements of provision of 1 year of free pre-primary education suggests that 40 % of these children enrolled in the 1-year program just before the commencement of primary education did not have any previous access to ECE.

The regional disparity in economic growth is also reflected in differences in access to ECE for children from various regions of China. From 1996 to 2000, more than 80 % of children in the East attended kindergartens, while only 35 %–50 % of children in the West had access to these programs (Cai & Feng, 2004). In 2010, the

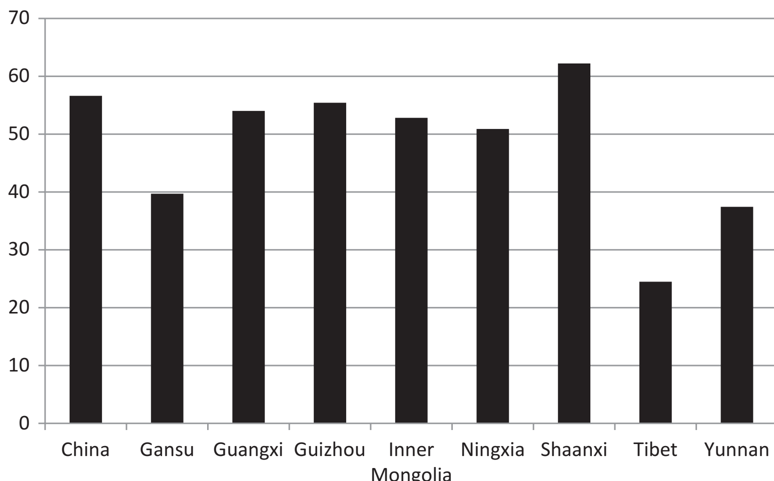

Fig. 8.2 Gross enrollment rate for children from 3 years of age to 6 in China and selected provinces in the West in 2010 (Average 48.17) (Sources: Statistical Communiqué on National Education Development in 2010 and 3-year initiative plan for the development of early childhood services in selected provinces in the West)

GERs for 3-year pre-primary education in most of the provinces in the West were below the national level. As shown in Fig. 8.2, less than 25 % of Tibetan children attended kindergartens, and the rates for Gansu Province and Yunnan Province were less than 40 %. It is also worth mentioning that Hainan Province, a province in the East, had an enrollment rate of 36.7 % in 2010 for 3-year pre-primary education that was much lower than the national enrollment rate (Zhou, 2011).

Further, in the more remote and backward rural villages, preschool services are not available. There, children who can most benefit from ECE programs have fewer opportunities to attend them. For instance, one survey indicated that nearly half of the 27,284 counties and towns in 22 provinces in Central and Western China did not have central kindergartens (Pang, 2009). Luo and colleagues (2009) investigated preschool services in 1652 poor and rural villages in Shaanxi, Gansu, and Henan provinces in 2008 and found that only 180 kindergartens were provided for children, with the average rate of attendance in ECE programs (including kindergartens and pre-primary classes) of 44 % (ranging from 11 to 45 %).

National statistics also reveal trends and differences in the types of ECE programs attended by children in cities, towns, and rural areas. First, as shown in Fig. 8.3, from 2004 onward, the proportion of children attending kindergartens in cities, towns, and rural increased, while the proportion of children attending pre-primary classes in primary schools decreased over time. Second, a larger proportion of children in cities and towns attended kindergartens compared to pre-primary classes. However, the reverse is true for rural areas.

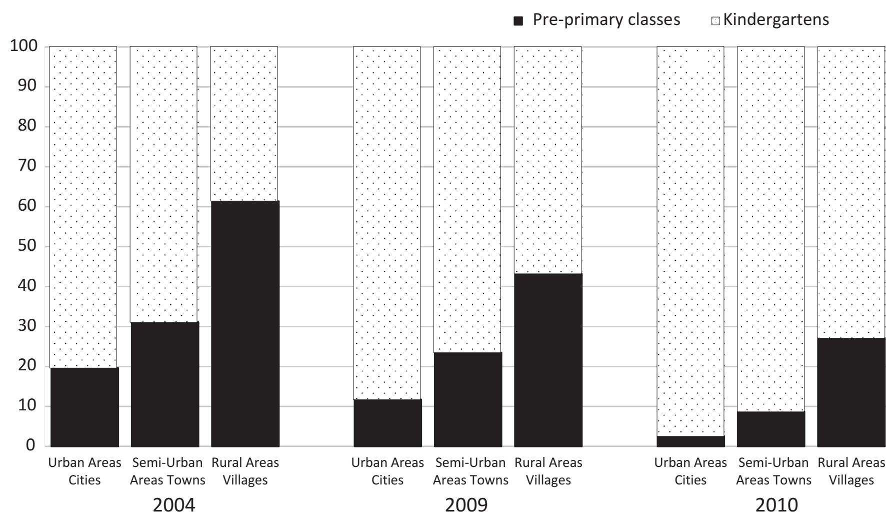

Fig. 8.3 Proportion of children attending kindergartens and separate pre-primary classes among children from different socioeconomic regions (%) (Source: Department of Development and Planning, Ministry of Education, 2004, 2009, 2010)

Quality of Early Childhood Programs

Program quality is generally gauged through structural and/or process dimensions (Rao & Li, 2009). The structural aspect of program quality measures indicators such as physical settings, teacher-child ratios, and teacher qualifications process aspect mainly refers to the quality of interaction between teachers and children (Rao & Sun, 2010).

Structural Quality

Although significant funds have been invested in establishing the development of early childhood programs in China, the space for children is relatively small. Even the central public kindergartens in counties or towns do not meet the national standard for space for children (Hu & Yang, 2010). According to a survey of 82 kindergartens in Henan, Gansu, and Shaanxi provinces, the floor area per child averaged about 5.1 square meters, which was only about one-third of the required national standard (Luo, Zhao, He, Liu, & Zhang, 2009). The private kindergartens are often established in the homes of residents and do not provide enough space for children (Li, 2006). Kindergartens in rural areas had about 74 % of space of those in kindergartens in counties and towns and 60 % of the space of those in cities in 2009 (Ministry of Education, 2009).

The class size in these kindergartens is fairly large. Wang (2008) investigated 245 classes in more than 50 public and private kindergartens in the counties, towns, and villages, and found that about 95.5 % kindergartens had a class size of 40 children, and some private kindergartens enrolled nearly 60–70 children in one class. Separate pre-primary classes that are affiliated with primary classes also have a large class size. These pre-primary classes share outdoor play facilities with the primary school and do not have other playrooms for children. A study of 19 pre-primary classes in Hunan Province found that classes had an average of about 38 children, but one class had as many as 57 children (Ding, 2005).

In most kindergartens, there is no health-care room and no morning check of temperature (Luo, Zhao, He, Liu, & Zhang, 2009). Many programs, especially pre-primary classes, do not provide drinking water for children (Ding, 2005; Lu, 2008). In areas where there is a shortage of water, children have no access to running water and cannot wash hands. The toilets are also not appropriate for children. Most of the pre-primary classes share toilets with the primary school. These toilets are not close to children's classrooms and do not meet the standards for preschool-aged children (Hu & Yang, 2010).

Furthermore, furnishings tend to be basic, and there is a dearth of educational resources. Many kindergartens and pre-primary classes occupy a single classroom and there are no shelves for books or toys. The only few furnishings are desks and chairs for children (Ding, 2005). In some programs, desks and chairs are not suitable for children, being either too high or too dangerous, as they are obtained from primary schools. In some areas in Western China, children have to bring their desks and chairs to kindergartens or pre-primary classes due to an extreme lack of facilities (Zhou, 2006). Children from the rural areas are seldom provided with any educational materials such as books and blocks. A study conducted in Jiangxi Province found that nearly 65 % of the kindergartens had less than four toys, and some of the pre-primary classes did not have play materials for children (Lu, 2008). In addition, the seating arrangement and the decoration in rooms were more suitable for primary school-aged children than preschool children. For example, visual displays included posters with Pinyin, numerals, alphabets, sayings, and regulations, and there were seldom any displays to meet children's needs and interests (Ding, 2005).

Teaching Staff, Teacher Qualification, and Training

In the past few years, the Chinese government has exerted considerable effort to expand and improve the qualification of preschool teachers in rural areas. The number of preschool teachers increased substantially from 125,476 in 2001 to 208,598 in 2008 (Department of Development and Planning, 2002–2010). However, given the large population of preschool-aged children in rural areas, there is still a fairly large shortage of teachers, and the teacher-child ratio is far from satisfactory. In 2001, the ratio of the number of full-time professional ECE teachers to that of children was 1:83, which is extremely high (Department of Development and Planning,

2002–2010). Through the years, more and more teachers have received training in ECE, and the teacher-child ratio decreased to 1:51 in 2008 (Department of Development and Planning, 2009). However, during the same period, the ratio for ECE programs in towns/counties and cities was 1:25~28 and 1:16~19, respectively. Cities tend to have more favorable teacher-child ratios than towns and rural areas (Department of Development and Planning, 2002–2010). Further, there is a great discrepancy in teacher-child ratios among different provinces and regions. For example, in 2008, the teacher-child ratio in rural areas in Gansu Province was nearly 1:76, while that in Shandong Province was 1:30 (Department of Development and Planning, 2009).

Teachers in rural areas shoulder a heavy workload as there is only one teacher in the classroom to cater for children's diverse needs (Kang, Ding, & Fu, 2010; Wang, 2010; Zhu, 2009). These difficult working conditions and relatively low levels of wages have led to qualified teachers leaving the profession (Li, 2009a, 2009b; Liu, 2009; Lu, 2008). For example, nearly 30 % of early childhood teachers resigned each year from 2005 to 2007, in a town of Hubei Province (Wang, 2010), and some pre-primary classes had to be closed due to high teacher attrition (Li, 2009a, 2009b).

Although the number of preschool teachers in rural areas is increasing, many teachers do not have the required professional qualifications. Graduates from normal schools who have majored in ECE are reluctant to work in rural areas. Senior high school or vocational school graduates, and even junior high school graduates, are then employed to alleviate the pressing shortage of teachers (Li, 2006). In 2008, 61.32 % of preschool teachers in rural areas graduated from junior high schools or lower grades (Department of Development and Planning, 2009). Primary school teachers, who were made redundant because of the decreasing birth rate, have become preschool teachers but they lack ECE qualifications (National Center for Education Development Research of the Ministry of Education of China, 2008). Therefore, 70.65 % of preschool teachers in rural areas did not have professional qualifications in ECE (Department of Development and Planning, 2009).

There is a dearth of opportunities for initial teacher training and continuing professional development. Many teachers do not have the opportunity to attend training programs, and sometimes they do not even receive any training in their kindergartens (Hu & Yang, 2010; Li, 2006). One study investigated 30 public kindergartens and found that only 43.33 % of them provided one to two training opportunities for teachers in the preceding 3 years (Peng & Yan, 2011). In some rural areas, senior teachers from model kindergartens prepare demonstration lessons for teachers in other kindergartens or pre-primary classes. However, since there is only one model kindergarten in counties or towns, teachers from villages or more remote areas have to travel long distances to attend these lessons (Lu, 2008; Tian & Zhou, 2009). In terms of within-school training, many kindergartens or pre-primary classes do not organize any teaching and research activities. A survey of 48 rural kindergartens in Hunan Province found that 53.2 % teachers did not know about kindergarten-based teaching research (Yang & Chen, 2010), and another study found that the only teaching and research activity was to submit a teaching plan each semester (Tian &

Zhou, 2009). The lack of professional development opportunities in rural areas is not conducive to the enhancement of teacher quality.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

Due to diversity of language and culture, and the varying needs of children and their families, national governments do not prescribe a fixed curriculum. Instead, they disseminate general guidelines or a curricular framework and rely on local centers and communities to develop their own curricula according to their own needs (Rao, Ng, & Pearson, 2009; Rao & Sun, 2010; UNESCO, 2004).

In 2001, the State Education Commission released the *Guidance for Kindergarten Education (Trial Version)* (The State Education Commission, 2001). It emphasized that teachers should act as a supporter and collaborator and guide in the learning activities of children, and thereby reflected a shift from the traditional teacher-centered pedagogy to a child-centered approach (The State Education Commission, 2001; Zhao & Hu, 2008). The document also proposed a play-based and child-initiated learning method, through an integrated curriculum including the five domains of health, language, social, science, and art (Wong & Pang, 2002).

In practice, however, these basic principles are not followed in rural areas. On one hand, the curriculum is not fully implemented, because of the ambiguity of curriculum goals and a lack of curriculum resources (Nie, 2006). As cognitive development is prioritized in rural areas, the curriculum in early childhood programs is predominantly focused on subject-based knowledge, such as counting, calculation, and recognition of simple characters, while aspects related to social development, science, or art are neglected (Hu & Yang, 2010). Usually, a "lighter version of first grade curriculum" is taught (Zhu & Zhang, 2008), and some kindergartens or pre-primary classes follow the Grade 1 curriculum (Wang, 2006). On the other hand, the resources in the programs are limited, and this is an obstacle to carrying out activities such as dancing, singing, and drawing.

The pedagogy is more teacher-directed rather than child-centered. Group teaching in the form of teacher-oriented instruction, instead of small-group or individual teaching, is predominantly implemented, in deviation from the principle of "learning through play" (Lu, 2008). A study conducted in 24 towns (townships) of Hunan Province found that there was no individual teaching in kindergartens and pre-primary classes. In kindergartens, 80 % of the time was spent on group teaching, and the remaining 20 % on small-group teaching, whereas in pre-primary classes, group teaching was the only method, even though some classes were composed of children ranging in age from 2 years to 6 years (Xu, Feng, Liu, & Chen, 2010). Generally, a schedule similar to that in primary schools is followed, especially in pre-primary classes and kindergartens affiliated to primary schools. Children have to attend four to five 40-minute sessions daily, and this is quite demanding for such young children (Liu, 2009; Xu et al., 2010). They are required to sit still and listen

to the teachers carefully, like primary school children, and have limited time for play (Ding, 2005; Wang, 2006; Zhao & Hu, 2008; Zhu & Zhang, 2008).

Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter provided an overview of ECE in economically disadvantaged rural areas of China, in terms of policy, funding and administration, provision and access, and the quality of early childhood programs. Over the years, many policy documents have addressed the quality of ECE in rural China. The central government has also reiterated the importance of developing ECE for rural children and has put forward specific measures to promote its quality. In response to the central government, provincial and local governments have also formulated corresponding policies to promote and ensure the development of ECE. As such, the central government has allocated special funds for ECE and has increased investment in ECE for rural children. More and more kindergartens have been established, and children in rural areas are provided with more access to these programs. However, ECE in rural China still faces many challenges. In this section, the challenges will be summarized, and some recommendations for improving services will be put forward.

First, the public funding for early childhood education in rural China is limited. Although the central government has assigned increased funding, local governments still have to shoulder a heavy financial burden. As the bulk of education expenditure is spent on primary education in rural areas, there is significantly less funding for ECE. Administrative control is also inadequate. To effectively promote ECE for rural children, more funds from government and nongovernment sources are needed.

Second, a strong and effective ECE administration system should be established to provide sufficient guidance and support to ECE services. Further, the form of fund allocation should be appropriate and enough, and a supervisory mechanism overseeing fund expenditure should be established, in order to ensure that each rural child benefits from the investment.

Third, although more and more children in rural areas have access to ECE services, many of them are still deprived of such opportunities, and even more of them cannot or do not receive 3 years of ECE. To expand provision, it is recommended that villages establish kindergartens using vacant primary or secondary school buildings. In areas with scattered population, "mobile kindergartens" are recommended. Professionally qualified teachers from county or town kindergartens can be invited and incentivized to go to these areas and to provide education services for these rural children on a regular basis (Li, 2010; Zeng, 2009).

Fourth, priority should be accorded to improving the quality of ECE. In many rural settings, the early learning environment is not appropriate, and children do not have easy access to educational materials. Teachers should also be encouraged and supported to use locally sourced, sustainable teaching aids in their instructional activities. Such materials stimulate children's thinking, encourage community

involvement in preparing the materials, and cut costs in resource-constrained settings. There is also a lack of teaching staff, and the educational background of the teachers in rural areas is relatively low. They are also, by dint of circumstance, subjected to low levels of social welfare. These factors affect the implementation of curriculum and the use of pedagogy. Children are not provided with a holistic curriculum, and the teaching practice is often not developmentally appropriate. Therefore, more effort should be made, and action taken, to improve the quality of ECE in these areas. The local government must strengthen its supervision of settings, to guarantee that they are safe and spacious enough for children. The government should also stipulate that a specific amount of education expenditure in ECE programs be spent on educational materials for children, including picture books, sports facilities, and toys. To improve the quality of teaching staff and pedagogy, more opportunities for preservice and in-service professional development should be provided for teachers in all ECE programs in rural areas. At the same time, professional support and guidance should be offered, to ensure that curriculum guidelines are followed, and the concept of holistic development of children is included in the pedagogy (Rao & Sun, 2010).

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Chapter 9
Responding to Emergencies: Early Childhood Programs After the Sichuan Earthquake

Si Chen, Jing Zhou, and Li Zhang

This chapter reviews early childhood education (ECE) in China in a post-emergency situation, using the Sichuan earthquake as an example. It begins by describing the effect of the earthquake on May 12, 2008, in Sichuan on ECE. Thousands of kindergartens were damaged, and many children, families, and teachers were dead or missing. It next focuses on the redevelopment of ECE after the earthquake highlighting the role of ECE professionals and other volunteers. Finally, it summarizes the lessons from the responses of the ECE community to this emergency situation.

Introduction

A devastating earthquake which measured 8 on the Richter scale struck Sichuan on May 12, 2008. During that period, children in a private kindergarten in Dujiangyan were having a nap. In response to the earthquake, a brave teacher, Dongmei, tried her best to safely evacuate every child to the playground. Only one child was slightly wounded. During the following 6 hours, she stayed with the children on the playground, comforting and caring for them and waiting for their relatives to pick them up. She worked until midnight until the last child was taken home. When she returned back home, she was grieved to learn that the catastrophic earthquake had claimed

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the lives of her little daughter and her mother when she was attending to the children in the kindergarten. Learning the news, she said, "I cried, but I do not regret!"

This is one of the many moving stories of preschool teachers' responses to the emergency situation caused by the destructive Sichuan earthquake, which resulted in the death of over 68,000 people and affected 15 million people. Each year, natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, fire, floods, and tsunamis disrupt the lives of people worldwide. Young children are most vulnerable in these emergencies that have adverse effects on physical and psychological well-being (Cologon & Hayden, 2011). In the immediate aftermath of a crisis, due to the destruction of the environment and shortage of supplies, contagious diseases are likely to spread, and children's health and nutritional status are threatened (Ager, Stark, Akesson, & Boothby, 2010; Masten & Osofsky, 2010). Separation from parents or caregivers and being a witness to a scene of disaster, compounded by loss of, or separation from, relatives and friends, cause considerable psychological distress to children (Hayden, 2009). These events can have detrimental effects on physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development, both concurrently and longitudinally (Ager et al., 2010). Although many children eventually recover and show resilience in such situations, appropriate care and support are indispensable for reducing risks, to a large extent (UNESCO-IIEP, 2010). One of the most powerful instruments is early childhood education, as shown in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter.

Education plays a crucial role in providing relief to children from the effects of traumatic events. Ever since the "Education for All" Summit in 1990 and the World Education Forum in the year 2000, where "Education in Situations of Crisis and Emergency" was emphasized (UNESCO, 2000), the theme of "education in emergencies" has been a rising field of focus in research and educational policies (Chand, Joshi, & Dabhi, 2003; Kamel, 2006). It has been acknowledged that "education in emergencies" helps to normalize children's lives, ameliorates distress, and helps affected individuals to cope with the changed environment (Pigozzi, 1999; UNESCO-IIEP, 2010). Yet young children typically have access to limited services, including education, in such emergency situations (Hayden, 2009).

The Asia-Pacific region frequently bears the brunt of natural disasters. According to statistics in 2011, four of the five countries with the highest number of natural disasters were from this region, and nearly 90 % of people killed in emergencies were from Asia (Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, 2011). Millions of children in this region have been, or are being, affected by disasters (UNICEF, 2009). The figures point to a pressing need for services, especially educational services for children in these regions. However, while almost every country develops policies and plans for ECE, few integrate the component of emergency situations into these policies and plans (UNICEF and Save the Children Alliance, 2009). Although many interventions have been developed to respond to such emergencies, these usually address urgent and basic needs for sanitation, shelter, water, and food, but few address the developmental and psychosocial needs of young children (Hayden, 2009). The field of ECE in emergencies is still in its infancy (Kamel, 2006), and few empirical studies have been conducted. Therefore, a "knowledge

database of good practices and lessons" is required (UNICEF & Save the Children Alliance, 2009).

The Impact of the Earthquake on Early Childhood Education

The death of, and injury to, thousands of children and teachers caused by the collapse of school buildings is heartbreaking, and the devastation affected the whole nation. According to the provincial government, a total of nearly 69,000 people died in the earthquake, and almost 2 million^2 meters of school premises were destroyed (Chen, Chen, & Xu, 2008). As the earthquake occurred in the early afternoon, when children were at classes or taking a nap, many children and teachers were trapped in the buildings and died. At least 9000 children and teachers were reported to be dead or missing, accounting for more than 13 % of the total death toll (OCHA, 2008), and nearly 5500 children were orphaned or lost contact with parents after the earthquake (Xinhuanet, 2008a).

In Wenchuan County, the most heavily affected area, the Yingxiu Kindergarten and Xuankou Kindergarten buildings were leveled by the earthquake. Only 3 out of more than 70 children and 150 out of 300 children, respectively, survived (South China Morning Post, 2008). In Beichuan County, 628 children at the Qushan Kindergarten lost their lives (Xue, 2008). In Deyang City, more than 60 children in the Huanhuan Kindergarten were trapped in the collapsed building, and only another 30 were safely rescued (Zheng, 2008). To protect children against the disaster during the earthquake, kindergarten teachers guided children to safe evacuation areas or took them out of the buildings, one by one, often at risk to their own lives. Due to teachers' instinctive bravery, many children were saved, and many teachers sacrificed their lives or were seriously injured in the service of their wards. For instance, in Huanhuan Kindergarten, in order to help two children escape from a falling cement board, a young kindergarten teacher tightly embraced them and propped her back against the board. Although the two children survived, the young teacher lost her life (Xinhuanet, 2008b).

Owing to the lack of teachers, buildings, and basic teaching facilities, almost all daily teaching activities in local kindergartens were suspended after the earthquake. In addition, many teachers and children who had survived were seriously traumatized as a result of the earthquake. Children and teachers became sensitive to sound, felt fear as a result of their experience of the earthquake, had sleeping problems, displayed high tension or panic, and were emotionally unstable (UNICEF & Save the Children Alliance, 2009). Experiencing the loss of family, peers, and teachers, young children were in deep grief and were scared and panic stricken. There was an urgent need to help normalize their lives by, among other things, the reconstruction of early childhood education centers in the impacted area. However, in the post-disaster relief, the government mainly focused on the rescue of victims and the provision of basic facilities such as food and shelter, and limited resources were provided to attend to the needs of young children, and it was left to the ECE

community to quickly organize stability and education for the affected young children and offer psychological interventions for both the children and their teachers.

The Restoration of Early Childhood Education

During and after this earthquake, supplementing the efforts of the government and some international organizations, the ECE community played an important role in the restoration of normalcy through the restoration of ECE. During the earthquake, local kindergarten teachers took immediate actions to save and relieve children. After the disaster, the China National Society of Early Childhood Education sent different professional teams to the affected area, to reestablish ECE, and implemented the "mobile kindergarten project." The following sections discuss these efforts of teachers and the China National Society of Early Childhood Education.

Rescue Actions Taken by Local Kindergarten Teachers

During the earthquake, many heroic teachers put their own lives at risk and did their level best to rescue every child from the collapsing kindergarten buildings. Many moving stories about these brave teachers were heard. In order to examine how teachers responded to the earthquake and the motivations for their instinctive responses and deeds of courage, an interview study was conducted by a research team from East China Normal University. A total of 100 teachers and principals who experienced the crisis were interviewed in groups and invited to share their personal experiences and recollections of responses, through completing a questionnaire. They were from 13 public and 14 private kindergartens in three cities, including Chengdu, Chongzhou, and Dujiangyan, which were mildly, moderately, and severely hit in the disaster, respectively. Among the teachers, 23 were kindergarten principals, and 77 were kindergarten teachers. The interviews were transcribed, and teachers' reported responses to the disaster were coded.

A total of four major types of actions were identified from all the interviews, including evacuating children immediately, providing psychosocial support for children, involving in the reestablishment of ECE programs, and organizing donation activities to support children in more severely stricken areas. In the following sections, these four types of responses to the earthquake will be described.

Organizing Immediate Evacuation

As soon as the earthquake was felt, all teachers evacuated children from buildings. In the interviews, 96 % of the teachers held the view that *teachers should treat children with parental love.* At the moment of crisis, they thought that they should take

the place of parents and should keep every child safe. And therefore, they protected children like mothers and made every effort to rescue every child, regardless of their own safety. As an example, when the disaster occurred, Xiaoyan, a young teacher in a public kindergarten in Chengdu, was preparing for the children to have a nap. Using a loud voice, she directed the children to move downstairs, and she ensured that they did this in an orderly manner. After the successful evacuation, she suddenly realized that one child with hearing problems might not have heard her shouting and rapidly ran back to the bedroom. She finally found the child who was sleeping and carried him to the playground. Right after that, the whole school building cracked. She said, "I cannot leave any child in danger." Teachers' care and concern for their wards were evident in many of responses of the teachers to interview questions. Their unselfish behavior and dedication to students saved the lives of many young children.

Providing Psychosocial Support for Children

As a result of witnessing the death of teachers and peers and experiencing the panic, children were scared and emotionally unstable. In such cases, teachers provided psychosocial support for children after the evacuation. For instance, when the earthquake struck, Mei, a 43-year-old teacher in a public kindergarten in Chongzhou, who was on leave, ran all the way to the kindergarten to save the children. When she came to the site, all the children were safe. She then, along with other teachers, played games with children at the playground and comforted frightened children, until all of them were picked up by parents and relatives in the evening. At the same time, her 14-year-old son was in a boarding school located in the severely hit city, Dujiangyan. Although she worried about the safety of her son, she stayed with these young children to provide them with the required psychological support.

Showing Dedication to Reconstruction Work

The earthquake destroyed many early childhood facilities, thereby dealing a severe blow to ECE in affected regions. Due to the shortage of resources, many kindergartens were closed down, and normal teaching activities could not be carried out. In such cases, many kindergarten teachers actively participated in the reconstruction of kindergartens. In the survey, 33 % of the teachers agreed that they *should be the first to worry about the woes of the people, and the last to share the weal of the people*, a sentence by a famous Chinese poet from the Song dynasty. They thought that, in this difficult time, they should work together to provide education for young children and to help parents care for their children. Many teachers in the affected kindergartens endeavored to look for rooms and facilities to rebuild kindergartens and worked in the kindergartens for free. For instance, Jiang, a young teacher in

Dujiangyan who had left the village where she worked, went back when she heard that the kindergarten where she used to work had a lack of teaching staff and was experiencing financial difficulties. She stayed with the children throughout and kept working through the summer vacation, while her own family remained in Dujiangyan.

Soliciting Donations to Support Kindergartens in Severely Stricken Areas

In severely affected areas, many kindergarten buildings were destroyed, and kindergartens faced financial problems. After the earthquake, many teachers (55 %) donated clothes and cash for children. They felt that they should be good models for children. Teachers also solicited donations of cash and educational resources from well-off families for kindergartens in the severely stricken areas.

Implementation of the "Mobile Kindergarten Project"

To assist in the reestablishment of ECE in earthquake-affected areas, the China National Society of Early Childhood Education launched the "mobile kindergarten project" with the support of experts in this field. More than 100 volunteers, including university professors, postgraduate students, principals of kindergartens, and kindergarten teachers from cities such as Beijing, Nanjing, Shanghai, Suzhou, Chongqing, and Qingdao, provided help, to reestablish ECE in severely stricken areas (Feng, 2011). In this section, as the first author was in charge of the Shanghai team, the efforts by this team will be introduced as an example to demonstrate how the project functioned in the emergency situation.

The Shanghai team consisted of university professors, postgraduate students majoring in ECE, and experienced kindergarten teachers from Shanghai. The team was divided into five groups and worked in cities such as Chengdu, Dujiangyan, and Chongzhou. Team members willingly forfeited their summer holidays, and each group spent 10 days in the affected areas to provide services in Sichuan.

The areas that the Shanghai team supported were Jiguanshan Township and Wenjinjiang Town in Chongzhou, a moderately affected city. In Jiguanshan Township, more than 3000 local people were homeless, and over 100 children between the ages of 2 to 6 were left without any access to early childhood education after the earthquake (China National Society of Early Childhood Education, 2008). In Wenjinjiang Town, 1902 families and 7361 children were affected (Lin, 2008), and they were provided shelter in temporary portable dwellings. To help affected people recover from the disaster, the Shanghai team provided psychosocial support to children and parents and teachers and organized diversified activities to support teaching and learning in the newly established, mobile kindergartens. They also guided the administrative work of kindergartens. These steps are further described in the following sections.

Response of the Shanghai Team

Providing Psychosocial Rehabilitation

In early childhood education, psychosocial rehabilitation should mainly target children, parents, and teachers. In accordance with the characteristics and psychosocial status of the affected population, the Shanghai team provided different kinds of rehabilitation support for children, parents, and teachers. Community-based activities are conducive to restore children's sense of security, normalcy, predictability, and connectedness (Kostelny & Wessells, 2005). The mobile kindergarten project was an example of a community-based activity. Through singing, dancing, role play, and storytelling, children had the chance to express their emotions and learn how to cope with distress. In addition, team members also involved teachers and parents. They guided teachers to adopt play, group, and individual counseling to reduce children's fears. Parents were provided parenting support and invited to engage in games that promoted parent-child interactions.

In such emergency situations, parents have a profound influence on how children cope with the distressing event. They can, for example, transmit their stress to their children, who in turn may respond to stressful situations in a negative way. However, if parents were to exhibit a positive attitude toward the event and take an active role in rebuilding family cohesiveness, children are likely to feel more secure and be more resilient. In order to assist parents in this regard, team members invited parents to the mobile kindergartens and offered them opportunities to communicate with each other. Parents were also taught stress reduction strategies and how to avoid the transmission of negative emotions to their children. In addition, regular lectures on parenting, and parenting consultation services provided by university professors, offered parents useful information on how to promote their parenting practice and to improve the psychological well-being of their children.

Given the key role that preschool teachers play following such traumatic events, it is very important that teachers themselves are given the support needed to deal with the negative effects of such an event. To help teachers cope with the distressing event, team members offered psychological consultation services and organized regular communications and interviews. In addition, to enhance teachers' feeling of connectedness, team members provided psychotherapy. University professors of psychology introduced group games that require cooperation and teamwork to create a pleasant atmosphere for teachers.

Establishing "Mobile Kindergartens"

As kindergarten buildings were completely destroyed in the area, there was an urgent need to establish new kindergartens. Considering that limited space and resources were available, the team adopted the integrated child development service

(ICDS) model used in India. The ICDS model provides children from economically disadvantaged families with a series of services, integrating health care, nutrition provision, and preschool education through Anganwadis (AWCs). Generally, each Anganwadi has at least one room, and a veranda, and supplies children with limited basic play or educational materials (Rao, 2010). Studies indicated that regardless of the low-quality and simple learning environment of these programs, children achieved development benefits (Rao, 2010). On the basis of ICDS, the team established two "mobile kindergartens" in three portable dwellings that were each 20 square meters in area and made use of the space beside the dwellings as playground for the children.

To create a fun, interesting, and lively learning environment for children, team members and teachers decorated the rooms with art and craftwork made by teachers and children. In addition, the outside wall of the dwellings was used as a communication board between parents and the kindergarten. Due to the limited space outside the rooms, each table inside the dwellings was designated a play corner, and several small bags were nailed up onto the walls to hold the materials for play.

In addition, during the process of establishment, various charitable organizations and individuals provided generous support and help. For instance, village leaders and residents helped find idle dwellings and cleaned up an open area for the team to use. A local kindergarten offered free transportation for the team. Kindergartens in Shanghai and Hong Kong donated picture books and materials for play, for children in the stricken areas. All these efforts contributed to optimize the learning environment in the mobile kindergartens.

Supporting Teaching and Learning

After the establishment of the mobile kindergartens, team members were actively engaged in the provision of teaching and learning activities. As indicated in Table 9.1, all members were involved in four types of activities, including group play for children, training programs for teachers, parent-child activities, and lectures for parents. The mobile kindergartens were open every day.

In such an emergency situation, the focal point of the curriculum for children was to ensure their healthy development and to restore their sense of normalcy and hope for future. The urgent need of children was psychological relief and support, and it is important to integrate these elements into the curriculum. Further, it is suggested that play, and child-to-child or child-to-adult interaction, is conducive to bring children a sense of normalcy (Save the Children, 2008). Based on these principles, team members elaborately designed modules such as *We Are Good Friends*, *To Welcome the Olympic Games* and *I Am Competent,* through diversified activities including early literacy, puppet shows, arts and craft, and outdoor group play. For instance, in the early literacy activities, children were guided to read picture books such as *Guess How Much I Love you*, *Badger's Present*, *and We Have Friends Everywhere*. Through these moving stories, children felt loved and protected. In the

Table 9.1 Activities provided by the Shanghai team in the "mobile kindergarten project"

Type of activities	Content	Time slot/ frequency	Participants	Organizers and guiders
Teaching activities and group play for children	Early childhood education for children	9 a.m.–5 p.m. weekdays	Children from Chongzhou	Skilled kindergarten teachers and postgraduate students from Shanghai; local kindergarten teachers
Training programs for local teachers	Psychological consultation services and guidance on professional development (ten sessions, 120 teachers each session)	Once or twice a week	Kindergarten teachers from Chengdu, Dujiangyan, and Chongzhou	university professors and postgraduate students from Shanghai
Parent-child activities	Games to promote parent-child interactions	9:30–11:30 a.m. 2:30–4:30 p.m. weekends	Children and parents from Chongzhou	Skilled kindergarten teachers and postgraduates from Shanghai; local kindergarten teachers
Lectures for parents	Guidance on parenting and parenting consultation services	Once a week	Parents from Chongzhou	university professors, skilled kindergarten teachers, and postgraduate students from Shanghai

lively puppet show *Looking for Friends* (conducted by team members), children learned how to help and love each other in difficult situations. While delivering these colorful activities, the team paid particular attention to making full use of the local resources and accessible materials, in limited conditions. For example, the team presented an interesting puppet show merely with a blanket and three puppets, delivered an activity for 20 parent-child dyads using only a pile of used newspapers, and arranged an early literacy activity with only one big picture book.

To improve teaching skills of teachers, the team offered a ten-session training program. Kindergarten teachers and principals from Dujiangyan, Chongzhou, and Chengdu attended the lectures presented by university professors and postgraduate students. The topics revolved around the following aspects**:** the reestablished of ECE after the earthquake, mental health education of young children, parenting of young children, effective group teaching practices, responsive curriculum development, preparing children for school, and professional development of kindergarten teachers.

Parents were also involved in the "mobile kindergarten project." As shown in Table 9.1, they were invited to kindergartens on weekends to participate in games that promoted parent-child interaction and to attend lectures by the professors. Parents were also given leaflets designed by the team, which provided tips, ECE, and psychological treatment for post-trauma stress. In addition, the team provided parent consultation services. Topics including how to play games with children at home, preparing children for early literacy and school readiness, and fostering parent-child relationships for children who live in kindergartens were discussed among parents and team members. As the project progressed, some parents gradually began to assist teachers in the classrooms.

Guiding Administration of ECE

Establishing a system of administration of kindergartens in emergency situations is necessary for administrators of kindergartens to know how to cope with sudden crises. In the interview study, many teachers and principals mentioned that due to lack of awareness, most of them responded by intuition and were flustered when parents came to pick up children immediately after the earthquake. After participating in the "mobile kindergarten project," many principals acknowledged the importance of including administration work in emergency situations as part of the regular administration training schedule. In response to the request of many kindergartens, the Shanghai team provided guidance on how to organize emergency evacuations and conduct regular evacuation drills.

Lessons Learned

After the Sichuan earthquake, local kindergarten teachers and principals endeavored to evacuate children immediately, and response to the emergency by the ECE community was prompt and effective. In addition, kindergartens helped each other to overcome difficulties. Many children were therefore rescued and relieved.

The "mobile kindergarten project" offered a good learning opportunity and brought great benefits to children, teachers, and parents. After just 50 days of work, the efforts made by the Shanghai team brought about remarkable effects. First, hundreds of children in portable dwellings received appropriate and quality ECE, thereby providing child care support to parents who could now assist in the reconstruction work. Second, the psychological consultation services and training programs for local teachers mitigated their distress, guided them to think about ways to help children out of difficulties, and promoted their sense of community and professional development. Third, psychological consultation services and new parenting ideas were introduced to local parents and communities. Parents and children were more closely connected through parent-child activities.

Emergency relief conducted by local kindergarten teachers and the "mobile kindergarten project" turned out to be a great success and instrumental in the reestablishment of ECE in Chengdu, Dujiangyan, and Chongzhou. In the next section, the lessons learned from the project and their implications for future ECE emergency situations are considered.

Lesson 1: Normalize Life as Soon as Possible

Emergencies pose tangible and intangible challenges to young children and increase their vulnerability (UNESCO-IIEP, 2010). In order to enhance children's resilience in the face of the risks, normalizing life for children should be regarded as the priority.

To foster and promote resilience of children, we suggest that immediate actions should be adopted to normalize life as soon as possible. Kindergartens should improve their awareness of protocols for ECE in emergencies and organize evacuation drills on a regular basis.

Lesson 2: Pooling of Resources from Different Sectors

Education programs in emergency situations should adopt a "community-based participatory approach" (Sinclair, 2002). This means that as many humanitarian resources as possible should be involved in the reestablishment process of early childhood education. We suggest that, in an emergency situation, different existing humanitarian resources should take an active role, by providing good learning opportunities for young children to help them tackle difficult situations.

Lesson 3: ECE Community Response

In emergencies, the ECE community is crucial in directing the reestablishment of ECE in stricken areas. We suggest that the ECE community work in unity to help children and their families overcome challenges caused by emergencies.

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Part III
Early Childhood Education in Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore and Taiwan

Chapter 10
Early Childhood Education in Hong Kong: Progress, Challenges, and Opportunities

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This chapter examines developments in early childhood education (ECE) in Hong Kong. We first consider, from a historical perspective, policy changes that have impacted ECE in Hong Kong. Next, we discuss major challenges in the pursuit of high-quality ECE. Finally, we discuss opportunities for enhancing the provision of ECE in Hong Kong.

Introduction

Since the handover of sovereignty from Britain to China in July 1997, ECE in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has entered an exciting and challenging phase, in comparison to past decades when ECE did not receive much attention from the Government. In Hong Kong, ECE refers to services for children from birth to 6 years. The term "kindergarten education" is now used to refer to education and care services provided to children ranging in age from 3 to 6 years. These services may be provided in kindergartens, child-care centers, or in kindergarten-cum-child-care centers. This chapter focuses on services for children of age from 3 to 6 years.

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Current Situation

Early childhood services come under the jurisdiction of two Government departments – the Education Bureau and the Social Welfare Department. Until 2005, the erstwhile Education and Manpower Bureau was responsible for overseeing kindergartens which enroll children aged from 3 to 6 years, whereas the Social Welfare Department was responsible for regulating services for children from birth to age 6 in child-care centers. Child-care centers include crèches (for infants from birth to 2 years old) and nurseries (for children aged from 2 to 6 years). From September 2005, a joint office of the Education Bureau and Social Welfare oversees all preschool services for children from 2 to 6 years, regardless of whether they are provided in kindergartens, child-care centers, or in kindergarten-cum-child-care centers.

In 2015, there were 978 kindergartens and kindergartens-cum-childcare centers in Hong Kong. Kindergartens typically offer half-day programs while kindergartens-cum-childcare centers offer full-day programs. Kindergartens are independent institutions although some are affiliated to primary schools. They are classified as being nonprofit-making (81.49 %) or private independent kindergartens (18.51 %) (Education Bureau, 2015a). They are also classified as local schools (89.37 %) if they follow the Hong Kong Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum (Education Department, 2006) or nonlocal schools. There are three levels of pre-primary classes: nursery for 3-year-olds, lower kindergarten for 4-year-olds, and upper kindergarten for 5-year-olds.

From a *Laissez-Faire* to an Interventionist Approach

Hong Kong has developed from a small fishing village to a world-famous cosmopolitan city in just 100 years. The development of ECE in Hong Kong has a shorter history. During the early part of the twentieth century, very limited ECE services were provided for young children in Hong Kong. However, charitable and religious organizations did provide care services for children who required it (Opper, 1993). Formal documentation on Hong Kong early childhood education services and policies started from postwar years, when there was an influx of refugees from mainland China in the 1940s and 1950s (Opper, 1993; Hong Kong Government, 1981a). Opper (1992) noted that the Government rendered limited support in areas of legislation, finance, inspections, teacher training, and curriculum. The monitoring mechanism of the Government at that time focused mainly on two aspects: (1) inspection by Government officials and (2) provision of a curriculum guide (Chan & Chan, 2003). The limited scope of support and rather lax regulatory framework reflect “a minimal-interventionist approach to the management of the preschool education” (Ho, 2007).

It was not until the handover of sovereignty from Britain to China in 1997 that a turning point came for early childhood policy in Hong Kong. In the inaugural speech of the Chief Executive Mr. C. H. Tung, the importance of early childhood education was highlighted, and commitments to enhance quality education were made. In response to rapid change and new challenges of the twenty-first century, the chief executive, in his 1997 Policy Address, requested the Education Commission to begin a thorough review of the Hong Kong education system. The reform proposals put forward by the Education Commission in 2000 "have been influenced by international developments and the need to prepare students for life-long learning in a knowledge-based economy" (Rao et al., 2003, p. 333). For the first time, ECE was acknowledged as the foundation of lifelong learning (Education Commission, 2000), signaling that the Government was moving from its laissez-faire approach toward an interventionist approach in early childhood policy (Pearson & Rao, 2006). The proactive role adopted by the Government in promoting quality ECE has resulted in remarkable progress in its development in Hong Kong. We will discuss the progress of early childhood in Hong Kong from the following aspects:

1. dual-policy approach to harmonization of pre-primary services,
2. involvement of the Government in monitoring services,
3. integration of curriculum guides for all pre-primary services,
4. enhancement of professional qualifications of pre-primary teachers,
5. mode of subsidizing pre-primary services,
6. enhancement of interface between early childhood and primary sectors,
7. the establishment of the Quality Education Fund (QEF), and
8. the move toward a 15-year free education.

From Dual-Policy Approach to Harmonization of Pre-primary Services

As noted earlier, preschool services come under the jurisdiction of two Government departments. Kindergartens were assumed to provide academic preparation for primary education, whereas child-care centers were set up as a welfare service for poor children, offering custodial services for children of working parents. However, the role of child-care centers has gradually changed since the 1990s (The Reconstituted Working Party on Kindergarten Education, 1995). In the 1990s, about 10 % of children aged from 3 to 5 were enrolled in child-care centers, but as many as 85 % of children in the same age group were enrolled in kindergartens in 1994.

The dual-policy approach of allowing two streams of organizations providing early childhood services possibly resulted in disparities in service delivery and confusion for operators and parents (Ho, 2006). The Education Commission Report No. 2 (Education Commission, 1986) recommended unification of pre-primary services. In 2000, a working party on harmonization of pre-primary services was formed by the Government. The harmonization section was responsible for making legislative

amendments, arranging fund transfer and financial assistance schemes, setting up a joint office, registering child-care centers as kindergarten-cum-child-care centers (KG-cum-CCCs), mutually recognizing the qualifications of child-care workers and kindergarten teachers, compiling operation manuals for pre-primary institutes, and setting up quality assurance mechanisms (Education Bureau, 2015b). As a result, kindergartens cater to children between 3 and 6, whereas kindergartens operating with an attached kindergarten-cum-child-care center (KG-cum-CCC) can provide additional care services for children below the age of 3. The implementation of harmonization measures took effect from the 2005/2006 school year. Approximately 400 child-care centers were converted to KG-cum-CCCs (Education Bureau, 2015c).

Formal Involvement of Government in Monitoring Services

There is no independent accreditation body tasked with monitoring standards of pre-primary services in Hong Kong. As Rao and Koong (2000) noted, basic standards were monitored through initial registration of pre-primary institutes, such as submitting documents to ensure safety of the premises, plans of the premises, proposed student enrollment and fees, staff employment terms, school calendar, and schedule of learning activities. The district educational officer was required to pay two annual inspection visits to kindergartens to ensure that they met standards put forward in the *Education Ordinance and Regulations of 1971*, which outlined the Government's intention to monitor education from the preschool to secondary school level. However, Opper (1992) commented that "kindergartens came under this legislation more by default than by intention" (p. 13) as the recommendations, in general, pertained more to primary and secondary schools. For example, the recommended teacher-to-child ratio of 1:45 is considered inappropriate for children in the early years (Opper, 1992).

Child-care centers were governed by *the Child Care Centre Ordinance and Regulations* (1975), which provided for registration, control, and inspection of child-care centers. In line with the Ordinance, children with special needs were integrated into regular child-care centers, and training was provided to upgrade qualifications of child-care workers. The Ordinance was amended and renamed the *Child Care Service Ordinance* in 1997. Inspectors from the Child Care Cent Advisory Inspectorate also visited child-care centers two to three times a year, to ensure continuing compliance with measures recorded in the *Child Care Centre Service Ordinance.*

No published official inspection reports were found during this period. The quality assurance mechanism at that time was considered insufficient to guarantee minimum standards of quality, and the level of teachers' academic and professional qualifications was unsatisfactory (Opper, 1992). In 1997, a quality assurance framework was put forward by the Education Bureau. The framework aims to enhance effectiveness of education through self-evaluation and external school review. Quality assurance

inspection has been compulsory for all pre-primary institutes since 2002, and the release of reports allows the public to make informed choices and decisions regarding the quality of pre-primary institutes. In addition, the quality review framework (QR framework) was introduced in schools that participated in the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) (Education Bureau, 2015d) which was initiated in 2007 and elucidated later in this chapter.

The framework is built on performance indicators[1] (PIs) published by the Education Bureau in 2000. Specifically, the QR framework includes self-evaluation processes of participating preschools and on-site review visits by Government officials. More than 90 % of preschool staff attended training programs on self-evaluation and the use of PIs, organized by the Government. The Government also allows public access to on-site inspection reports on the Government's website.

The implementation of quality assurance inspection denotes a paradigm shift in the role of the Government (Ho, 2007) and is considered as a facilitative and productive process for school self-evaluation and quality improvement (Wong & Li, 2010). Since then, the Government's involvement in service delivery has been greatly expanded and formalized.

Integration of Curriculum Guidelines for All Pre-primary Services

Before 1996, there were separate guidelines for planning of daily practices for kindergartens and child-care centers. Publication of the *Guide to the Kindergarten Curriculum* (Hong Kong Government, 1984) provided guidelines for kindergartens on general curriculum aims, teaching principles, program planning, organization and content, recommendations for schedule and organization of space, basic furniture, and teaching resources. The *Code of Practice of the Child Care Centre Advisory Inspectorate* (Hong Kong Government, 1982) and the *Activity Guidelines for Day Nurseries* (Hong Kong Government, 1990) guided the practice of child-care centers, with recommendations on indoor and outdoor play, physical activity, creative arts, music and movement, and social experiences. Rao (2002) noted that a child-friendly approach toward teaching and learning was recommended by these documents. Children are encouraged to learn through play, while a more academic-oriented program was only recommended for older children.

The curriculum guidelines, however, were not mandatory, and it was left to pre-primary institutes to decide how to implement the ideas and recommendations

[1] *Performance indicators for pre-primary schools*, published from 2001 to 2003 (Education Bureau, 2015d), were considered "a tangible and effective tool for pre-primary institutes' self-evaluation and external review" (Education Department, 2006, p. 7). The performance indicators included four domains, namely, (1) management and organization, (2) learning and teaching, (3) support to children and school culture, and (4) domain on children's development.

stated in the *Guide*. As a result, it was found that in some pre-primary institutes, among other things, class sizes were large but classrooms were small. Teachers often adopted traditional modes of teaching, such as stressing rote learning, conformity, and uniformity with limited adult-child interactions (Opper, 1992).

The first guide for pre-primary services, *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* (Education Department, 1996), was published in 1996. It is not until then that the recommended curriculum for children of similar age groups was relatively unified (Rao & Koong, 2000). The Guide recognizes "education" and "care" as inseparable and provides educationally sound, and developmentally appropriate, curriculum content for children attending both kindergartens and child-care centers (Chan & Chan, 2003). It also advocates a child-centered approach toward teaching and learning and "…espouses contemporary views on effective early teaching and learning, and provides suggestions for facilitating intellectual, communicative, personal, physical and aesthetic development…" (Li & Rao, 2005, p. 238).

In response to the impact of trends in global development of education, and curriculum reforms on the Hong Kong education system, the revised *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* (Education Department, 2006) was published. This *Guide* covers different important aspects, including the curriculum framework, curriculum planning, learning and teaching, assessment, transition to primary school, and home-school cooperation. It also includes a series of references for teachers, such as developmental characteristics of children from birth to 6 years old, brief descriptions and examples of basic skills applicable to pre-primary education, and proposed core and supplementary values and attitudes for incorporation into school curricula. The Guide recommends that curriculum should be comprehensive and well balanced to cater to children's holistic development while advocating adoption of a child-centered approach and play-based strategy in curriculum design (Education Department, 2006). It recommends that objectives of children's development can be achieved through six learning areas, namely, (1) physical fitness and health, (2) language, (3) early mathematics, (4) science and technology, (5) self and society, and (6) arts. The *Guide* emphasizes traditional objectives of early academic experience, such as the provision of reading, writing, and arithmetic. At the same time, new elements are included in the *Guide* to reflect contemporary development in early childhood. Specifically, the application of technology and the teaching of both mother tongues (Cantonese and Putonghua) and second language (English) were incorporated in the *Guide* for the first time. As we discuss later in this chapter, there are still practical challenges in the adoption of information and communications technology (ICT) and trilingual teaching in early childhood education. At the time of writing this chapter, the current version of *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* is being revised.

Enhancement of Professional Qualifications of Preschool Teachers

Untrained teachers were allowed to join the early childhood workforce in the past. Persons with 11 years of basic education could register as permitted teachers in kindergartens or as trainee workers in child-care centers (Ho, 2006). There were different paths of training for kindergarten teachers and child-care workers, which made the qualifications of the workforce complicated at that time. Kindergarten teachers were usually trained by the former Colleges of Education (The Hong Kong Institute of Education), and child-care workers were trained by the former Hong Kong Polytechnic (Hong Kong Polytechnic University) and former Lee Wai Lee Technical Institute (IVE-Lee Wai Lee) (Hong Kong Government, 1981b). These courses were not mutually recognized by concerned Government departments, with the exception of a certificate course in pre-primary education (distance learning mode) organized by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (The Reconstituted Working Party on Kindergarten Education, 1995).

In the past, both preservice and in-service training were offered to child-care workers. For example, there was a 2-year preservice course at the Lee Wai Lee Technical Institute for secondary 3 school-leavers (Hong Kong Government, 1981b). A 1-year preservice certificate course was available at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University for secondary 5 school-leavers, but was phased out in 1986 after being provided for the preceding 10 years. This was followed by the 2-year in-service higher certificate course and, later, the 3-year higher diploma course, before the closure in 2007 of all early childhood training programs at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Rao and Koong (2000), Rao et al. (2003) and Li (2004) have summarized the development of kindergarten staffing in Hong Kong. Initial training was offered to in-service kindergarten teachers in 1981. The 16-week qualified assistant kindergarten teacher (QAKT) education course was tailored for teachers who did not have two passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE)[2]. The qualified kindergarten teacher (QKT) education course was made for teachers with two passes in the HKCEE. Later, a conversion course (QKT conversion course) was introduced for QAKT teachers to obtain qualified kindergarten teacher (QKT) status. It was not until 1995 and 1998 that certificate courses were introduced for in-service teachers (CE-KG) and preservice (CE-ECE) students, respectively, in the Hong Kong Institute of Education. Teachers with the qualified kindergarten teacher status could thus update their qualifications to the certificate level.

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[2] The Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) is normally taken by a student at the end of his/her 5-year secondary education. With the commencement of the New Senior Secondary Curriculum at Secondary 4 in the 2009/ 2010 school year, the last cohort of school candidates took the 2010 Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority offered the last round of the HKCEE in 2011. Standards of performance in the HKCEE have for many years been benchmarked against standards in comparable subjects at British GCE O Level (Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2015).

Trained teachers commanded higher salaries, and some profit-making kindergartens did not want to pay higher wages for kindergarten teachers. This resulted in a decrease in the proportion of trained staff in the profession (Wong & Rao, 2004). In 1981, 84 % of teaching staff in kindergarten were untrained (Hong Kong Government, 1981b). To address this problem, measures recommending enhancement of professional development were highlighted in many government documents, including**:**

- The Government White Paper on Primary Education and Pre-primary Services (Hong Kong Government, 1981b)
- A report by a visiting panel of education experts (Visiting Panel commissioned by the Hong Kong Government, 1982)
- The Education Commission Report No. 2 (Education Commission, 1986)
- The Education Commission Report No. 5 (Education Commission, 1992)

Furthermore, the Education Commission Report No. 7 (Education Commission, 1998) reaffirmed that qualified teachers and effective school management are important prerequisites for providing high-quality education.

One important strategy to improve qualification of preschool teachers in Hong Kong was to harmonize training for kindergarten teachers and child-care workers. The Working Party on Kindergarten Education recommended harmonizing the two types of training by drawing up a common framework for training institutes to develop training courses and to seek recognition from both the erstwhile Education and Manpower Bureau and from the Social Welfare Department, the two government departments which regulated early childhood services (The Reconstituted Working Party on Kindergarten Education, 1995). In 2005, a mutual recognition of serving child-care workers (CCWs) and qualified kindergarten teachers (QKTs) was completed. The Government has issued a series of regulations on professional development in early childhood education (Education Bureau, 2015e). For example, it has been regulated that the minimum academic entry qualification for a preschool teacher, at present, is five passes (including both Chinese and English) in the HKCEE. Since September 2003, all newly appointed preschool teachers have been required to possess a qualified kindergarten teacher (QKT) qualification or its equivalent. In addition, all serving preschool principals were required to possess a certificate in kindergarten education, or its equivalent, by the end of the 2005/2006 school year. By the 2004/2005 school year, all teachers employed in pre-primary schools were required to be qualified. Statistics showed that by the end of the 2009/2010 school year, 95.7 % of pre-primary teachers in Hong Kong were trained, with 95.5 % having QKT or equivalent training or above (Education Bureau, 2015e). Figure 10.1 shows the percentages of trained teachers in local and nonlocal Hong Kong preschools from 1997 to 2009. Figure 10.2 shows the changes in the professional qualifications of preschool teachers from 2007 to 2015. The proportion of untrained teachers has declined, while the proportion of teachers with certificates and degrees has increased.

The implementation of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) in the 2007/2008 school year offered fresh impetus for professional development of pre-school teachers in Hong Kong. New requirements were set for teachers in the 5 years following the implementation of the PEVS**:** all serving teachers had to obtain the certificate in early childhood education qualification by the end of the 2011/2012 school year, and from the 2009/2010 school year, new principals had to obtain a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or its equivalent (Education Bureau, 2015e).

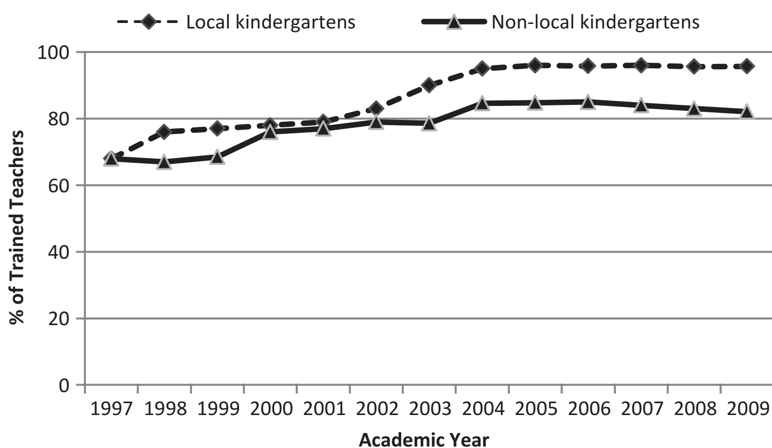

Fig. 10.1 Trained teachers in Hong Kong local and nonlocal preschools (1997–2009)[3]

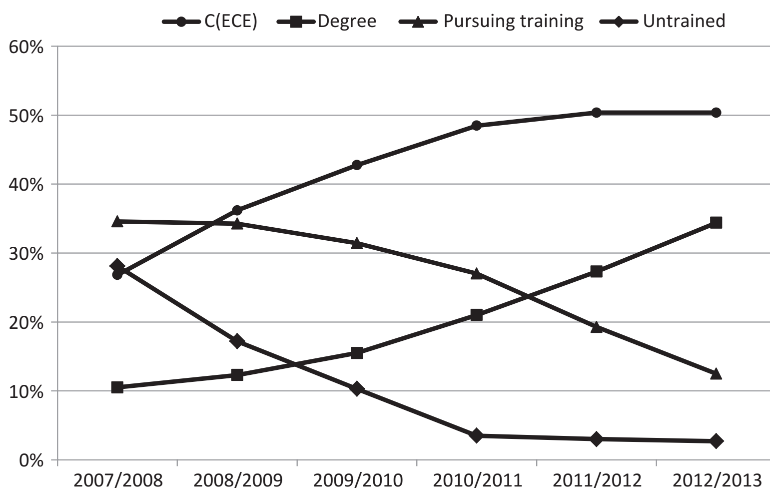

Fig. 10.2 Changes in qualifications of teachers in local preschools

[3] Figures from 2005 onward include teachers in kindergarten-cum-child-care centers upon harmonization of pre-primary services on 1 September 2005. They are not strictly comparable to figures for earlier years.

The Mode of Subsidizing Pre-primary Services

The White Paper[4] on Education Policy in 1965, and the White Paper on Primary Education and Pre-primary Services in 1981, included reform proposals for pre-primary education. The White Paper in 1965 reflected the Government's intention to implement changes in education under resource constraints. While stating that universal primary education was the primary aim, the Paper also clearly stated that pre-primary education and services provision relied on voluntary organizations and private enterprise, with the Government assisting by way of providing advisory services and facilities for in-service teacher training (Hong Kong Government, 1965). The 1981 White Paper, entitled "Primary Education and Pre-primary Services," reaffirmed the Government's intention to encourage voluntary agencies to provide pre-primary services for children (Hong Kong Government, 1981b). As a consequence, ECE continued to be excluded from the subsidized education system in Hong Kong.

Although free pre-primary education is not provided, the Hong Kong Government has introduced important measures to remove economic barriers for children under 6 in accessing early childhood education. All children aged under 6, studying in kindergartens or child-care centers in Hong Kong, irrespective of their nationalities and subject to eligibility, can apply for fee assistance under the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme (Education Bureau, 2015e). The fee remission scheme for needy parents ensures that no children are deprived of preschool education because of financial reasons.

The Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) introduced by the Government in 2007 has been an important step to facilitate teacher professionalism: schools can receive HKD 13000 per child, and HKD 3000 is to be used for teacher professional development (Rao, 2010). Direct fee subsidy toward pre-primary school fees is provided for parents whose children are enrolled in nonprofit-making kindergartens.[5] Transitional measures are arranged to make sure that students receiving other kinds of subsidies should not be worse off after the introduction of the scheme. The PEVS is considered a milestone in early childhood education in Hong Kong. It not only helps to reduce parents' financial burden but also supports teachers' professional development and improves preschool quality (Yuen, 2007).

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[4] White papers are the official documents proposing reforms in Hong Kong.

[5] At present, all pre-primary institutes are privately run and are categorized as nonprofit-making kindergartens and private independent kindergartens. In 2010, there were approximately 85 % and 15 % children enrolled in nonprofit-making kindergartens and private independent kindergartens, respectively. All kindergartens are registered under the Education Ordinance, and the Operation Manual for Pre-primary Institutions (2006) provides prospective school operators with necessary information regarding statutory requirements and recommendations for operation of kindergartens (Education Bureau, 2015d).

There are three unique characteristics of the PEVS**:** it discriminates against private independent kindergartens, promotes teachers' professional development, and limits parents' choice to only nonprofit schools (Li, Wong, & Wang, 2008). Li, Wong, and Wang (2010) further argue that the PEVS promotes affordability, accessibility, and accountability of early childhood education in Hong Kong.

The 2006–2007 Policy Address of the chief executive (Education Bureau, 2015e) announced major financial commitments to providing children with affordable, quality pre-primary education. Apart from implementing the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) from the 2007/2008 school year, there was a one-off school development grant to all kindergartens in 2007 to enrich their teaching and learning resources. There was also a one-off facilitation grant for eligible private independent kindergartens to help them meet the necessary and legal and accounting/auditing costs incurred in the conversion to nonprofit-making status, by 2007, in order to join the PEVS.

Enhancing the Interface Between Early Childhood and Primary Sectors

Due to limited primary school places offered in the 1950s, children had to pass a qualifying examination in order to gain admission to primary 1. Therefore, traditional teaching methods of rote learning became the norm in most Hong Kong pre-primary schools. Programs tended to concentrate on academic skills in Chinese, Arithmetic, and English, in order to prepare children for the demands and expectations of primary schools (Hong Kong Government, 1982). In response to this problem, the Government published a list of do's and don'ts in 1999 for pre-primary institutes, which reflected "concerns about inappropriate curriculum content and methods for young children" (Li & Rao, 2005, p.249). In addition, formal primary 1 admission examinations were also later abolished, with the education reform proposal (Education Commission, 2000).

According to the Government (Education Bureau, 2015e), all children in Hong Kong who have reached the age of 5 years and 8 months, or older, are eligible to participate in the primary 1 admission system. The purpose of the system is to minimize the pressure imposed on young children as a result of intense competition for primary 1 places and the adverse effect this has on education at the preschool level. All children joining the system are offered admission to primary 1 in either Government or aided primary schools. The *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* (Education Department, 2006) "articulates with primary, secondary and tertiary education, to form an entire spectrum of education" (Education Department, 2006, p.6). As a result of reforms in primary schools, it is assumed that pre-primary institutes "now have greater room to design their own curriculum, and to free children from unnecessary pressure. In addition, recommendations have been made for pre-primary institutes to build closer communication and co-ordination with

primary schools, which may help children adapt to primary school life" (Education Department, 2006, p. 7).

Establishment of the Quality Education Fund

The Hong Kong Government established a HK$5 billion Quality Education Fund (QEF) in 1998 to fund school projects that disseminate good practices. The measure further illustrates the Government's commitment to enhancing preschool quality. Pre-primary institutes and tertiary institutes which are successful in applying to the QEF produce quality projects or studies that promote high-quality education in Hong Kong (Rao & Li, 2009). By 2008, a total of HK$84.6 million had been granted to the pre-primary sector, to support 622 kindergarten-based educational projects through the QEF (Quality Education Fund, 2008), and this has proved over time to be another positive move in supporting the implementation and development of quality early childhood education in Hong Kong.

Challenges for the Development of Hong Kong Early Childhood Education

The implementation of Government policy at the school level and cultural influences on preschool quality pose multiple challenges for development of early childhood education in Hong Kong. We shall examine the challenges in the following aspects**:** (i) harmonizing the balance between policy provision and implementation, (ii) developing culturally relevant practices, and (iii) addressing contemporary issues in early childhood.

Balancing Policy Provision and Implementation

The Government has put great effort into pursuing quality preschool education. However, there is no promise of a good fit between policy provision and implementation. As Ho (2007) noted, the implementation of policy might be "mediated, filtered or even distorted with realities at school level". Balancing recommendations from the curriculum guide and market forces and enhancing professionalism of the preschool workforce continue to be challenges in Hong Kong.

Balancing Recommendations from the Guide and from Market Forces

Although the Government has expended much effort in enhancing the quality of early childhood education in Hong Kong, the implementation of the pre-primary Guide is only mandatory in preschools wherein the Pre-primary Educational Voucher Scheme can be encashed. If a kindergarten wants to participate in the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS), it has to be a nonprofit kindergarten, offer the local curriculum, as specified in the Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum, and charge tuition fees not exceeding the fee stipulated by the Government (Education Bureau, 2015d).

On the other hand, as all preschools in Hong Kong are privately owned and are not included in the formal 12-year compulsory educational system, they are susceptible to market forces (Chan & Chan, 2003; Ho, 2008). Parents, as consumers, play a critical role in shaping pre-primary education in practice (Ho, 2009). As a result, there might be a push and pull between Government monitoring mechanisms and the market-driven ecology in pre-primary education**:** the market force may be more influential than the Guide in affecting operations and teaching approaches and content in pre-primary settings. This interaction is therefore an important challenge for the development of ECE in Hong Kong.

The Government has recommended a child-oriented approach to early childhood teaching and learning in the *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* (Education Department, 1996, 2006). However, there is still pressure on pre-primary institutes to adopt academically driven curricula (Chan & Chan, 2003). Although there are reforms at the primary level, as Chan and Chan (2003) noted, primary school teachers still expect children to have basic mathematics and language competence, and this forces pre-primary schools to adopt academically oriented modes of learning. Some pre-primary schools have assumed that implementing the primary 1 syllabus during the last year of schooling in pre-primary schools is the best way to prepare children for primary school. These practices are obviously contrary to the Government's recommendations.

Market-driven enterprise, the pre-primary curriculum, and teaching approaches, in practice, are unduly influenced by what principals and teachers assume are needs and wants of parents. Hong Kong Chinese parents are found to attach more importance to both academic achievement and filial piety than their English counterparts (Pearson & Rao, 2006). Preschools, therefore, often unavoidably include academic learning as an important component in their curriculum, to meet parents' expectations and to continue to attract potential admissions. At the same time, rapid decrease in the birth rate, after 1997, has turned the sector into an oversupplied market, resulting in keen competition among the preschools in Hong Kong. In such a scenario, meeting parents' expectations becomes important for the continual survival or success of a preschool. As a result, there are inconsistencies between policy recommendation and practice in curriculum implementation in preschools in Hong Kong. For example, Li and Rao (2005) found that Hong Kong teachers used a drill-and-practice approach for inculcating early literacy, although there were attempts to follow guidelines by using an interactive teaching method. Pearson and Rao (2006)

also found that primary pedagogical objectives at the pre-primary level were to ensure that children achieve formal literacy and numeracy skills through direct instruction. These suggest that finding a balance between Government recommendations and market forces is an integrated and complex issue.

Enhancing Teacher Professionalism to Implement the Guide

The development and implementation of an appropriate curriculum for children have significant dependence on competence of frontline practitioners. The Guide states clearly that it provides "general directions for curriculum development," and "[pre-] primary institutes need to formulate their own curriculum based on this Curriculum Guide, and transform it into appropriate learning experiences for children" (Education Department, 2006, p. 10). However, preschool education in Hong Kong has been historically viewed as a form of custodial care and/or as preparation for primary education (Opper, 1992). These perceptions are considered to influence both the public and preschool teachers and are a roadblock to professionalism of preschool education (Ho, 2006). There is a comparatively short history of professional training for preschool teachers in Hong Kong. This low level of teacher professionalism has therefore been seen as a barrier in the achievement of quality early childhood education in Hong Kong (Chan & Chan, 2003; Ho, 2007) and in the implementation of the Guide.

There are studies examining Hong Kong preschool teachers' educational beliefs and classroom practices. Cheng (2001) found that Hong Kong pre-primary teachers found it immensely difficult to understand the concept of "learning through play," and a gap exists between practitioners' espoused theories and actual classroom practices. It was echoed by Li (2003, 2004). Li (2003) found that, under the influence of Western ideas, preschool teachers acknowledged the ideas of learning through play and the importance of hands-on experience while catering to individual differences, but could not put them into practice. Teachers believed that preparation of lessons was crucial to effective teaching and learning, but they were inclined to focus on their own actions, rather than on children's. As a result, lessons were highly structured and were conducted in a teacher-directed mode. Li (2004) also revealed that teachers tended to adopt pre-selected activities and emphasized children's learning outcomes, rather than the learning process. In addition, many preschools were found to use learning packages provided by local publishers to design classroom activities (Li, 2006a), and they admitted that they were not qualified enough to develop their own school-based curriculum without expert guidance and other inputs (Li, 2006a).

These studies support the statement that there is still a long way to go for professionalism of early childhood education in Hong Kong (Ho, 2006). In this context, provision of more effective, comprehensive, and accessible preservice, and in-service, training for frontline practitioners may help overcome the challenge posed by low professionalism in implementing the Guide successfully.

Developing Culturally Relevant Practices

Quality early childhood education contains distinct features within specific cultural backgrounds (Rao, 2010), and the use of culturally relevant frameworks to assess quality (Woodhead, 1999) is encouraged. Hong Kong has a distinctive blend of East and West. Western political, economic, and education ideas and systems were introduced under British rule. With over 95 % of its residents being Chinese, Hong Kong has a Confucian cultural heritage, but the remaining 5 % are a highly visible group. This cultural integration is also reflected in ECE, and it is therefore important to look into the development of culturally relevant practices in Hong Kong.

Translating Western Early Childhood Teaching Approaches into a Chinese Society

How does one successfully and effectively adopt Western ideas in educational practices in a Chinese context? This may be one of the most important questions for ECE in Hong Kong. Given its distinct geographical location and economic situation, Hong Kong has long been exposed to Western educational ideas and to interaction with educational professionals from around the world. Western teaching approaches such as the project approach, the Reggio Emilia approach, and the high scope program of learning have been borrowed and "transplanted" into Hong Kong preschools. As discussed previously, since the launch of education reform in 2000, policy-makers have been seeking to incorporate the best Western pedagogies into accepted practices in Hong Kong (Wong & Li, 2010). "Learning through play" is also recommended as the model of learning and teaching for young children (Cheng, 2001). At the same time, the influences of traditional Chinese values, which emphasize drill and practice in early learning, are still prominent (Ng & Rao, 2008). Many parents place high expectation on children's academic learning in preschools and consider pre-primary education as merely a preparation for primary school (Rao, 2010).

Against this background, the translation of Western ideas into ECE in Hong Kong is a process requiring comprehensive understanding of both facets. As Li (2004) pointed out, to teach effectively in the midst of Western influences in Hong Kong, teachers should be able to simultaneously cope with three sets of potentially conflicting expectations and orientations**:** their proclaimed vision of early childhood education, Chinese culture, and local constraints. Researchers have examined how Hong Kong classrooms adopt Western ideas. For example, Lee and Tsang (2005) documented how the Reggio Emilia experience was adapted in Hong Kong to fit local needs of the community and children. They suggested that there should be specific staffing and resource support for kindergartens to adopt Reggio Emilia projects successfully in Hong Kong. However, Cheng (2006) found that the adoption of Western approaches (such as high scope and project approach) in pre-primary schools in Hong Kong did not translate into permanent and effective teaching and

learning for children. Teachers' professional skills played a significant role in this process, and this was echoed by Ng and Rao (2008) when they examined mathematics teaching in early years in Hong Kong and found a fusion of traditional Chinese and modern views on early learning. They made the observation that culturally defined beliefs of teachers with respect to teaching and learning may be especially important in shaping classroom practices and that culture may be one of the incontestable factors influencing early childhood learning (Ng & Rao, 2010). This again suggests the important role of teachers in implementing and sustaining reforms (Pearson & Rao, 2006) and in reflecting on current practices, before hurriedly and carelessly adopting a trend (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). Contextual factors are important when considering quality of teaching and learning. It is necessary to develop a culturally appropriate pedagogy (Nguyen, Terlouw & Pilot, 2006) which can effectively import and selectively apply some Western ideas in a Chinese society.

Developing Appropriate Practices in Multicultural Classrooms

As noted earlier, although about 95 % of people in Hong Kong are of Chinese descent, the remaining 5 % of the population, composed of nonethnic Chinese, is a highly visible group (Census and Statistics Department, 2006). South Asian populations of Indians, Pakistanis, and Nepalese, and some Vietnamese refugees, have become permanent residents of Hong Kong. There are also Europeans, Americans, Canadians, Japanese, and Koreans, working in important sectors, including commerce, finance, and education in Hong Kong. In addition, the census shows that among the total population growth from 1997 to 2001, about 93 % of new arrivals came from mainland China, under the one-way permit scheme (Hong Kong Government, 2003). It is inevitable for non-Chinese Hong Kong residents, and newly arrived mainland Chinese, to enroll their children in pre-primary institutes in Hong Kong, creating multicultural pre-primary classrooms with children from diverse backgrounds. Pre-primary educators are therefore being challenged to develop appropriate practices for children with diverse cultural backgrounds and to establish an identity in the globalized world.

Addressing Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood

The Government has made efforts to initiate changes in response to contemporary developments in early childhood education, as stated in the most recent *Pre-primary Curriculum Guide* in 2006. We consider how the new elements introduced in the Guide, such as the integration of information and communications technology (ICT) and the teaching of languages, are addressing contemporary developments in early childhood education.

Integrating Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in Classrooms

The world has changed as a result of rapid technological advancements in recent decades. Computers have been made available in many early childhood classrooms. However, no guidelines for integrating computers into classroom activities have been made available. Moreover, there were limited resources allocated to help children extend ICT learning in Hong Kong, such as printers, scanners, digital videos, or cameras (Han, 1997). Han (1997) found that most of the computer software adopted in the classrooms belonged to the drill-and-practice type. No suggestions were given on selecting appropriate software and websites for children in the *Guide*, which might have been a major concern in application of technology in classrooms (Saracho & Spodek, 2003).

In late 1998, a 5-year plan to integrate ICT into school curricula was launched in Hong Kong. Parents enthusiastically welcomed integration of ICT into early childhood education (Leung, 2003). In response, the learning area of "experience in nature science" was replaced by "science and technology" in the revised *Pre-primary Curriculum Guide* (Education Department, 2006), and for the first time, technology was included officially in the guide to all pre-primary institutes. Nevertheless, the recommendations are rather short, with the Education Department noting that "[t]ime spent on using technological products (e.g., computers) as teaching aids should not be too long, so as not to hinder overall teaching arrangements. Over-dependence on technology will deprive children of opportunities to learn from reality" (Education Department, 2006, p. 33). Considering the possible changes related to school practices (Fullan, 1992) and leadership (Yee, 1999), the challenges in integrating ICT into early childhood curriculum may not simply be a case of technology adoption but, rather, a process of innovation, requiring both financial and training support for schools (Yuen, Law & Wong, 2003) while taking into account social and cultural factors (Siu & Lam, 2005). As suggested by Clements and Swaminathan (1995), effective integration of ICT into curriculum requires leadership, training, commitment, and, even possibly, a change of beliefs. A recent study (Li, 2006b) revealed that related problems exist in Hong Kong. Based on principal surveys and interviews, Li found that key issues in integration of ICT into teaching in Hong Kong included low level of ICT competence of teachers and parents, inadequate hardware and software, and lack of technical support. It is apparent that the integration of ICT in pre-primary classrooms needs further attention.

Teaching of Cantonese, Putonghua, and English at the Pre-primary Level

After the handover of sovereignty, the Hong Kong Government adopted the "bi-literate and trilingual" policy to enable Hong Kong residents to become bi-literate in written Chinese and English and trilingual in spoken Cantonese, Putonghua, and English. Chinese and English are the city's official languages, and Cantonese is spoken by over 90 % of the population. Furthermore, the teaching of Putonghua,

and the adoption of Putonghua as a medium of instruction, has gradually become popular in Hong Kong schools. Many Chinese children in Hong Kong are exposed to at least two languages (Cantonese and English) from their early years. Upon entering preschools, children also begin to read and write complex Chinese characters and also begin to have opportunities to learn the English alphabet and some English songs and phrases (Li & Rao, 2000). It was noted that almost all preschools in Hong Kong teach some English, as knowledge of English is valued by parents (Li & Rao, 2005; Wong & Rao, 2004). The majority of children are exposed to Putonghua once they enter preschools, since over 80 % of Hong Kong preschools provide regular exposure to Putonghua, although the amount of input varies considerably (Chan, Lee, & Yip, 2010).

Against this background, the *Guide to Pre-primary Curriculum* published in 2006 specified the learning objectives and principles for teaching Cantonese and Putonghua and formally acknowledged English as a second language for the first time. The Guide "[takes] into account the local context of language learning", that "spoken language normally refers to the mother-tongue and Putonghua" and that "the learning objectives and principles of teaching with respect to listening, speaking, reading and writing are applicable to both mother-tongue and Putonghua learning" (Education Department, 2006, p. 26). The *Guide* also denotes that developing proficiency in the mother tongue is of primary importance, but "more opportunities for learning other languages can enrich children's language experience, and provide exposure and understanding of other cultures associated with the languages learnt" (Education Department, 2006, p. 29). It is suggested that the basic principles of mother-tongue teaching apply to English as a second language acquisition (Education Department, 2006, p.30).

Teaching three languages at the pre-primary level is unique in comparison to the rest of the world and requires substantial knowledge and experience not only of the linguistic phenomena itself but also of language learning. Researchers in Hong Kong have conducted numerous studies on language learning and teaching at the pre-primary level (e.g., McBride-Chang & Treiman, 2003; Tse, Chan & Li, 2005; Wang, Cheng & Chen, 2006; Yip & Matthews, 2010), providing important support to preschools to help them fulfill challenging trilingual teaching practices.

Looking to the Future: Opportunities for Further Development

Challenges and opportunities are always inseparable. We shall examine the opportunities of Hong Kong, in light of its unique geographical and contextual characteristics and the global attention to early childhood education.

Over a decade ago, Rao and Koong (2000) pointed out that the problems facing early childhood education include exclusion from the main education system, inadequate subsidies to preschools, slow progress in teacher training, high adult-child

ratios, lack of attention to transition from preschool to primary school, and lack of policy-relevant empirical research. Although early childhood education is still excluded from the subsidized education system in Hong Kong, it is clear that the Government has taken a very active role in enhancing the quality of early childhood education. Rao and Li (2009) have pointed out that the Government's commitment to enhance quality has shown positive results in the development of early childhood education in Hong Kong. They have highlighted three important aspects which contribute significantly to the improvement in the quality of early childhood education in Hong Kong. First, voices are heard by the Government through the introduction of public consultation in the policy-making process. Second, key individuals and senior government policy-makers who are committed to providing quality early childhood services in Hong Kong have exerted positive influence on the Hong Kong pre-primary sector. Third, the Government has been amending relevant laws based on research and public opinion, and this bodes well for the feasibility and scientific nature of policy.

Against the background of global attention to ECE, Hong Kong has the advantage of accessing latest advances in this field and an enhanced public acknowledgement of early childhood education. The continual upgradation of professional qualifications of preschool teachers has had positive effects on development of early childhood education by enhancing teachers' competence to learn, to implement new ideas, and to reflect on their own practices in establishing a unique identity for their pedagogy, integrating Western and Eastern ideas in Hong Kong. Evidence has shown that teachers have already made efforts to implement ideas proposed in the *Guide* by using interactive teaching methods in literacy teaching (Li & Rao, 2005). On the pedagogical side, preschools in Hong Kong are currently "evolving from teacher-didactic, examination-oriented institutes, into student-oriented, democratic learning centers" (Pearson & Rao, 2006). As Li (2004) noted, the current practice in Hong Kong was not only a matter of "culturally appropriate practice" but a case of professional development of teachers based on local context. Instead of transplanting Western ideas into an ethnically Chinese society, we can now look forward to translating appropriate ideologies to cater to different needs in the local context.

In May 2015, the Government released, for public consultation, the Report of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education (Education Bureau, 2015f). The report has made sensible recommendations in terms of the vision, mission, and objectives of kindergarten education, the scope of kindergarten education, enhancement of the quality of kindergarten education and kindergarten teachers, and funding and catering for diversity. At the time of writing this chapter, these recommendations had not yet been formalized into policy.

The story of ECE in Hong Kong has been compared to the story of Cinderella (Rao, 2013, Wong & Rao, 2015). In response to the *Education Commission Report No. 5* (Education Commission, 1992), Opper wrote that kindergarten education continues, as in the past, to be the Cinderella of the education system. As her two elder sisters, primary and secondary, prepare themselves for the ball organized by the Education Commission, she remains in the kitchen, neglected and despised, gleaning the meager droppings that fall from the Education Department's table

(Opper, 1993, p. 88). In 2002, Rao stated "there has been some improvement in the status of kindergarten education since 1983…Cinderella is now dressed and ready for the Ball, but she has still not met the Prince" (Rao, 2002, p.78). In 2009, Rao and Li (2009) stated that "early childhood education is entering a very positive era in the history of Hong Kong education, and enabling policies will ensure that all children have access to high quality early education and care. The government is now arranging for Cinderella to meet the Prince. Let us hope the wait is not too long…" (Rao & Li, 2009), and in 2013, Rao (2013) stated "Cinderella has now met the Prince (the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education)" – let us hope for a positive outcome.

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Chapter 11
Early Childhood Education in Macao: Recent Policies, Developments, and Trends

Keang-ieng Peggy Vong and Sou Kuan Vong

Introduction

This chapter illustrates recent developments and trends in early childhood education (ECE) in Macao. First, it portrays the educational landscape in Macao. Second, it reviews policies that have impacted on ECE. Third, challenges for the development of ECE are considered. It concludes with observations and recommendations for the future.

The Portuguese pronunciation of the "Ma Kok" Temple led to a small fishing port near the Pearl River estuary being called Macao. Over 400 years of Portuguese rule has imparted distinct European charisma and characteristics to this southern city of China. Today, with booming tourism and gaming industries, Macao's economy has also grown, with positive impact on development of education and with departure from the earlier noninterventionist attitude adopted by the Macao-Portuguese government, before the return of the territory to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1999.

Prior to 1999, early childhood services were governed and financed by two independent departments, the Social Welfare Bureau (known as Instituto de Acção Social) and the Education and Youth Affairs Bureau (known as Direcção dos Serviços de Educação e Juventude, also known as DSEJ). The former supervised nurseries[1] and the latter administered kindergartens,[2] as well as primary and secondary schools. The roles and responsibilities of the two bureaus differed in many ways, which has led to disparity in their services catered for young children 3 months to 5

[1] Institutions for children 3 months to 5 years old, with special authorization for children aged up to 7 years.

[2] Institutions for children around 3 years to 6 years old.

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years old. Requirements for staff qualification also vary, this being not conducive to overall early childhood services in Macao. The government's recent switch from using the term "pre-primary education" to "early childhood education" signifies change of policy, as well as change in coverage of services offered. Early childhood services in Macao today continue to be based on some policies from the colonial period, even though marked changes have been effected with change in sovereignty. This chapter focuses on how policies, teacher education, and curriculum and pedagogy for early childhood services have evolved since then.

Educational Landscape

Education in Macao has accumulated much change, and Vong and Wong (2010, p. 103) have pointed out that local education is small but fragmented, possibly due to the long-standing noninterventionist approach. Private schools outnumber public schools tremendously, and according to statistics of 2014–2015 academic year, there are 10 government schools, 54 private schools that have joined the free education system, and 10 private schools that do not belong to this system (Direcção dos Serviços de Educação e Juventude, 2016). Private schools are either managed by Christian or Buddhist groups or are patriotic schools run by traditional pro-China organizations.

The authority in charge of non-tertiary education is also the Education and Youth Bureau (Direcção dos Serviços de Educação e Juventude, 2016). The first *Education Law* was introduced as late as 1991, after which many supplementary regulations and decree-laws regarding education were promulgated. In 1994, an official curriculum framework for pre-primary, primary, and junior secondary was published, which could be interpreted as a gesture to minimize diversity. Macao only developed its own school curriculum in 1995. Its implementation was mandatory in government schools, with Chinese as the medium of instruction, but not compulsory for private schools. Just prior to the handover in 1999, the government took a more dynamic role in regulating private education, from advising on internal management of schools, schools' accounting system, and extracurricular activities to training for teachers, with the intent to establish a unified Macao education system to make the territory comparable with education systems in Hong Kong and the PRC (Bray & Kai, 2007). In the post-1999 period, the Macao government takes a strong lead to revise several laws, including the first Education Law promulgated in 1991 and the local curriculum framework in order to effect changes in the field of education. More recently, the DSEJ has launched the "Blue Sky Project" which aims at reallocating schools that are currently operating on certain floors of residential buildings, instead of their own sites (Macau Daily News, 2016). Among these government efforts, some are more appreciated than others by those private schools.

The "Annual Policy Address – Area of Social and Cultural Affairs" is a comprehensive document in which issues and foci of the year, specifically in the area of education, are addressed. For instance, in the area of non-tertiary formal education,

the Policy Addresses from year 2000 to 2016 have included the following major developments: implementation of universal free education, revision of the education system, consolidation of curriculum and teaching, development of IT education, promotion of lifelong education, enhancement of teacher professional development, reinforcement of moral and civic education, introduction of whole school assessment, and participation in the Program of International Student Assessment (PISA). The "Revision of Education Law - Education Law No. 9/2006," the "*Extension of Free Education to 15 Years*," and the "*Ten-Year Plan for Non-tertiary Education*" were significant milestones.

Since 1999, this active interventionist stance adopted by the government resulted in the provision of 15 years of free education (including 3 years of kindergarten, 6 years of primary, 3 years of junior secondary, and 3 years of senior secondary education), centralizing curriculum policy, and introducing career frameworks and development statutes for private school teachers. Considering the autonomy of private schools, this overall education reform recognized market realities, pedagogical development, and administrative measures, with extension of free education to kindergarten.

Early Childhood Development and Policies in Macao

Governing Bodies

The Division of Infancy and Youth of the Social Welfare Bureau is in charge of the early childhood care services for 3-month-old babies to 7-year-old children, with specific responsibility to regulate related organizations and to provide training for staff in these organizations (Governo de Macau, 1999). Meanwhile, the DSEJ governs the 3 years of kindergarten education. The DSEJ's latest and major development is the extension of 10 years' universal free education to 15 years. Prior to this, 10 years' universal free education covered only pre-primary education (the last year of kindergarten), 6 years of primary, and 3 years of junior secondary education. Coverage of the first 2 years of kindergarten education was a significant step in institutionalizing early childhood education, through the Division of Preschool and Primary Education under the DSEJ.

Evolution of Policies

On 13th April, 1987, the signing date of the Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration between Portugal and the People's Republic of China on the question of Macao is a point of demarcation in its contemporary history (Vong & Wong, 2010), with the then Portuguese government of Macao gradually playing a greater role and

Table 11.1 Legislations related to early childhood education in the area of social welfare

Year (date)	Legislations	Content
16 February 1987	Decree-Law no. 8/87/M	Social Welfare Bureau responsible for issuing nursery licenses
27 September 1988	Decree-Law no.90/88/M	Nurseries are establishments to cater for children up to 3 years of age, as a support service to working parents (Article 3)
24 May 1999	Portaria no. 156/99/M	Approve "Norms Regulating the Installation and Function of Nurseries" (Article 1)
21 June 1999	Decree-Law no. 24/99/M	Approve "Organization Statute of Social Welfare Bureau." The Division of Infancy and Youth to monitor local nurseries (Article 14)
28 June 2004	Administrative Regulation no.20/2004	Revise "Norms Regulating the Installation and Function of Nurseries." Provide care service to infants below 5 years of age and up to 7 years old, with special authorization from the Social Welfare Bureau via extracurricular support (Article 1)
13 October 2008	Dispatch of the Chief Executive	Authorize contract with Luk Chiu Kwan Hung's Child Development Research Center to provide "Activities Guideline and Activities Resources for Nurseries" from 2008 to 2010
4 October 2010	Administrative Regulation no. 18/2010	Revise "Norms Regulating the Installation and Function of Nurseries." Each room should not exceed 28 children (Article 10)
23 June 2014	Administrative Regulation no. 13/2014	Revise "Norms Regulating the Installation and Function of Nurseries." Each child has no less than 1.8 square meters in an activity room and each activity room should not exceed 30 children

producing massive legislation in every area, including early childhood development (from the 1980s), to define or redefine boundaries of governance. Table 11.1 outlines the evolution of legislation in ECE since the 1980s.

The Social Welfare Bureau regards early childhood care as a support service to families with particular social needs, and services in the 1980s were related to charity and welfare, reflected in the webpage of the Social Welfare Bureau in 2011, which states "Nursery: Children with family problems that need to be placed in nurseries subsidized by the Social Welfare Bureau." Regulations for nurseries were approved only in 1999, and the scope and level of services extended by providing extracurricular support for children up to 7 years. Although norms were revised in 2004 with issuance of "Activities Guidelines," minimum qualification for childcare workers was not specified, begging the question of differences in theory and practice of pedagogy between nursery and kindergarten. Table 11.2 shows measures and policies initiated by the DSEJ.

Early childhood education (ECE) was considered supplemental to formal education in the 1980s, but is today regarded as a primary component of basic education. Unlike the Social Welfare Bureau, the DSEJ has issued formal curriculum, supported innovative experiences and pedagogical practices, promoted teacher

Table 11.2 Legislations related to early childhood education in Macao, focusing in the education aspect

Year (date)	Legislations	Content
19 June 1982	Decree-Law no.26/82/M	Approve regulation of pre-primary education: Pre-primary education should take place in proper institutions and provide supplementary support to family. The age range is between 3 and 5 years old or 1 year before admitting to Primary 1 (Article 2)
29 August 1991	Law no. 11/91/M	Establish the Macao education system. Kindergarten is divided into early childhood education (3–4 years old) and pre-primary education (5 years old) (Article 4)
9 September 1991	Decree-Law no. 48/91/M	Establish academic qualifications for kindergarten and primary official institutions
21 December 1992	Decree-Law no. 81/92/M	Organization Regulation of Education and Youth Affairs Bureau. The Division of Preschool and Primary Education is to guide and coordinate operation of kindergarten and primary schools (Article 12)
18 July 1994	Decree-Law no.38/94/M	Establish framework for organizing curricula for pre-primary and primary education. It is important to ensure that young children attend private or government kindergartens
15 January 1996	Portaria no. 7/96/M	Authorize 3 years' pre-primary and primary teacher education program (bacharelato degree) to enhance teaching quality in Chinese medium schools
22 September 1997	Decree-Law no. 41/97/M	Establish judicial, assistance, and coordination regime for training of pre-primary, primary, and secondary school teachers
27 July 1998	Portaria no.171/98/M	Based on Portaria no. 7/96/M, authorize 2 years' pre-primary and primary complementary teacher education leading to bachelor degree
23 June 2003	Administrative Order no. 19/2003	Revoke operation of two Sino-Portuguese kindergartens, namely, "Narciso" and "Sir Robert Ho Tung"
23 June 2003	Administrative Order no. 20/2003	Authorize establishment of "kindergarten" in current government primary schools, for better use of resources
25 October 2005	Dispatch of the Secretary for Social and Cultural Affairs no. 121/2005	Authorize 4 years' pre-primary and primary bachelor program in education
13 December 2006	Law no. 9/2006	Fundamental law of non-tertiary education system: objectives of infant education are to "cultivate students' basic ethical concept and moral behavior," "nurture habit and characteristics of getting along well with others," "enhance language and other communicative capacity," and many others (Article 7)
27 August 2007	Administrative Regulation no. 17/2007	Revise "regime of free education subsidy," covering first year of kindergarten to final year of senior secondary

(continued)

Table 11.2 (continued)

Year (date)	Legislations	Content
29 April 2013	Administrative Regulation no. 9/2013	Revise "the free education subsidies," kindergarten receives 605,000 Patacas (25–35 children per class)
1 July 2013	Administrative Order no. 38/2013	Revoke operation of a Sino-Portuguese kindergarten, namely, "Yong Tian"
25 June 2014	Administrative Regulation no. 15/2014	Formal curriculum framework for local schools
27 July 2015	Dispatch of the Secretary for Social and Cultural Affairs no. 118/2015	Approve "the requirements of basic academic attainments for early childhood education"

education programs, and raised teacher qualifications. Nonetheless, the Social Welfare Bureau's effort to extend early childhood services to the age of seven indirectly facilitates the survival of nurseries, while they also expect such services to be more competitive in recruiting children, especially during the epoch of decline in the birth rate.

Divergent conceptualization of early childhood of these two governing bodies, serving different but complementary missions of social welfare and education, has led to an incoherent and nonlinear development in ECE, but with some overlap: for instance, children at four can be sent to either kindergarten or nursery, with attendant discrepancies in learning and teaching.

Early Childhood Education in Practice: A Two-Tiered Staff Development System

Nurseries are considered as an auxiliary service for working parents, and the primary role is to care for the very young. Hence, most staff serve as caretakers. Training is usually short term, periodic, and inconsistent in method or ways of institutionalization. In 2004, the Social Welfare Bureau introduced the "Development Scheme for Initiating Nursery Young Children's Potentials" (Macau Social Welfare Bureau, 2004), based on experiences in Hong Kong. This 2-year scheme aimed at quality control of nurseries and included staff training (Macao Social Welfare Bureau, 2004), which was conceived within the nursery structure and was skill oriented. More recently, the composition of staff of nurseries is mixed, i.e., most of them are caretakers, with one or two teachers who teach the oldest groups or classes in the nursery. The qualification requirement for these teachers, who are entitled to subsidies on top of their salary and granted by the Social Welfare Bureau, is a bacharelato degree, i.e., 3 years of teacher education.

Laws and regulations for kindergarten teacher training have been updated since 1991, with the establishment of the Macao education system, the first official

blueprint to be documented. The recent promulgated Law no. 3/2012, also known as *System Framework for Private School Teaching Staff of Non-tertiary* (Macao Special Administrative Region, 2012), has made bachelor degree the norm for entering teaching profession. However, owing to the historical reasons, some teachers still do not hold appropriate qualifications. Currently, there are four types of teacher education:

1. Preservice teacher education – a 4-year program leading to a full degree in education
2. In-service teacher training – targets at kindergarten teachers who have not previously received teacher education, so as to provide them with professional training at the degree level
3. Extended training – is meant to supplement, refresh, or deepen knowledge and competence after initial teacher qualification
4. Specific training – allows individuals to take on specific tasks within the system

In these four categories, the DSEJ has the mandate to organize training programs or to designate institutions to offer them. Training for childcare workers is usually in-house and includes workshops, seminars, and on-site supervisions.

Reforming Early Childhood Teacher Education: For Better or for Worse

Albeit the DSEJ's designating teacher training partnership institutions, the Faculty of Education at the University of Macao has been mandated to train teachers since the mid-1980s, and it currently advocates a somewhat child-centered approach, in theory and practice. The existing program includes kindergarten teachers' knowledge of development and learning for children from birth to 8 years of age and to create comprehensive, common understanding. However, there is lack of "space," in terms of credit hours and concern, in the program for building sufficient foundational knowledge across the spectrum. These constraints are magnified by the ideology underlying program revision in 2009 by the University of Macao (Faculty of Education, 2016). The revised program advocated broad-based higher education, reducing credits of majors to allow more general education courses for the entire student body at the university. Hence, the original structure of the kindergarten teacher education program changed markedly. Kindergarten head teachers have voiced their concerns about discrepancies between teacher training and curricula and pedagogy actually implemented in kindergartens. In preservice teacher education for kindergarten teachers, there has been neglect of long-standing teaching and learning practices, with teacher beliefs and lack of resources undermining well-meaning provisions. Head teachers' expectations of more professional teacher training have been heightened by visits to kindergartens in mainland China, and concerns regarding morality of teachers in the backdrop of economic growth.

With teacher education no longer considered vocational training but recognized as a profession, it requires a solid theoretical foundation, with academic research alongside subjects and skills (Furlong, Barton, Miles, Whiting, & Whitty, 2000; Winther-Jensen, 1990). Teacher training is not independent of kindergarten curriculum and pedagogy (Loizou, 2009), parents' expectations, and government decisions. Such paradigm shifts relate to changing perspectives and practice in ECE (Pramling Samuelsson, 2010; Oda & Mori, 2006). Parents' ideas of teaching and learning accentuate the debate on teacher education being research based or professionally based.

Early Childhood Education: Evolvement in Curriculum and Pedagogy

In this chapter, we have discussed in other sections that the primary role of nurseries is to provide care for the very young. Therefore, there has not been much structured curriculum and pedagogy. Until recently, teachers are hired by nurseries to design teaching materials and teach the oldest age groups. In some nurseries, textbooks and exercise books are not uncommon. In 2016, the Social Welfare Bureau has delegated a team based at the university to conduct a study on the overall policies pertaining to nursery programs and practices.

The existing types of kindergarten and modes of curriculum and pedagogy in Macao stem from two concepts: laissez-faire and autonomy in education.

During the Portuguese sovereignty, education for Chinese children was not the concern of the government which set up schools, kindergartens included, for the then Portuguese residents. However, local groups (e.g., workers, farmers, and religious groups) were allowed to set up schools for Chinese children. This laissez-faire policy had led to the establishment of various kinds of kindergartens, each with different educational objectives and goals. According to Yuen (2009), there is diversity in the types of kindergartens in Macao, such as Portuguese, English, Luso-Chinês (or Portuguese-Chinese), and Chinese kindergartens, while this last type outnumbers the other three. Most English and Chinese kindergartens are private schools operated by the various groups mentioned earlier but subsidized by the DSEJ. Some of the curricula and pedagogies of these Chinese kindergartens had been influenced by the Taiwan system, while others by the Chinese system in mainland China, and still others by the Hong Kong system.

After the handover in 1999 to China, there is the Macao Basic Law which safeguards the autonomy in education in Macao. Hence, the diversity of kindergarten types remains unchanged. Moreover, with increased government subsidies, kindergartens, in particular the Chinese ones, attempt to develop their own kindergarten-based curriculum and pedagogy through organizing teachers to visit different programs and settings at their own choice or suggested by the DSEJ (in which cases DSEJ serves as the organizer) in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore,

and sometimes those in English-speaking countries. But in general, until today, most Chinese kindergartens embrace a thematic curriculum and an activity-based approach, with occasional or periodical insertion of other approaches (e.g., the project approach, high-scope approach, and corner play). Play curricula are not adopted, commercialized textbooks known as thematic books are used to guide the curricula, exercise books for Chinse language writing and English language writing are not uncommon, and interest classes are offered of regular school hours or days. Nonetheless, there is increasing government concern for teaching writing too early.

In 1999, the DSEJ attempted to set some curriculum and pedagogical guidelines for kindergarten education (the first two of the 3 years) and pre-primary education (the last year) by issuing the Outlines for Early Childhood Education and Pre-primary Education (Direcção dos Serviços de Educação e Juventude, 1999). However, only the government or public kindergartens are obliged to adopt these guidelines, while the private ones have no obligation to follow suit. In 2014, the DSEJ launched the Formal Curriculum Framework for Local Schools (Macao Special Administrative Region, 2014), an official document which enforces the observation of the objectives and goals, as well as curriculum designs and pedagogical didactics suggested in the framework by all the kindergartens in Macao. Subsequently, a set of "The Requirements of Basic Academic Attainments for Early Childhood Education" (Macao Special Administrative Region, 2015) was issued, aiming to somewhat unify the baseline of young children's learning abilities by the end of their kindergarten education. In order to encourage all kindergartens to try out the educational ideas stated in the abovementioned documents, there have been pilot projects which invite kindergartens to make initial effort in blending those basic academic attainments into their existing curriculum and pedagogy.

In sum, while education diversity has been a characteristic of Macao education (Yuen, 2009) and autonomy in education has been safeguarded by the Macao Basic Law, both the Social Welfare Bureau and the DSEJ are gently, carefully, and continuously attempting to take a stronger lead in the direction of early childhood education in Macao in terms of financial incentive, provision of guidelines, and engaging teachers in the testing of their educational ideas.

Possible Challenges for Early Childhood Education

A Missing Conception of Early Childhood Education

Nurseries prepare young children for kindergarten education, impart understanding of routine and social relations, and increase competence in self-care. Many nurseries have not emphasized broad developmental needs in those earliest years. Some merely provide basic care, while others focus on training 2- to 3-year-olds to read and write, leading to a nonlinear conception of child development discussed earlier. The DSEJ recently advocated for creativity-oriented education, beginning in the

early years (Portal do Governo da RAE de Macau, 2001, 2003, 2004), yet no joint effort has been made to nurture such ability (Kelen & Vong, 2006). This is possibly due to a long-standing lack of communication and collaboration between the two government bureaus. While such demarcation may be common across societies, shared understanding of ideology and pedagogy among teachers at different stages is usually first articulated by government and then bridged through linking goals of teacher education at different stages. Yet government awareness of such issue has to come first and foremost.

The "Invisible Hand"

This term coined by Adam Smith (1723–1790) describes natural forces guiding free market capitalism through conjunction of self-interest, competition, and supply and demand for scarce resources. Private enterprise dominates nurseries and kindergartens in Macao, against a backdrop of "big market, small government" (Vong & Wong, 2010, p.62). The Confucian culture emphasizes education for social mobility, and messages such as "Don't let your children lose at the starting line" or even the assertion that "Pre-natal education makes a difference," embodied in popular culture (Giroux, 2000), create certain illusions with respect to ECE, especially shaping parents' expectations of early childhood education which could have unreasonably influenced their choice of kindergartens or nurseries. In periods of low birth rate, there is more competition among kindergartens and even nurseries, leading to "flexibility" in pedagogy and goals to meet expectations of parents and nurseries increasingly institutionalizing themselves to appear similar to kindergartens in their educational role. They may use textbooks or activity guidebooks or claim an advanced approach in nurturing infants. In many kindergartens, innovations in educational experience include engaging young children in fashion shows, poem recitals, which are purposely planned to meet adults' tastes. This phenomenon is referred to by Giroux (2000) as "stealing children's innocence." Debate needs to include identification of stakeholders, which socioeconomic group they are from, and participation of representative voices in ECE, as well as the role of government administration and of education expertise.

Children's Rights

Macao ratified the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* in 1989. With private institutions playing a major role in providing service and education, their autonomy is safeguarded by the Macao Basic Law, allowing divergence in management, goals, and culture. The challenge is to incorporate the spirit of children's rights, defend equal opportunity, and provide social justice in diversity.

A Culturally and Socially Appropriate Pedagogy Needed

Most working parents in Macao send children to nurseries or kindergartens (at 95.5 % enrollment rate in ECE for 3-month- to 5-year-olds) (Direcção dos Serviços de Estatística e Censos, 2009) for them to acquire more knowledge and skills (in terms of vocabulary, songs, drawing, etc.), as well as social rules in these formal institutions. In recent years, "home-school cooperation" in ECE has been designated as an essential value and goal, and a teaching strategy in which children are normally assigned projects that require assistance from parents is an effort to engage parents in children's learning. With the intention to bridge the gap between home and school learning, this practice may in itself lead to disparities in children's learning opportunities due to familial learning conditions. In direct contrast to the message "don't let your children lose at the starting line," those from disadvantaged families without much cultural capital could actually lose at the starting line. Under what conditions could there be a culturally and socially appropriate practice is still unclear.

Conclusions

Against the backdrop of a primarily privately run education system and of government policy on free education, kindergarten education has become the first stage of Macao's basic education. Early childhood education comprises care and services for children from 3 months to 7 years of age and education for children from 3 to 6 years of age, provided by the Social Welfare Bureau and the Education and Youth Affairs Bureau, respectively. The stated government policy of care for young children being the primary interest of nurseries is not backed up by focus on developing an age-appropriate curriculum and pedagogy by either the Social Welfare Bureau or by parents, and there is lack of specified qualification requirement for childcare workers in nurseries. In recent years, training programs for childcare workers have been conducted, some government and private nurseries have recruited qualified teachers, the staff is now more mixed, and some teaching is taking place. Nurseries are pressured by parents to better prepare their young children for kindergarten education and that results in teaching with textbooks and exercise books for older children in private nurseries, while artwork and music lessons are also included in the preparation. Curricula and pedagogies which stress subject learning dominate nursery operations; the scenario is in fact institutionally constructed and incongruent with original ideas of nursery provision. There is still much space for improvement in terms of linking theory to practice, if nurseries include teaching and learning.

In kindergartens, complications arise from disparate curricula and pedagogies under the ruling of education by autonomy provisions of the Macao Basic Law, with some emphasizing academic achievement, while others borrow Western practices to foster different competencies. Various nonmainstream international kindergartens

adopt the corner teaching and learning approach, which is similar to the high-scope approach, and evolution of curriculum and pedagogy is reinforced by school-based development advocated by the Education and Youth Affairs Bureau.

Parental choice has had a critical role in this context, with most kindergartens being private, subsidies notwithstanding. As curricula and pedagogies are influenced by parents' conceptions of teaching and learning and traditional Chinese concerns for face and investment in education, academic-oriented programs may be emphasized which might not be age appropriate but contextually constructed. There is also a discrepancy between teachers' professional knowledge and practice in actual settings. With contemporary focus on the rights of the child, the child's voice in the construction of childhood needs to be heard, through research, policies, and practice. Teacher training has to be sensitive to new theories, perception changes in society, and to voices of teacher educators and teachers within the currently institutionalized framework. With the latest 10-year plan (currently canvassing opinion) for a better education, it is seen as an opportunity to signal the way forward.

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Chapter 12
Governmentality of Early Childhood Education in Singapore: Contemporary Issues

May Yin Sirene Lim and Audrey Lim

Introduction

This chapter provides a descriptive overview of Singapore's early care and education landscape, as contextualized within the nation's unique economic and sociopolitical setting. We begin by introducing Singapore's political and cultural history as a British colony, so as to set the stage for our readers to understand how some of its nation-building and educational policies have come about. Subsequent sections in this chapter are devoted to foregrounding key government initiatives in the private preschool sector vis-à-vis the government-run primary and secondary school system and the educational issues arising in the last decade.

The word "governmentality" in the title is borrowed from Foucault's (1977, 1988) use of the French word *gouvernemental*, and his notion of how governments explain their solutions to problems in the state and maneuver cautiously to develop tactics to address those problems. In Lemke's (2000) interpretation, Foucault's governmentality as an "art of government" is about achieving dynamic equilibrium between technologies of domination and technologies of self and not about forcing citizens to do what the government wants. This concept seems apt in a chapter describing and foregrounding a major contemporary issue in Singapore's early childhood education (ECE) – that of raising quality in a largely privatized and commercial preschool sector.

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Multicultural Economic Success and Pragmatic Governance

Singapore's road to independence was abrupt and almost unexpected. In its early days as a republic with limited land resource for agriculture, it had a small yet mixed population of indigenous Malays, Straits Chinese, and immigrants from China and India and a high percentage of illiteracy and unemployment. It was imperative for the nation to focus pragmatically on survival. It has since risen rather quickly out of the ashes of poverty to become a respectable city-state now classified by the IMF as an advanced economic entity. In 2009, its per capita GDP reached S$53,143 (USD36, 537) (Department of Statistics, 2010), and the 2011–2012 Global Competitiveness Report has placed Singapore in second position. Through pragmatic governance, Singapore has shown the world that there can be multiple paths to modernization, other than those offered by politically stronger and economically more advanced nations in the Northern Hemisphere, such as the UK and the USA.

Alongside neoliberal policies to enhance economic growth, social cohesion and harmony is still a government priority as Singapore welcomes a steady stream of foreigners into its workforce. This can be illustrated by one of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's speeches:

> *…we must capitalize on our strengths. And what are they? Our multicultural heritage, our clean and safe environment, our disciplined and energetic people, a cosmopolitan and open society, and then we can make Singapore a vibrant global city, not just for tourists, but for our own people, to create an outstanding living environment for all Singaporeans.* (Prime Minister, National Day Rally Speech, 2005)

The population now comprises about five million residents, out of which about 1.3 million are nonresidents (Department of Statistics, 2010). Of the resident population, about 74 % are of Chinese ethnicity, 13.5 % Malay, 9.3 % Indian, and 3.2 % are from other ethnicities such as Eurasians (Department of Statistics, 2010). This majority-Chinese population structure is an inheritance from the days of British colonial rule. The linguistic composition of the population, however, is much more heterogeneous than represented by the four ethnic groups. Commonly spoken non-English languages include Chinese dialects such as Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka, and Hainanese, regional Malay languages such as Baba Malay and Javanese, and Indian languages such as Tamil, Punjabi, Bengali, and Hindi. The language policy for the nation recognizes four official languages: Malay, Mandarin Chinese, Tamil, and English, and the bilingual policy in education ensures that all children attending primary and secondary schools become fairly proficient in English, the de facto working language in the public and business sectors, and one other official language (or another language that is offered in the school system).

What are the fundamental ideologies that have guided the Singapore government toward achieving an economic miracle thus far? Chang (2003) provides a lucid explanation of how seven basic philosophical values of the Singapore government have guided the nation's economic development: (1) neo-social Darwinism, (2) connectionism, (3) Golden Means-seeking rationalism, (4) pragmatism, (5)

communitarianism, (6) conservative liberalism, and (7) elitism. These make up a unique blend of Western and East Asian philosophies and foreground the government's focus on survival, its political farsightedness, zeal for competitive excellence, effort to balance between individual interests and society's interests, eagerness to learn from other nations, and its perpetual self-evaluations of "What works for us?", "What needs to be changed?", and "How can we do better?" In working toward becoming a first-world nation, the government has always been exceptionally focused on two key goals: ensuring a thriving economy and a politically stable and socially cohesive nation. All its national policies, including educational policies, contribute to either or both of these goals.

Education as an Economic Strategy

One of the key factors in Singapore's economic success as a young nation lies in the government's proactive measures in developing a technologically literate populace. This has been achieved through a government-run and centralized primary and secondary education system that is continually evaluated and improved in all aspects – school facilities, school organizational structures, curriculum, assessment, pedagogies, teacher education, and teacher professional development. A basic tenet in the government's emphasis on quality education is that on the small island of Singapore, every citizen is seen as the nation's precious asset and human capital resource. Directly or indirectly, the government takes it upon itself to devise multiple levels of educational opportunities from preschool (i.e., kindergarten and childcare education) through adulthood (i.e., workforce skills development and training).

Significant educational initiatives are announced almost every few years by the Ministry of Education, and there are constant reviews taking place to tweak segments of the education system in view of changing times and expectations. For instance, announcements from the Primary Education Review and Implementation Committee were made in 2009, calling for specific changes in assessment modes and curricular focus; simultaneously, a secondary education review took place. In 2008, recommendations were announced for the preschool sector, as a follow-up from the 2003 launch of the Ministry of Education (MOE)'s recommendation for a kindergarten curriculum framework.

Many middle-class families align themselves with the national priority of seeing education as economic strategy, and have been described as hothousing young children through a myriad of enrichment programs, on top of hours spent in preschools (Ng, 2012; Tham, 2012). The *Compulsory Education Act* that was passed in the year 2000 only pertains to the 6 years of primary education in government primary schools and excludes provisions in special education schools (i.e., the education of children with disabilities). Children begin Primary One during the year they turn seven, and prior to that year, many children attend preschool, which is provided entirely by private and social enterprises. Given that many Singaporean parents

want their young children to be educated by professionals as early as possible, enrollment in preschools has generally been over 90 % in the last two decades, even when preschool was not made compulsory by the state. In terms of accessibility, there have always been government subsidies for families to enroll their children in either kindergartens or childcare centers, and accessibility to preschool education is also enhanced by the availability of many preschools located within housing estates, where 85 % of Singaporeans reside. In recent times, wealthier families have been seen to enroll their preschooler in more than one type of education program, and this has led to an increase in the number of private enrichment centers that offer shorter programs such as speech and drama, phonics, language arts, abacus, dance, music, sports, and visual arts. There are even centers that help prepare preschoolers for the primary school curriculum, signifying the demand that exists among anxious parents (Ng, 2012).

Situating Early Childhood Education in Singapore

Although ECE is not directly provided by the Singapore government, there are policy tools to continue nudging the ECE private sector toward better quality of provision. Although privatized, ECE is under government technologies of control that constantly shape the sector according to national needs. In all government speeches and policy initiatives, ECE provision continues to serve the ultimate master of a competitive and meritocratic system in Singapore. ECE plays the role of social leveler, and the government believes in continued yet strategic partnership with other agencies and community organizations, to provide quality care and education services that are accessible to all families, particularly those in the lower-income segment of the population:

> *While less than one-fifth of Primary 1 students had at least one parent who had post-secondary education twenty years ago, the ratio has increased to one-half today. Parents have thus become better-educated, and have higher expectations of the standard of pre-school education for their children.…*
>
> *As the preschool landscape continues to evolve, we have to ensure that all our children, especially those from lower-income families, are able to access good quality preschool education and have a good foundation for learning before they attend primary school.* (Ministry of Education, 2008)

Preschool as social leveler seems to be the same viewpoint held by the government, even in the early years of independence in the 1960s. There are government speeches that acknowledge how preschool education provides all children with the necessary head start prior to entering primary school. The same message has been sent over the years, that (1) education is the key to breaking the poverty cycle, and (2) Singaporean parents ought to motivate and guide their children to succeed in school.

An independent survey carried out by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), commissioned by the Lien Foundation, ranked the overall preschool environments of 45 countries. According to the index developed, Singapore ranked number 29 (EIU, 2012). Subequently, the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports was renamed the Ministry of Social and Family Development, and a new statutory board the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) was formed to play a more active role in improving the quality of preschool programs. It is noteworthy that the Singapore government has taken the report "Starting Well" rather seriously and taken steps to improve the availability and affordability, besides the quality of her preschool environment. The initiatives outlined in the following sections demonstrate the efforts of MSF, through the ECDA, in making improvements on all three criteria, that of availability, affordability, and quality of Singapore's preschool environment.

Parental Expectations for Young Children

The goal of preschool education has traditionally been related to parents' desires for their children to succeed in a bilingual and academically rigorous primary and secondary school system (Sharpe, 1998, 2000). Little has changed with the nation's economic affluence. If anything, parental anxiety toward their young child's academic learning seems to have increased. Many families expect preschools to prepare their children for primary school and are willing to pay high fees for preschool programs that seem to be innovative in their curricular approach. The nation has a higher percentage of more educated parents now, and they demand more creative and innovative approaches rather than traditional workbook-centered learning. Some families have a tendency to latch onto what they deem as international "brand names" (e.g., Montessori, Froebel, Waldorf-Steiner, Multiple Intelligences, Reggio Emilia), and some wish to provide their child with additional English language classes. There are also many in this affluent group who prefer to preserve childhood play and freedom and so do not want academically rigorous programs that only focus on the traditional 3Rs. Hence, they enroll their children in preschools that offer desirable curricular "add-ons," or evening/weekend enrichment programs, such as speech and drama, visual art, dance, music, and gym.

As parents work longer hours, and there are more dual-career married couples, there has also been a significant increase in the demand for childcare (including infant care) services. The *Ministry of Community Development*, *Youth and Sports* (MCYS) has responded to the demand by facilitating the swift establishment of 196 new centers in recent years alone. All childcare centers offer "academic" kindergarten programs, and some also include extra enrichment programs (e.g., speech and drama) that parents can pay for, in addition to monthly fees.

Enrichment programs seem to be gaining popularity among parents who can afford the additional fees. Some parents are eager to spend an extra dollar on enrichment classes for their preschoolers, over and above the child's time spent in either kindergarten or childcare (Zachariah, 2010). A newspaper reporter, Zachariah (2010), interviewed several parents who stated they felt the need to enroll their child in additional language classes, so that their child would be thoroughly prepared for academic learning at primary school, where most subjects are taught in the English language. Although there are no officially published figures on the number of private education or tuition centers on the island, the reporter found that one popular education franchise alone had 13 of its 25 centers with programs catering to 4- to 6-year-olds. A study conducted by Ebbeck and Gokhale (2004) on child-rearing practices found that the majority of children in a sample size of 40 received private tuition in preparation for academics in Primary One.

Do parental anxieties translate to childhood woes? There are no official statistics or research studies to show a significant correlation; however, this is a topic that appears regularly in the national newspapers and other forms of media. Cheong (2009) reported that the number one stress inducer for children in Singapore is school pressure. The National Child Guidance Clinic reported in 1996 (cited in Cheong, 2009) that there was a significant increase in the number of new patients who were 6- and 7-year-olds, having difficulties in Primary One, when the Clinic had been used to seeing more of older school-aged students. This seems aligned with research studies conducted by Sharpe (2002) and Yeo and Clarke (2005) on children's transitioning from preschool to primary school. Both studies revealed that Singaporean children tend toward a schoolwork- and school-centered view of life, learning very early on in their Primary school days, that "learning" is serious work and that "success" involves doing well academically. This work-centered worldview dictates the lives of many young Singaporeans, and parallels that of many single adult Singaporeans, who expressed a desire to focus on attaining financial security or achieving success in their careers before getting married (National Family Council (NFC) & MCYS, 2009). Working parents also spend limited time with their children. According to a 2009 survey conducted among families with children below 15 years, fathers typically spend 2.8 hours on an average weekday with their children, while mothers spend 4.6 hours, and fathers spend 8.4 hours on an average day during the weekend with their children, while mothers spend 10.5 hours (MCYS, 2009).

The Singapore Education System

Primary, secondary, and postsecondary schools that are directly funded and provided for by the Singapore government form *the* education system for which the nation developed a good reputation (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2007) especially since the release of the Third International Math and Science Studies (Mullis et al., 2000). This public school system is secular in nature, where even schools with a Christian

ethos have Muslim students enrolled, and do not feel pressured to change their religious beliefs. This contrasts with the preschools (and other private schools) where the programs and curriculum could include religious teachings that are not optional for students.

The Department of Statistics in Singapore publishes an annual yearbook releasing figures reporting key sociodemographic and economic characteristics of the nation. The section on "Education" focuses only on primary, secondary, postsecondary, and the few government-funded tertiary institutions. While enrollment in childcare centers is reported in the "Services" section, kindergarten enrollment is not reported. Generally, statistical information on the preschool sector, and other services for younger children who are not of school-going age, remain obscure.

The government, through the Ministry of Education (MOE), has made it clear in the last decade that it has no intention of becoming a preschool education provider (MOE, 2000, 2010), as it does not wish to replace the role of the community and commercial organizations. Instead, the government prefers to allow parents to choose from a wide range of preschool education models according to their personal inclinations and preferences (including religious beliefs). In the last decade, however, the local authorities have used creative means to nudge the sector toward higher quality through indirect funding and a measured approach to regulation. In the next section, we elaborate on the Singapore government's investment in education, describing two separate funding models for the public school sector and the private preschool sector.

Government Spending on Education

Education has alternated with defense as the most expensive item in the Singapore government's budget, averaging about 3.5 % of the annual GDP in the last decade. The government deploys the education budget across the different sectors, making judicious decisions. Yearly, about 50 % of the budget is invested in the primary and secondary school (including centralized institutes and junior colleges) sector, 41 % in postsecondary education (Polytechnics and Institute of Technical Education), and the remainder in the Ministry of Education Headquarters, and its universities and other statutory boards. Despite the latest global economic downturn, the MOE has not cut back its expenditure on education, due to its firm belief that education is a necessary investment in human capital, especially in financially difficult times. The government believes that investing in the education system ensures that the nation has a younger generation that is ready to take up new future challenges when the economy eventually improves. The 2012 budget for education was S$10.6 billion, increased from[1] S$9.7 billion in 2010.

Given the larger context of government expenditure on primary, secondary, and postsecondary education, the expenditure on the preschool sector appears compara-

[1] US$1 equals approximately Singapore $1.4.

Table 12.1 Number of schools in Singapore in 2011

Institutions	Number	Enrollment
Public sector		
Primary schools	173	256,801
Secondary schools (including government aided), centralized institute, and junior colleges	183	253,913
Private sector		
Preschool type 1: Kindergartens registered with the MOE	494	Approx. 64,000
Preschool type 2: Childcare centers licensed by the MCYS	955	73,900
Includes 18 integrated childcare programs (ICCP)		
Includes 272 with infant care services		

Sources: Ministry of Education (2011). Education Statistics Digest. Retrieved 4 June 2012 from http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/education-statistics-digest/files/esd-2010.pdf; MCYS (April 2012) Statistics on childcare services. Retrieved 4 June 2012 from http://www.childcarelink.gov.sg/ccls/uploads/Statistics_on_child_care(STENT).pdf

tively tokenistic, when the enrollment is about 60 % of the total primary school enrollment (see Table 12.1: Number of Schools). Government spending on the preschool sector goes mainly to (1) a recurrent grant made available to eligible kindergartens, (2) family subsidies, (3) innovation grants to kindergartens, and (4) annual bursaries for high-performing preschool teachers to continue their professional development. The biggest item in the government's preschool expenditure is the recurrent grant to eligible kindergartens and childcare centers to enable them to keep their fees affordable, while at the same time improve the quality of their programs (e.g., through teacher professional development).

The recurrent grant has more than doubled from S$17 million in 2008 to S$36 million in 2009 and was expected to reach S$62.5 million by 2013 (MOE, 2009). Similarly, the MCYS also provides a recurrent grant to eligible childcare operators, and since 2008, the ministry has disbursed S$25.34 million (MCYS, 24 Nov 2010).

In recent years, however, the government has been investing much more on the early childhood sector. A press release by ECDA, dated August 30, 2013a, revealed that the government would be investing $30 million (Singapore dollars) over the next three years on manpower efforts in the sector. The plan announced by the then Acting Minister for Social and Family Development, Mr. Chan Chun Sing, "outlined the government's plan to enhance scholarships and training awards for the sector." The changes "will provide more support for new and existing early childhood educators and help operators better attract, develop and train their staff" (ECDA, 2013a, 2013b).

There is a universal childcare subsidy for all families (S$300) and the additional Centre-based Financial Assistance Scheme for Childcare (CFAC). The CFAC is periodically reviewed and is generous particularly for families in the lower-income brackets. For instance, families with monthly income of S$1500 or less can receive up to S$340 per child per month for children above 18 months. In addition to the CFAC is the Kindergarten Financial Assistance Scheme (KiFAS), in which families with a monthly household net income of S$1500 or less could apply for subsidies of

up to S$108 for monthly kindergarten fees. On top of the CFAC and KiFAS, families with a net income of S$1500 or below may be given an additional, one-time S$200 or S$1000 start-up grant, to help with the initial expenses of letting their child attend kindergarten or full-day childcare, respectively. In 2009, 3196 children received CFAC and another 7212 children received KiFAS, as compared to FY07 when 2574 children received CFAC and 6266 children received KiFAS. Supplementing these government grants are numerous forms of subsidies provided by individual grassroots organizations, self-help groups, and some preschools. These are all financial assistance measures to ensure that families that need help can apply for financial support, in line with government belief that all children should have access to early years education, prior to primary school entrance.

In line with this strategy to provide a strong start for children of low- and middle-income families, KiFAS was extended to families of Singaporean children with gross household incomes of up to $6000 (ECDA, 2014a, March 13). This was a post-EIU (2012) initiative to enhance the affordability of preschool for these families. This initiative will benefit about 17,000 Singaporean children each year. A higher quantum of support will be extended to lower-income families who will receive up to $160 in fee assistance per month (for details of the KiFAS Framework, see ECDA, 2014a, March 13). The then Minister of Social and Family Development, Mr. Chan Chun Sing, stated that the government would set aside about $20 million per annum for KiFAS which is double the amount set aside in 2014. From 1 January 2015, the ECDA will extend KiFAS support to families with gross monthly household incomes of up to $6000, compared to $3500 previously (ECDA, 2015a, January 2).

To encourage private preschools to improve their programs, since 2008, the government has also offered an innovation grant scheme which provides successful preschool applicants with up to S$4000 (per preschool) to pursue innovative projects. In 2011, MOE and MCYS approved grants totaling S$660,000 for 106 kindergarten projects and 59 childcare projects and named 21 Outstanding Kindergarten Innovation Award holders. These forms of public recognition are the government's way of fostering self-improvement within private preschools, channeling creative energies away from mere profit generation.

To encourage kindergarten and childcare teachers to enroll in professional upgrading courses, and to enrich the private ECE sector with more qualified professionals, the government provides bursaries and scholarships (through the MOE, the MCYS, and the Workforce Development Agency) each year, for preschool teachers to pursue full-time or part-time professional diplomas, such as the Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education – Teaching (DECCE-T) courses, and degree programs such as the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education with management program conducted by SIM University, the first and only privately funded local university focused on educating working professionals and adult learners.

In summary, the government's spending strategy on the preschool sector is in line with the same measured approach it takes toward intervening in the sector and moving it toward better quality.

Calculated Approach to Improving ECE

The government has always been steadfast in taking on a strategic yet indirect approach toward raising quality in preschool education, despite public feedback that preschools should be nationalized just like primary and secondary schools. The year 2000 Parliamentary Budget Debates was a pivotal moment in Singapore's most recent journey toward improving preschool education. Dr. Aline Wong, then a Senior Minister of State for Education, was firm in explaining the government's stance toward the preschool sector, and it is a position which has remained unchanged 10 years on:

> *Simply pouring money [into preschool education] will not raise quality automatically. We must carefully decide how to deploy resources so that most children can get the most value out of preschool education. …we will be more involved in preschool education, paying particular attention to high-leverage areas like defining outcomes, designing a developmentally-appropriate curriculum, training teachers, conducting research and improving our regulatory framework…I want to emphasise that MOE will not take over preschool education. The provision of preschool education will remain firmly in the hands of the private and people sectors. There is merit in allowing different centers with different philosophies and schools of thought to offer different types of preschool education. It will also encourage creative innovation, as each center strives to meet the needs of its unique pupil profile.* (MOE, 2000)

Thus, the MOE has led in preschool initiatives by focusing its efforts on key leverage areas, especially in articulating the purpose of preschool education and a curriculum framework, conducting research, and working with the MCYS to design a framework to raise teacher quality. Each of these initiatives will be explained in later sections of this chapter.

Types of ECE Provision

The entire ECE is a private sector as there is no universal government provision for all children to have preschool education before they enter Primary One. However, driven by the state's meritocratic ideals, most parents, as noted earlier, are generally anxious to provide their young children with educational opportunities, from as early an age as it is possible financially for the family. As such, even though preschool education is not made compulsory by the state, most young children are enrolled in preschool, whether in a kindergarten or childcare center, because most families value the importance of education and want children to be academically and emotionally prepared for primary school. As the nation becomes more economically affluent, the social and economic gap widens, potentially exacerbating social inequities between young children from families that can afford more educational services and those that cannot.

The government feels that provision for preschool education is currently adequate and accessible to families. However, attendance is not 100 %, for reasons that

only the families would be able to explain. The MOE and MCYS, however, have been identifying 5- and 6-year-old children who are not attending preschool. The ministries have garnered the help of voluntary organizations and grassroots organizations, to contact the families of children who are not enrolled in preschools, to understand the issues and difficulties they may face, as well as offer counsel and practical aid where necessary. These efforts have been described by the MOE as "laborious" and requiring the "commitment and persistence of relevant stakeholders in the communities" (MOE, 2010). The annual door-knocking exercise last year has reduced the percentage of children who enter Primary One without attending any preschool from 5 % in 2006 to 1.2 % in 2010 – which implies a staggering enrollment rate in preschool for this group who enter Primary One, of 98.8 % (insert).

The Singapore preschool sector today is divided largely into two types of provision: kindergartens and childcare centers (see Table 12.2). Both types of preschools may be provided by either commercial operators or social and community organizations registered as voluntary welfare organizations (VWOs). Traditionally, kindergartens were developed to provide young children with an academic head start, prior to entering primary school, while childcare centers had a history as crèches operated by the Social Welfare Department in the 1960s, offering full-day care services.

The first two crèches were initially established in 1954 for poor children. But with rapid industrialization in the late 1960s and 1970s, more women were returning to the workforce, and families required center-based care for young children. By 1975, there were 13 crèches set up by the Social Welfare Department (no longer in existence). Khoo (2004) reported that the government transferred its crèches to the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) in 1977 and encouraged other nonprofit agencies and the private sector to offer such services in its place. There were 18 childcare centers in 1980, and this increased through the 1990s, such that by 1996 there were 434 centers (Lim, 1998). As of April 2012, there are 981 childcare centers, and about 28 % offer infant care programs catering to children from 2 months.

Before the formation of ECDA, all kindergartens registered with the MOE, and all childcare centers were licensed by the MCYS. There are preschools provided by a range of providers: community groups, different religious groups (e.g., church, mosque), and businesses; some cater only to the bottom 4 % of the national socioeconomic status and/or children who have been referred by social workers.

One of the largest providers of affordable kindergarten programs in the majority of housing estates is that of the People's Action Party Community Foundation (PCF), established in 1986 as a nonpolitical voluntary welfare organization, associated with the ruling political party and aims to offer social, educational, and welfare activities to the masses in the community. This is a uniquely Singaporean creation, an avenue through which individual members of parliament in the current ruling political party can be in touch with the daily needs of residents in their constituencies. Such dovetailing of community services and political means has been in existence since the early days of independence, when political parties offered kindergarten services as a means to recruit parents as members (Lim, 1998). The Party Community Foundation now has 247 kindergartens (out of the total of 494

Table 12.2 Main differences between kindergartens and childcare centers

Basics	Kindergarten	Childcare
Jurisdiction	The Education Act (1985 edition) defines kindergartens as private schools to be registered with the Ministry of Education	The Child Care Centres Act (1988) requires all centers to be licensed by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS)
Age group	Generally 3- to 6-year-olds	Most cater to 18-month-olds to 6-year-olds
	Three or four levels: pre-nursery (Pre-N), nursery (N), kindergarten 1 (K1), kindergarten (K2)	An increasing number (272 as of April 2012) have infant/toddler care services catering to children from 2 months
		Levels include infants, toddlers, Pre-N, N, K1, and K2
		Most centers only have one or two groups of children in each level
Program	Children attend one session of a 3- to 4-hour program depending on age group	Half-day and full-day services are offered to families
	Most kindergartens have two or three sessions per day (Mondays to Fridays)	Operation hours are generally from 7 am to 7 pm, Mondays to Fridays, and 7 am to 2 pm on Saturdays
	Most kindergartens offer children a curriculum conducted in both English and Mandarin. Several offer Malay and/or Tamil	Other than closure on public holidays, centers are allowed up to additional 5.5 days of closure per calendar year, stipulated by the MCYS
	Kindergartens affiliated with mosques, churches, and other religious establishments include a religious component in the curriculum	Some centers also have before- and after-school programs for school-aged children
	The school year coincides with that of primary and secondary schools and begins in January for four 10-week terms	Like kindergartens, most centers offer children a curriculum conducted in both English and Mandarin. Several offer Malay and/or Tamil
		Centers' curricular programs are usually planned for four 10-week terms in a school year that begins in January, like kindergartens
Fees	Kindergarten fees range from $48 to $1750 (USD38 to 1372) per month with a median of $143 (USD112)	Median monthly full-day childcare fees, $730 (USD575) ; median monthly full-day infant care fees, $1271(USD1000)

kindergartens), spread across numerous housing estates throughout the island, which totals about half of all kindergartens registered with the MOE, making the Party Community Foundation the leading provider of affordably priced preschool education in Singapore. It also has 87 childcare centers island-wide.

In the remaining childcare segment, two of the largest providers appear to be (a) a commercial franchiser Cherie Hearts Group International, with 60 childcare

centers island-wide (as of June 2012), and (b) the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) with its recently renamed "First Campus" Network comprising 92 *My First Skool* centers that are affordably priced childcare centers situated mostly in the housing estates. *My First Skool* childcare centers are representative of VWO provisions equivalent to the PCF kindergartens, as both organizations aim to serve the needs of the majority. These are also two of the main preschool providers that are eligible for the government recurrent grant that has been described in the preceding pages.

Since the EIU published its report in 2012, the government has made efforts to render the preschool environment of Singapore more available to families. The ECDA's press release of April 4, 2014b, for instance, indicated that 17 new sites for preschool anchor operators would provide an additional 1700 preschool places (ECDA, 2014). Another press release, dated May 28, 2015c, reported that ECDA will build five new large childcare centers in increase childcare places (for ECDA-appointed anchor operators – AOPs) in high-demand areas (such as Jurong West, Punggol, Sengkang, Woodlands, and Yishun) (ECDA, May 28). According to another press release (2015d, August 11), there would be 1000 available childcare places in two high-demand areas (Sengkang and Punggol) for AOPs by the mid-2016. In addition, non-anchor operators would also be provided with support to expand childcare places in high-demand areas and at workplaces (ECDA, September 24). The support could take the form of portable rental subsidy, extension of community/sports facilities, kindergarten conversion grant, or enhancements in workplace childcare center scheme. All the abovementioned initiatives are meant to increase the availability of childcare places. The last of these initiatives was also aimed at enhancing the affordability of childcare for families.

Turn-of-the-Millennium Initiatives to Raise Quality

In 1999, a special task force named the "Steering Committee on Preschool Education," led by the Senior Minister of State for Education, Dr. Aline Wong, was set up to examine ways in which the government could leverage on areas that would have significant impact on learning outcomes for preschoolers while retaining preschool provision in the hands of the private sector. The Committee drew up a policy framework that has enabled the MOE to embark on various initiatives since year 2000: (a) defined a list of desired outcomes, (b) developed a curriculum framework, (c) set new standards for ECE teachers, (d) established a teaching training framework with the MCYS, (e) conduct research, and (f) improve the government's preschool regulatory framework.

The efforts of this Committee had set the direction for government initiatives in the preschool sector in the last 10 years and at least the next 5 years. Each of the key initiatives announced in the year 2000 is described in the following paragraphs, updated where necessary with more recent government strategies that build on the existing initiatives.

Further Initiatives to Raise Quality

Further initiatives to enhance efforts to raise quality and increase the attraction of early childhood professionals came in the form of a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Masterplan for the early childhood sector. This Masterplan was first announced by the Minister of Social and Family Development (MSF), Mr. Chan Chun Sing, at the inaugural Early Childhood Conference on Nov 20, 2013. A separate section of the present chapter under "Guidelines for ECE Teacher Education" will elaborate on details of this Masterplan (ECDA, 2013b, November 20).

Key Stage Outcomes of Preschool Education

One of the first tasks completed by the Steering Committee was to answer a fundamental question, "What should the aims of preschool education be?" This resulted in a list of desired outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2000) that were aligned with the primary school key stage outcomes, so that the MOE would be able to focus on areas that needed most attention. The list was crafted with input from other policymakers, professionals, and educators. It is an articulation of the primary goal of preschool education according to a set of visible child outcomes, indicative of a Tylerian rationale (Tyler, 1949) undergirding much of the Singapore education system (see Table 12.3).

The list of desired outcomes could also be interpreted as partially guided by Confucian ideals, in which "Cultivating the person, regulating the family, governing the state, creating peace in the World," is regarded as the greatest ideal in Confucius' teachings on moral ethics and way of life. In the Confucian way of self-cultivation, an individual should learn first to show respect and filial piety to one's parents, and

Table 12.3 Key stage outcomes of preschool education (MOE)

At the end of preschool education, children will:
Know what is right and what is wrong
Be willing to share and take turns with others
Be able to relate to others
Be curious and be able to explore
Be able to listen and speak with understanding
Be comfortable and happy with themselves
Have developed physical coordination and healthy habits
Love their family, friends, teachers, and kindergarten

to love one's fellow beings, towards becoming a benevolent person (see chapters by Rao and Sun; Sun and Rao; and Choy, this volume, for greater detail, including the Confucian ideal of learning to be human as the goal of Education. It is when a nation has an educated and benevolent common people, coupled with good governance, that there should be peace under the heavens. This list of desired outcomes for preschool children deliberately downplayed academic learning and debunked a common public myth that "preschool" was entirely about preparation for academic learning in primary school. Instead, the list makes a statement about focusing on developing young children with positive dispositions, in order to prepare them for school. It also hints that preschoolers should be educated to ultimately fit into a society that values hardworking citizens who are law-abiding, who value order, and who are respectful and considerate toward others.

Curriculum Framework

The Steering Committee aimed also to translate the desired outcomes into a curriculum framework that will guide preschools in offering age-appropriate learning activities in five domains: moral, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical domains (MOE, 2000 COS debate). In January 2003, the MOE published a curriculum framework, "Nurturing Early Learners: A Framework for Kindergarten Curriculum in Singapore," and announced that it was field-tested at preschools between January 2001 and November 2002 (MOE Tharman speech, 2003). This was launched as a national *recommendation* rather than as a prescription for preschools. It emphasizes six core curricular principles (MOE, 2003) that could be fulfilled by most planned curriculum models and approaches: holistic development and learning, integrated learning, active learning, supported learning, learning through interactions, and learning through play.

The document is deliberately broad in its guiding principles, but apparent in encouraging a holistic and play-based approach to children's development and learning. The framework does not require preschool curriculum to be standardized. It leaves a lot of room for preschools to design their own educational programs and activities, simply because these curricular principles do not contradict those found in popular early childhood curriculum texts that are in their fifth edition and beyond (e.g., Eliason & Jenkins, 2007; Jackman, 2011; Kostelnik, Soderman & Whiren, 2010; Wortham, 2009). In scrutinizing the "Nurturing Early Learners" documents, a critique of such a curriculum framework would be its underscoring of the Singaporean multicultural social context in which preschoolers, families, and preschool teachers live and work (Ang, 2006; Lim, 2004).

Six years after launching the framework, in 2009, the MOE published the "Kindergarten Curriculum Guide" as a complementary document to encourage preschools to continue designing play-based curriculum and use more interactive teaching approaches. It also places an emphasis on teacher professionalism and growth.

Having such a broad curriculum guideline still means that preschools are left with the responsibility of ensuring that children transition smoothly from preschool to primary school, since the framework does not stipulate a standard national set of curricular goals for what is deemed the chief concern by many families – English and Mathematics – such that they dovetail into the academic expectations of Primary One (age 7). In reality, the range of quality and types of curricular approaches across the entire private sector of kindergartens and childcare centers vary in both form and substance. Some are more focused on free play, and others are more focused on academic work. As noted earlier, these include preschools using specific models and approaches such as the Montessori Method, Waldorf-Steiner, a Reggio Emilia-influenced approach, Project Approach, self-designed thematic curriculum, direct instruction methods (e.g., Success for All), and Vygotskian *Key to Learning*. There are also preschools promoting different religious values and beliefs through their curriculum, such as Catholic, Protestant, Islamic, and Soka; these tend to be operated and funded by religious establishments such as churches and mosques.

It is noteworthy that despite the freedom that preschools have in branding themselves, many preschools may give in to the expectations of the families that they profess to serve, because their existence as private entities is largely dependent on enrollment numbers that translate to school fees and earnings. Nevertheless, even if the "Nurturing Early Learners" is not a standard prescribed national preschool curriculum, we recognize that its launch as an MOE recommendation has served to influence the thinking of preschool educators and families in the nation (i.e., those who have access to this news and understand the implications). The message was further emphasized by the subsequent publication of the "Kindergarten Curriculum Guide." How effective has the message been? At best, it has encouraged preschools to offer a holistic, and possibly integrated, child-friendly curriculum, one that de-emphasizes rote learning and does not offer a watered-down version of the primary school curriculum. At worst, the ambiguity of the curriculum framework could be a signal to preschools that they can continue the way they have been, as long as their curriculum is *communicated* to families as being aligned with the six principles. As private businesses, preschools are dependent on student enrollment to keep their doors open; as such, they are responsible to cater to families' requests, including requests to include more academic work in their curriculum.

In February 2013, the Refreshed Kindergarten Curriculum Framework was launched. The Senior Minister of State of Law and Education, Indranee Rajah, announced that "purposeful play" is one of the teaching approaches advocated by the Refreshed Kindergarten Curriculum Framework. This document spelled out the six learning areas for preschoolers, namely, language and literacy, motor skills development, aesthetics and creative expression, discovery of the world, numeracy, and social and emotional development. Following hot on the heels of the launch of the Refreshed Kindergarten Curriculum Framework, MOE launched the Guide and Resources for Preschool Educators on the same year (MOE, 2013).

Infant/toddler programs were recently in the spotlight when the MCYS launched the Early Years Development Framework to complement the kindergarten frame-

work (MCYS, 2011). Breaking years of silence, ever since the demand for center-based infant care has increased, this MCYS framework is written once again as a "recommendation" with no mandatory list of outcomes, but firmly establishes the need to nurture secure attachment and holistic growth. In doing so, it aims to counter programs that may be inundated with developmentally inappropriate academic learning.

For as long as two government agencies are involved in raising quality in preschool, and there are differentiated policies in preschool and primary, the journey toward curriculum reform in Singapore's ECE will continue in a similarly decentralized yet occasionally regulated manner. ECDA will have to harmonise legislation for child care and kindergartens as well as create greater policy coherence. To overcome limitations in policy-making, there needs to be more open learning among educators across kindergartens, childcare centers, and primary schools so that the notion of "school readiness" can be demystified, and the pressure is taken off individual children to *be* ready for school when she/he turns seven, and more developmentally appropriate practices can be cultivated in both preschools and in earlier years of primary school. Lastly, the government would need to provide a minimum of a code of ethics and/or standards for programs that integrate preschoolers with special educational needs. In an era where there is much concern about the need to serve the best interests of the child (UN Convention of the Rights of the Child), there is a need for the preschool sector to become more inclusive in its practices, especially since there seems to be a growing trend of children entering primary schools with additional educational needs (Leow & Quek, 2010).

New Standards for ECE Teachers

More recent industry standards have been stipulated by the MOE (2008) following initial ones set in 2000, that by January 2013, three in four registered K1 and K2 teachers (i.e., working with 4- to 6-year-olds) were to be trained up to the Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education – Teaching level and by January 2006, all preschool principals should have attained a Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education-Teaching, a Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education-Leadership, and at least 2 years of relevant experience in the preschool sector. The MOE reported that the sector is on-track in meeting these targets. In January 2011, 86 % of kindergarten teachers and 70 % of childcare teachers had attained the DECCE-T or were undergoing training for it.

Although preschool teachers are not recruited by the MOE, the Ministry has found a mediating position in helping the private sector recruit more teachers. One way it has done so is by collaborating with the Workforce Development Agency to provide relevant information to the public, so as to facilitate recruitment efforts, especially from mid-career switchers (especially graduates), who are either retrenched from another sector or are volunteering to switch sectors because they

have always had the passion to work with young children. Additionally, the MOE has also supported the local polytechnics to develop and offer full-time, three-year early childhood related diploma programs to secondary school leavers (typically 16-year-olds).

In terms of remuneration, the preschool teacher earns significantly less than a teacher employed by the MOE in a primary school. Before the turn-of-the-millennium government initiatives, the sector has traditionally been viewed as child-minding work, not unlike elsewhere in the world (Fromberg, 2003). Hence, many of the preschool teachers tended to be less academically qualified women who sometimes came from lower-income families. Recently, the demography of the sector has widened, as an increasing number of younger teachers have graduated from the polytechnic early childhood programs and have entered the field. However, the status of preschool teachers has remained low, partly due to the low wages they receive. Moreover, teacher attrition seems to be a growing problem as many preschools continue to have difficulty hiring teachers. Preschool teaching job vacancies have become noticeably high in the last 2 years, through an initial browse in online job recruitment advertisements.

Currently, a qualified preschool teacher earns an average of about S$15,000 to S$24,000 per year. In contrast, the MOE recruits the top third of each graduating high school cohort into a fully paid 4-year teacher education degree program or a 1- to 2-year graduate program, if they are already degree holders. These preservice teachers are put on the MOE payroll, even when they are at the NIE completing their professional programs. An average primary school teacher with a degree, and 3 years of teaching experience, can earn up to S$58,000 a year.

In terms of career advancement, preschool teachers can look forward to becoming a preschool principal as a career advancement opportunity, although some organizations create middle-level positions such as a "senior teacher" or "level coordinator." One of the first in the preschool sector to introduce positions such as the "mentor teacher" and "senior principal" was the NTUC First Campus (First Campus, 2010). Due to the fact that the preschool sector is not centrally organized by the government (unlike the primary and secondary schools), such career advancement opportunities are dependent on the creativity and resource of individual preschool institutions and organizations. In contrast, the government schools sector has already had in place, for at least two decades now, a rather sophisticated career opportunities map for its teachers in primary and secondary schools (ranging from various middle-management positions in schools to positions in the MOE Headquarters as curriculum specialists, senior and mentor teachers, and other leadership positions).

Guidelines for ECE Teacher Education

Teacher education programs are available for preschool teachers for part-time study, and are almost entirely provided by commercial institutions, while primary and secondary school teachers are prepared full-time at the National Institute of Education (NIE), affiliated to one of the four publicly funded universities in Singapore – the Nanyang Technological University. This is the only university with a school of education, and the NIE has had a 60-year history as the sole teacher preparation institution in the nation, working collaboratively with the Ministry of Education, to constantly adapt its offerings in relation to changing needs and demands in the education landscape. In the last decade, it has also jump-started its research programs to grow more indigenous knowledge, to better inform mainstream classroom practices and educational policies. Over the years, the NIE did offer different kinds of early childhood certificate and diploma programs when the private teacher training sector was yet in formation, but all these programs have gradually been overshadowed by its core business of preparing primary and secondary school teachers for the government-run schools. NIE stopped offering early childhood preservice programs altogether in the year 2003, in part, due to the saturation of private teacher training agencies appearing in the market, after the government announced new industry standards for preschool teachers.

Preschool teacher education in a nation that places such high value on children's education has been rather under-established compared to even the earlier forms of teacher education for primary and secondary teachers. Introduced in the late 1960s and early 1970s, professional education for preschool teachers was minimal and largely ad hoc and impromptu. Today, although Singaporean families are increasingly expecting preschool teachers to be professionally prepared to both care for, and educate their children, the preschool teacher preparation sector has remained largely privatized, with minimal government regulation, and its existence is determined largely by supply and demand in a free market. This translates to potentially uneven program quality across the many private training agencies.

A significant ECE policy milestone was, however, achieved in the year 2001, when a joint MOE-MCYS committee, known as the Preschool Qualification Accreditation Committee, was formed to create a model framework for preschool education teacher training and accreditation of training courses. This was the government's move toward raising the level of professionalism in the preschool sector, given that the majority of preschool teacher preparation was conducted by trainers, in an entirely private and largely commercial sector. Competition is stiff in the private teacher training sector, with several agencies starting up and closing within a few years. In 2002, 17 training agencies were approved by the Preschool Qualification Accreditation Committee; in 2006, the number increased to 27; and in 2010, the number fell to 15. As more private training agencies were set up, the NIE stopped offering ECE programs at the certificate and diploma levels. It now only has Masters and PhD programs with specializations in early childhood.

Table 12.4 PQAC-accredited programs

Program	Total number of hours	Practical component (included in total number of hours)	Program entry requirement
Certificate in Early Childhood Care and Education (CECE)	800 hours 24 months part-time or 12 months full-time	240 hours of supervised teaching practicum	Applicants with least three GCE "O" level credits including English or Chinese language (if pursuing the training in Mandarin)
Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education – Teaching (DECCE-T)	1200 hours 36 months part-time or 20 months full-time	300 hours of supervised teaching practicum	At least five GCE "O" level credits including at least a B4 grade in English as first language or mother tongue language for mother tongue teacher
Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education – Leadership (DECCE-L)	850 hours 24 months part-time or 12 months full-time	200 hours of supervised leadership practicum	Applicants to have completed DECCE-T
Specialist Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education (SDECE)	1600 hours 36 months part-time or 24 months full-time	500 hours of supervised teaching and leadership practicum	Polytechnic graduates and degree holders in other fields

The Preschool Qualification Accreditation Committee has specified in its teacher training framework, minimum professional training hours, and general topics that should be included in the course content. In the 1970s, preschool teachers would normally undergo some form of basic and fundamental training ranging from 60 to 120 hours, but apart from these basic courses, professional training was ad hoc and often consisted of stand-alone workshops. Today, the Preschool Qualification Accreditation Committee accredits the four nondegree professional certifications described in Table 12.4. Within the general guideline of program duration and topics, however, training agencies still have plenty of leeway to determine the quantity and quality of scholarly and professional tasks that its trainers (many of whom offer their services to different training agencies on a part-time basis) would offer the candidates, and this includes the liberty to design appropriate modes of assessment.

The most recent additions to the list of preschool professional qualifications are two similar programs developed in collaboration between the MOE, MCYS, and Workforce Development Agency (i.e., Workforce Skills Qualifications [WSQ] programs). These two additions are 700-hour or 900-hour "place-and-train" programs, initiated to enhance the recruitment of qualified mid-career entrants and more academically qualified fresh graduates:

1. Advanced Diploma in Kindergarten Education – Teaching, taught at the Singapore Polytechnic (one of five polytechnics in the country), is also known as the WSQ Professional Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education (Kindergarten) and prepares candidates to work with children aged 4 to 6 years in a kindergarten setting.
2. WSQ Professional Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education (Childcare), taught at SEED Institute (formerly RTRC, affiliated with NTUC's *First Campus* childcare centers), prepares candidates to work with children from 2 months to 6 years, at a childcare setting.

Applicants to these two programs would need to first be employed by a preschool and then undergo an accelerated program of work and study at a registered kindergarten or childcare center, for about 10 months. Other non-preschool Qualification Accreditation Committee-accredited courses that are required by the MCYS for childcare teachers are the Certificate in Infant/Toddler Care and Development, as well as the Child First Aid Courses at approved training agencies.

Apart from the professional preservice programs described thus far, there are few offerings in terms of professional development programs for preschool teachers, other than brief workshops and courses listed on the MOE and MCYS websites (these are usually related to the 2013 Nurturing Early Learners curriculum framework, helping teachers put principles into practice). Otherwise, private training agencies are free to organize their own professional development programs and to offer them nationwide to preschool teachers. Before ECDA, the MOE had been organizing an annual Kindergarten Learning Forum (year-end) and a midyear Kindergarten Conference, while the MCYS had been organizing the Annual Childcare Seminar for at least 10 years. The ECDA now organises one large conference for the combined total of about 1800 child care centres and kindergartens. Many teachers are generally keen to keep honing their teaching skills, so those who can afford the fees would continue in their professional learning by enrolling in an early childhood degree program and, for some, a master's program. At the moment, the government has not made it a requirement for preschool teachers to have a degree, while it has announced that it would be able to meet an all-graduate teacher recruitment by 2015, for all primary and secondary schools. Early childhood degree programs are, by and large, offered by private training agencies that collaborate with international universities from the UK, USA, and Australia. The only bachelor degree program offered by a local university is the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education conducted by SIM University.

An initiative by the MCYS for the childcare sector is the creation of a professional sharing platform known as the Child Development Network (MCYS, 2010a, 2010b). It aims to raise quality by strengthening professional interactions among members of the early childhood community, growing center-based action research, training of mentor-leaders for childcare centers, and inviting international experts to share research and good practices through public lectures and workshops.

The PQAC was renamed Early Childhood Teacher Accreditation Committee (ECTAC) when the ECDA was established in 2012. For a listing of agencies

conducting early childhood training courses approved by the ECDA, see ECTAC (2015) where only four postsecondary education institutions (PSEIs) were listed under ECDA and ten private training agencies (PTAs) remain on the list.

The following post-EIU (2012) initiatives of the ECDA demonstrated a comprehensive plan to enhance the quality of the preschool environment in Singapore, specifically those related to teacher training/education. The first of two initiatives (2014e, October, 9) involved the introduction of a new Institute of Technical Education (ITE) Training Award to support more students who intend to pursue a career in the EC sector. Students taking the Higher Nitec in Early Childhood Education (at ITE) will receive full support for course fees, a monthly allowance, and a resource support grant, a grant for professional development. They have the flexibility of applying for the award at the start or midway through the Higher Nitec program. The award will incur a one-year bond to the sector for each year of support. The second initiative will benefit in-service professionals who are keen to pursue a leadership role in their centers. They will be eligible to apply for a new Advanced Diploma in Early Childhood Leadership (ADECL), offered at the Polytechnics from 2016. The modular structure of the program and a blended learning instructional mode of the program will allow for greater flexibility for participants to balance work and professional upgrading. The ADECL will replace the current Diploma in ECCE – Leadership (DECCE-L).

Besides efforts aimed at raising the quality of early childhood (EC) professionals, ECDA attempted to increase the attraction of EC professionals. At the ECDA's inaugural Early Childhood Conference on November 20, 2013, the then Minister of Social and Family Development (MSF), Mr. Chan Chun Sing, announced a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Masterplan for the early childhood sector (ECDA, 2013b, November 20). The CPD Masterplan comprises three components: a structured professional development roadmap outlining key competencies and responsibilities of various roles that EC professional could take up that included the teaching and leadership pathways to cater to the different aspirations of EC professionals, culminating in the mentor principals and master teachers at the pinnacle of their career roadmap. The second component comprises the core and milestone CPD courses to be developed in consultation with the sector. The third component outlines the incentives and recognition for teachers who have fulfilled the recommended CPD hours and courses and gained a number of years of experience in the sector.

In recent years, the ECDA has expended much effort to enhance the skills and career development of early childhood educators. In September 2014 (ECDA, 2014c), the then MSF Minister, Mr. Chan Chun Sing, announced three initiatives to develop and recognize early childhood (EC) professionals at ECDA's Early Childhood Conference. The first involved developing structured competency-based career pathways for the EC sector. The pathways within organizations will now include roles such as mentor principals and principal supervisor (compared to the single role of principal/center supervisor previously available) and master teacher and lead teacher (whereas only the kindergarten teacher role was previously available). Additional ranks of kindergarten teacher and nursery teacher have been added. The second initiative involves providing more development opportunities for

EC professionals at different stages of their careers. The third involves recognizing and tapping on exemplary leaders and professionals as ECDA Fellows. The second initiative was further detailed in a subsequent ECDA press release (ECDA, 2015f). It outlined the introduction of a structured program – the Professional Development Program (PDP, for short). This program is meant to help preschool teachers develop themselves to take on larger job roles in their organizations via a combination of modular courses, projects, and continuing professional development offerings to develop their knowledge and skills while concurrently holding onto a paid job. Cash awards offered after they have met key program and services milestones were offered over a 3-year period as an incentive for attaining competencies and achievements during the program. The first batch of PDP participants (teachers) were nominated during the period from October 1 to October 31, 2015. Similar programs were introduced for educarers and leaders (ECDA, 2015e, August 20) subsequently. This involved a qualifications (WSQ) new place-and-train (PnT) program to equip educarer trainees with competencies to support young children's learning and development. They will also benefit from the program's structured work and study model and receive the ECDA-recognized Singapore Workforce Skills certification upon completion of the program. The third initiative involves recognizing and tapping on exemplary leaders and professional as ECDA Fellows.

The first batch of 14 ECDA Fellows were appointed by ECDA on May 6, 2015. They were earmarked to drive quality improvements in the EC sector and develop the fraternity of EC professionals. They were appointed based on the following selection criteria: demonstrating professional expertise in teaching and learning; ability to foster creativity and innovation to establish practices in early childhood education; strong leadership in building a culture of professionalism, collaboration, trust, and teamwork among the early childhood fraternity; ability to build a culture of lifelong learning through continuing professional development and growth; and ability to build partnerships and networks to harness resources for sustained impact and effective implementation (ECDA, 2015b, May 6).

Perhaps ECDA's press release of 2016 (May 4) will point to the way forward for preschool teachers who can look to a more structured and diversified career pathway in the near future. The present MSF Minister, Mr. Tan Chuan-Jin, elaborated on the details of the ECDA's Professional Development Program (PDP) (first announced in September 2015) for preschool teachers with the potential to take on larger roles stand to gain from milestone1 cash awards of up to $12,000. ECDA has set aside $1.7 million for the cash awards for this batch of PDP participants over the next 3 years (ECDA, 2016b, May 4).

ECE Research

Research in the local early childhood field may be described as nascent, with many areas that university academics could exploit, to move the field toward greater excellence and understanding of the nature and characteristics of local children and

families. Worthwhile issues for investigation include the nature of childhood in an urban and contemporary society like Singapore, parenting styles and practices, educational program implementations and child outcomes, effects of privatization and program quality, as well as media and its impact on culture.

The government recognized the need to catalyze this in 1999, when it commissioned the NIE to design an intervention study to examine the longitudinal effects of preschool education. The study was to have been central in guiding government decisions about “optimal investment” in preschool education, to see if early education was indeed significant in raising the overall capacity of Singaporeans (MOE, 2000), as reported by well-known longitudinal studies such as the 1960s Perry Preschool Project, the 1990s National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Longitudinal Study of Early Childcare in the USA, and the late 1990s Effective Provision of Preschool Education project (EPPE) in the UK. The NIE Pilot Research Study took place over a two-year period, involving curriculum intervention, mostly in kindergartens operated by VWOs, and several VWO childcare centers. The research findings were announced at the launch of “Nurturing Early Learners” and suggested that a holistic and integrated play-based curriculum provided children with a linguistically richer and more engaging learning environment, which especially benefited children from lower socioeconomic and non-English-speaking backgrounds (MOE, 2003).

In 2011, the MOE supported the establishment of an experimental kindergarten at Temasek Polytechnic. The aim is to innovate and conduct research in curriculum and teaching strategies. It is the first of its kind in Singapore, another example of government’s indirect intervention in the ECE sector to catalyze local efforts in curricular innovation. Since 2013, the MOE has also created 15 pilot kindergartens to focus on curricular innovations and teacher development.

An ongoing research endeavor is the Focused Language Assistance in Reading (FLAiR) intervention project. In 2007, the MOE announced its approach to enhance school readiness of preschool-aged children (i.e., 4- to 6-year-olds), along with strategies to work toward 100 % preschool attendance. The approach consists of three strategies (Tan, 2007):

1. Identify preschool-attending children with inadequate language foundation, so that Focused Language Assistance in Reading (FLAiR) could be provided while they are in preschool.
2. Identify 5-year-old children who do not attend preschool and encourage their attendance.
3. Identify 6-year-old children not attending preschool during the annual Primary One registration exercise, and encourage them to attend preschool, even if it is for the few months prior to entering Primary One.

As part of the first strategy listed above, the MOE FLAiR project (2007) has been designed as an intervention program to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds, to obtain the necessary foundation in the English language that is believed

to be crucial for school success, since all primary schools in Singapore utilize the English language as the main language of instruction for most subjects. In 2010, 1400 children from 137 eligible kindergartens participated in FLAiR, an increase from 570 children (from 54 eligible kindergartens) in 2008 (Ministry of Education, 2010).

Such a focus on preschool as intervention to raise children's level of English is not new; in the late 1970s, the government piloted pre-primary programs offered in historically Chinese-medium schools (now called the Special Assistance Program (SAP) schools). A key assumption in this view is that English is important for success in formal schooling (not unlike the US system, where many children from non-English-speaking homes become disadvantaged in public schools). Such an expectation on preschoolers to hone their English language listening and speaking skills also implies a high expectation of preschool teachers to be fluent and accurate in their use of the English language. Teachers who do not meet minimal levels of English language proficiency now have to undergo courses conducted by the Workforce Development Agency (MOE, 2007). Despite the bilingual educational policy, English continues to be a language of the twenty-first-century modernization, since Singapore lies at the crossroads of global communications and commerce.

In the childcare segment, the MCYS has recently commissioned the NIE to conduct a study to measure the quality of infant/toddler programs across 160 centers, using the Infant and Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R) (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2006). The MCYS also aims to encourage center-based action research projects, through the Early Childhood Research Fund (ECRF). These government initiatives have focused on aspects that would inform governmentality. However, much more research, especially quality research, needs to be carried out, if the EC field is to grow toward improving the daily lives of children, their families, and those of preschool educators.

ECE Quality Assurance

A few local studies have been conducted on preschool quality, and these have used the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 1998), to examine the effects of preschool quality on language and socio-emotional outcomes. Kwan, Sylva, and Reeves (1998) and Kwan and Sylva (2001) have studied children in 16 daycare centers. As part of the MOE's quest to raise quality in a privatized kindergarten sector, it announced in 2008 that it was developing a new voluntary quality assurance framework, based on a locally developed quality rating scale. By end 2009, about 80 % of kindergartens had already trialed a version of the scale, as a self-evaluation tool. Subsequently, the MCYS announced that the scale

would also be recommended for childcare centers to evaluate their kindergarten programs. Revised and launched in 2010 as the Singapore Preschool Accreditation Framework (SPARK), this quality rating scale is the fulfillment of earlier promises made in the year 2000, to strengthen government regulation beyond registration and licensing. The SPARK provides preschools with a systematic approach to review their structures, processes, and outcomes. The MOE has tested the instrument in a variety of preschool settings for reliability, and it is also validated against other internationally recognized assessment tools, such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998). Therefore, the MOE states that it is a reliable tool for both kindergartens and childcare centers, and applications for external quality assessments began in 2011 (MOE, 2010). The government anticipates that the quality rating of preschools will enable parents to make informed choices about kindergartens and childcare centers for their children. In 2012, 69 kindergartens and childcare centers have attained SPARK certification for 2011–2013. In 2014, the ratio of SPARK-accredited kindergartens is 1 in 4, while that for childcare centers is 1 in 7. Since then, ECDA has taken steps to make SPARK assessment more accessible to center leaders and teachers and continued its efforts to encourage more centers to be SPARK-certified. For instance, a SPARK information package has been developed and distributed to all centers to enhance understanding of SPARK. Moreover, additional and targeted training is being conducted on key quality areas assessed under SPARK (ECDA, 2014d).

The governing strategy of the private preschool sector has remained unchanged all these years; it is guided by a continuous adaptation of the machinery that has been established and a fine-tuning of the public-private, government-individual equilibrium:

> *MOE's approach is to set broad parameters for kindergarten education to ensure a baseline of quality, while preserving the richness and diversity that comes from having a range of operators and models. This provides leeway for parents with different preferences, to choose the option that best meets their needs. And their needs can vary; some might choose religious-based models to steep their children in religious knowledge since young.* (MOE, 2009)

During the past few years, the government has adopted two schemes aimed at managing the wide range of operators: one is the establishment of a group known as anchor operators (AOP); another is the appointment of partner operators (POP). The then Minister of Social and Family Development, Tan Chuan-Jin, announced that 23 new partner operators (who run a total of 169 existing childcare centers) had been appointed by ECDA to complement the anchor operators earlier appointed. The POP scheme will benefit 16,500 children. Both these categories of operators will provide parents with more quality and affordable early childhood options (ECDA, 2015f, October 19). A condition of the POP scheme is that operators are required to cap full-day childcare fees at the national median of $800 and to keep fee increases affordable. From January 1, 2016, Singaporean children enrolled in POP centers will also benefit from a one-off reduction in fees. These centers are also required to

attain SPARK certification and to provide support for their teachers' professional development and career progression.

Beneficiaries of Calculated Governance

The private and liberal nature of the preschool sector is likely to remain in the next decade, because of the Singapore government's unwavering belief that families should continue to have a choice in how they would like to educate and care for their young children. Families should decide if they want their youngest members to have a strong foundation in religious, cultural values and/or an academic head start. These main priorities of governance lie at the foundation of all educational policies, including a light-touch approach toward the preschool market: to strive to stay relevant in the twenty-first-century world economy and to remain a socially cohesive society. A continuous effort is being made to enhance the quality of preschool education, within its particular situated context, just as many economically advanced countries are striving toward.

As described in this chapter, Singapore's goals to raise preschool quality may be the same as those in many other nations, but the strategies may be different. The ECDA has been set up to streamline governance of child care centres and kindergartens and the government continues to play a more active role in improving the quality of preschool programs, without nationalizing early years' education or making it a universal provision.

While some countries may choose to address pre-primary-to-primary transition issues, by including at least 1 year of preschool in the public school system, Singapore has opted to exclude preschool from being made part of compulsory education, which begins from the year children turn 7. In addition, there are multi-pronged approaches that represent indirect government intervention, for instance, the FLAiR project to enhance English language ability and school readiness of preschool-aged children (i.e., 4- to 6-year-olds), government collaborations with grassroots organizations to work toward 100 % preschool attendance, and a quality assurance framework in place to nudge preschools into fitting within a particular "quality" mold.

The jury is still out on whether Singapore's "light-touch" government strategies, coupled with a penetrating gaze, would work in the next decade. Some of the issues and developments to look out for include (a) the impact of an increasingly commercial childcare sector that includes franchises, but little regulation of program quality across franchisees; (b) the outcome of encouraging families to decide and "choose" from a free market of preschools that continue to dictate fee structure and curriculum, when it may actually be Hobson's choice for the lower-income segment of families; and (c) teacher attrition rates despite saturation and high enrollment at private early childhood teacher education agencies and polytechnics.

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Chapter 13
Early Childhood Education in Taiwan

Eva E. Chen and Hui Li

Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) in Taiwan has evolved significantly over the past hundred years. Understanding Taiwanese ECE development requires understanding how Taiwan developed as a society. Occupied by mainland Chinese immigrants in the seventeenth century and colonized by the Japanese before and during World War II, Taiwan has only been able to form its own identity, including its education philosophies and practices, in the past 60 years. Despite this slow start, ECE has become increasingly recognized as an essential part of the national education system, drawing the attention of government officials and civilians alike.

In this chapter, we first review the historical development of ECE in Taiwan. Next, we highlight recent policies implemented by the Taiwanese government to improve ECE affordability and accessibility for children under 5 years of age. Third, we discuss myriad efforts by the government to improve accountability of ECE service providers and the quality of ECE available to children. Finally, we highlight lessons other Chinese societies can learn from Taiwan. To summarize, this review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of ECE in Taiwan to serve and help scholars conducting research in this field.

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History of Early Childhood Education in Taiwan

Identifying origins of ECE in Taiwan can be difficult, as different foreign entities have ruled the island for two centuries, resulting in a variety of policies regarding education of young children. Development of Taiwanese ECE can be divided into several time periods. We focus on the two most important periods, the era of Japanese colonization and the years following World War II.

The Japanese Colonial Period

The first recorded kindergarten in Taiwan was established in 1897, six years earlier than the first kindergarten established in Mainland China (Feng, 2017, Chapter 4). In the preceding year, members of the Taiwanese elite in Tainan City (located in the southern part of the island) had formed the Tainan Education Society to research and develop an education system for Taiwan (Lin, 2009). Shortly after the organization's formation, society member and former Qing Dynasty scholar Meng-Hsiung Tsai visited several ECE centers in Kyoto, Osaka, and other cities in Japan. Observing the benefits of such an education on young Japanese children, Tsai decided upon his return to create a kindergarten in Tainan City. After Tsai secured approval and financial support from the Tainan County Government, a kindergarten was built on the grounds of the Guandi Temple in 1897 (Lin, 2009; Lin & Ching, 2012; Lin & Yang, 2007). Tsai served as the Guandi Temple Kindergarten's principal and hired two women who had been educated in teachers' colleges as staff. The first 20 students were recruited from wealthy families and from families with governmental ties. In 1901, the Private Taipei Kindergarten was subsequently established by the Japanese colonial government, catering only to Japanese children living in Taiwan at first, but eventually accepting local Taiwanese children as well (Lin & Yang, 2007).

The creation of daycare centers, in contrast, was considerably more organic, motivated less by educational ideology, and more by practical concerns. The first recorded daycare center, the Taitung Lu Yeh Village Daycare Center was created in 1928, primarily to provide childcare services to Japanese colonial families (Lin & Yang, 2007). In 1932, the first daycare center for Taiwanese families, the Hsinchu Tong Luo Village San Zhuo Cuo Harvest Season Daycare Center, was established by Deh-Fung Lai, a Taiwanese landowner, so that the farmers under his employment could focus on crop harvesting without worrying about childcare. Eventually, as the number of daycare centers grew, the Japanese government consolidated the daycare centers, classifying them as social welfare (as opposed to educational) services, initiating the split between kindergartens and daycare centers within ECE in Taiwan (Lin & Yang, 2007).

The Post-World War II Period

In 1949, after World War II, Taiwan was returned to the Republic of China. Upon the departure of the Japanese, the newly formed national government decided to revert to the pre-war Chinese education system. The Standards of Kindergarten Curriculum, established in 1932, and the Kindergarten Establishment Plan, published in 1943, were reinstated; these two policies are currently still in use, though both have been revised several times since (Lin & Yang, 2007). The increasing numbers of women joining the workforce after the war made institutional childcare especially necessary. However, the government's resources had been drained during the war, and budget issues continued in the postwar years. Thus, although there were initially more public kindergartens, in 1961, the number of private kindergartens surpassed the number of public ones – a pattern that holds even today (Ho, 2006; Li & Wang, 2017, Chapter 14; Lin & Yang, 2007; Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2012). Despite the financial challenges faced by the Taiwanese government in supporting ECE on its own, it did officially recognize ECE centers that focused on 4- to 6-year-old children as "kindergartens" in 1956 (Lin & Ching, 2012). In the 1950s, the government also established a number of village daycare centers and military dependents' kindergartens, to provide childcare support to farmers and military staff (Chiu & Wu, 2003).

In the 1970s, generous governmental investment in major infrastructure projects led to rapid economic development. As a result, the government was able to attend more closely to ECE, passing the Child Welfare Law in 1973, the Daycare Center Establishment Measure in 1977, the Early Childhood Education Act and the Guidelines of Establishment of Nursery School in 1981, and the Statute for Encouragement of Establishing Private Kindergarten in 1983 (Chiu & Wu, 2003; Lin, 2002; Lin & Tsai, 1996). These regulations have brought advancements in ECE governance, solidifying a foundation for rapid development of kindergartens in Taiwan. Due to high demand and governmental endorsement, the number of kindergartens increased rapidly during this period. However, especially since most of the kindergartens were privately run, quality was not closely monitored. Serious concerns over the kind of education young Taiwanese children were receiving arose in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The year 1987 marked a turning point, when martial law was finally lifted, and society transitioned into an open democracy (Ho, 2006). In the same year, the Standards of Kindergarten Curriculum was revised and published, as a reference for service providers (Lin & Tsai, 1996). Soon after, the government began to devote more time to preschool education, intending to extend compulsory education down by a year, into kindergarten, and building more public kindergartens in the 1990s (Ho, 2006). Around the same time, the Ministry of the Interior also began to plan for more publicly funded daycare centers (Ho, 2006). In 1994, over 200 educational organizations initiated a call for education reform, prompting the government to form a Commission on Education Reform (Chiu & Wu, 2003). The Commission produced an Education Reform Action Plan in 1998, which included 12 key points

for improvement, one of which was to make preschool education more accessible to families with 5-year-olds (Yang, 2001).

The government began to take more assertive steps to reform ECE in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Lin, 2007), passing a number of laws specifically on early childhood education. Additionally, in 2005, the Ministry of Education terminated the largely ineffective kindergarten accreditation system and, in the following year, launched a nationwide five-year consultation program with university-affiliated child development experts (Li & Wang, 2017, Chap. 14). Finally, the government initiated important policies to streamline the education system, including the following: (a) the implementation of an ECE voucher plan, providing financial assistance to eligible families in Taiwan; (b) the subsequent provision of free education for 5-year-olds; (c) the provision of additional support to children from disadvantaged families; (d) the integration of kindergarten and daycare center systems; (e) the creation of government-supported, privately operated kindergartens; and (f) the initiation of a teacher certification system (Li & Wang, 2017, Chap. 14; Lin, 2007). These recent laws and policies reflect the government's newfound and increasing dedication to early childhood institutions. We discuss the recent laws and policies below. In particular, we focus on how these policies have improved the affordability and accessibility of kindergartens for children, as well as strengthened the overall accountability of ECE services in Taiwan.

Financing Early Childhood Education in Taiwan

Introduction of the Early Childhood Education Voucher System

Given the high number of private kindergartens and daycare centers in Taiwan, relative to the number of public kindergartens and daycare centers, one major concern for parents and teachers alike is whether families can afford to send their young children to school. The push to make ECE more affordable and more accessible to Taiwanese families was bottom-up in nature, beginning with a grassroots movement that led to policy changes in the government. In recent years, the federal government has implemented three initiatives to address these concerns: (a) creating an ECE voucher program, (b) providing free education for 5-year-olds, and (c) supporting young children from families in need.

Serious calls for ECE reform began with the 410 March for Educational Reform on April 10, 1994 (Khoo & Wu, 2001). Over 30,000 people who represented approximately 200 educational organizations took to the streets to protest the quality of education available in Taiwan, from pre-primary to higher education. Among the many demands, the protestors called for help to families of young children with the costs of attending pre-primary school. The magnitude of the march led the then-Minister of Education, Wei-Fan Guo, to suggest the usage of education vouchers to help parents finance pre-primary school; with more financial support, parents would

be able to select from a wider range of schools. In September of the same year, Minister Guo formally proposed an ECE voucher program, targeted especially at children from financially disadvantaged families and children with learning disabilities (Khoo & Wu, 2001). In 1997, three years after the 410 March and Minister Guo's proposal, the Taipei city government formally proposed the implementation of an ECE voucher program. However, the proposal immediately experienced push-back from other local governments and congressmen, who questioned the feasibility of running the program successfully. Despite these reservations, the municipal authorities in Taipei and Kaohsiung implemented separate ECE voucher programs in the following year (Khoo & Wu, 2001). Because Taipei is the capital city of Taiwan and Kaohsiung is the largest city in southern Taiwan, the implementation of such revolutionary measures to improve ECE received much attention. Indeed, on October 18, 1998, the National Union of Preschool Education organized the 1018 March for Early Childhood Education, to push specifically for the implementation of the voucher program throughout Taiwan, so that the financial burden could be alleviated for all Taiwanese families (Khoo & Wu, 2001).

While public marches were being held and new governmental policies were being introduced, Taiwanese scholars began focusing their attention on ECE, specifically on the voucher system. In 1999, the National Taipei University of Education held a national academic forum on the ECE voucher system. Since the forum, a growing number of researchers in various Taiwanese academic institutions have investigated not only the impact of the voucher system on ECE, but also how the ECE field could be generally improved for young children. However, empirical studies conducted on the impact of the voucher system have been severely limited, and most research on ECE vouchers has been published in Chinese, thereby preventing non-Chinese-speaking scholars from taking part in academic discourse.

Attention on the implementation of ECE voucher systems reached its peak in 2000, when issues of ECE's affordability and accessibility became part of candidates' platforms during the presidential election. In particular, the presidential candidate of the then-incumbent Kuomintang Party, Chan Lien, proposed that the Ministry of Education design a centralized ECE voucher program, to be launched throughout the island (Chiu & Wu, 2003). Although Lien lost the presidential election, the government formally initiated the ECE voucher program under the leadership of the newly elected president, Shui-Bian Chen (Chiu & Wu, 2003; Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2003). The federal government in Taiwan announced that the program would address three important issues in the field: (a) the need to organize and use governmental resources more efficiently; (b) the need to improve the quality and standards of ECE services; and (c) the need to minimize the differences in costs between attending public schools and attending private schools, alleviating the financial burdens of families with young children. The voucher plan targeted 5-year-olds. The federal government would fund the plan, at least initially, and local governments would produce and distribute the vouchers.

Although the public view of Taiwan's adoption of the ECE voucher program was generally positive, critics have adopted a more pragmatic, even cynical, perspective. In particular, Ming-Sho Ho, a sociologist at the National Taiwan University, has

argued that the voucher policy was a political campaign advocated by private kindergarten owners in an effort to protect their own businesses (Ho, 2006). Ho has pointed out that the growth of public ECE services in the 1990s was largely perceived as a threat to the livelihood of private kindergarten owners. In response, they formed the National Union of Preschool Education, pushed for more protections for private preschools, and organized protests – including the 1018 March for Early Childhood Education. Private kindergarten owners were careful to align their goals with those of educational reform, acquiring support from the academic world, from families, and from both major political parties (Ho, 2006). These efforts were greatly bolstered by the fact that public school teachers were, and still are, unable to unionize, limiting the chances of a possible counter-narrative.

Regardless of motivations that led to the call for educational vouchers, the program was implemented throughout Taiwan. Once the voucher program was firmly established, the Child Welfare Bureau of the Ministry of the Interior commissioned an evaluative study to examine the general perception of the program. This study, published in 2007 by Khoo and Wu, revealed that the ECE program was generally perceived as being a step in the right direction. However, the actual impact of the voucher program on ECE was limited. Because the voucher program provided NTD 10,000 per year (about $333 in U.S. currency) for each family, the vouchers covered only about 5 % to 15 % of the total cost of sending children to pre-primary school. As a result, the voucher program made little difference in the schools parents chose for their children, and also had little effect, especially relative to governmental expectations, on narrowing the gap between the cost of attending private schools, and those of attending public schools. In addition, because the voucher program only targeted 5-year-olds, it provided no benefits for families with children who were younger than 5 years of age. Finally, because the voucher program provided financial assistance in the form of reimbursements, families were still expected to pay kindergarten fees themselves first, even those who were financially disadvantaged.

The effect that the ECE voucher program had on schools was also mixed. For instance, the voucher program frequently required each school to file the necessary paperwork with its local government, take on the responsibility of receiving funds from the government, and then distribute the voucher money to the families. In other words, the implementation of the voucher program became the school's responsibility, creating much more work for schools, and delaying families' access to the funds (Khoo & Wu, 2007). High-ranking government officials also voiced their concerns. The Minister of the Interior at the time, Bo-Yah Chang, announced that due to limits in the governmental budget, the voucher program could force cuts in other child support services (Khoo & Wu, 2001). Additionally, the then newly appointed Minister of Education, Ovid Tseng, expressed his doubts about the long-term efficacy of the system in solving issues of affordability and accessibility in ECE (Khoo & Wu, 2007).

On the other hand, there was general consensus among parents and education experts that the program was still beneficial, especially to low-income families. In particular, there were substantial improvements in school accountability, since the

voucher program spurred numerous unregistered kindergartens and even daycare centers to register for legal status (Khoo & Wu, 2007). In summary, although many concerns arose when the program was implemented, there was overall acknowledgment that providing vouchers for ECE was a good and important use of governmental resources. Parents and educators alike agreed that it would be beneficial for the voucher program to remain, though they also agreed that the financial support that the vouchers provided needed to be increased, in order for substantive improvements in ECE to be seen (Khoo & Wu, 2007).

Increasing Funding for More Children

In 2004, the Ministry of Education initiated more substantial support of education of 5-year-olds from disadvantaged families (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2008). This plan was extended in 2007 to further improve the quality of pre-primary education for students (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2008). During his 2008 presidential campaign, President Ying-Jeou Ma promised continued efforts to make pre-primary education free for all 5-year-olds, instead of relying on vouchers to subsidize the costs of schooling (Taiwan Ministry of Education & Ministry of the Interior, 2011). In addition to concerns that were already highlighted in past educational reform efforts (e.g., affordable private school tuition), the government had other concerns. One primary concern was to provide quality pre-primary education for the socially disadvantaged, particularly vulnerable populations, including children of low-income families, children living in remote communities (e.g., neighboring archipelago counties of Kinmen, Matsu, and Penghu), children from ethnic minorities (e.g., aborigine groups), and children of young parents (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2008; Taiwan Ministry of Education & Ministry of the Interior, 2011). A second societal concern was the rapidly falling birthrate in Taiwan; in 1995, the fertility rate (i.e., the average number of children women have) was 1.8, but in 2010 it dropped to 0.9, the lowest birthrate in the world that year (Sui, 2011). Although the fertility rate has risen since, concerns over the costs of raising a child in Taiwan have persisted. Increasing funding for ECE, then, was viewed as an incentive for young couples to marry earlier and to have more children (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2008; Taiwan Ministry of Education & Ministry of the Interior, 2011).

With these considerations in mind, the 2008 plan was to take place in three phases, increasing the funding for families with 5-year-olds. Special consideration (e.g., covering transportation costs and after-school program fees in addition to school tuition) was given to ethnic minority students and to students from remote communities. Public pre-primary education would be completely free for eligible students, while private pre-primary education would be partially subsidized, with the amount of subsidy based on family income, as well as on the total number of children (up to 3 children per family) in the family (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2008). Funding was to be provided for the construction of more public pre-primary schools, and greater attention was to be paid to quality of teacher instruction and of facilities (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2008).

The 2008 plan was succeeded in 2011, by a follow-up proposal to assure free pre-primary education to all eligible 5-year-olds residing in Taiwan. The 2011 plan reemphasized many of the points made in the previous plan. In addition, the proposal highlighted several considerations oriented toward social justice. For instance, it acknowledged that ECE could help facilitate gender equality in the workplace (since providing childcare would allow both parents to join the workforce). And it emphasized that, in line with the philosophies of most democratic societies, education is considered a human right and therefore should be offered to as many children as possible (Taiwan Ministry of Education & Ministry of the Interior, 2011).

The proposal in the 2011 plan guaranteed that public education would be fully funded and increased the funding for private education (up to approximately $1000 in US currency), so that most children attending private pre-primary schools could have their tuition fees waived as well (Taiwan Ministry of Education & Ministry of the Interior, 2011). As with the 2008 plan, the 2011 plan provided additional funding for children from disadvantaged families. In a supplemental plan implemented in the same year, the Ministry of Interior also committed to providing more funding (up to approximately US$400) for disadvantaged families to send their children to daycare (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2011). The main goals of the government were as follows: (a) to enroll 95 % of the eligible children in kindergartens (though ECE would not be compulsory) by the year 2013; (b) to make 85 % of the private kindergartens into government-utility, privately operated kindergartens[1]; (c) to establish affiliated public kindergartens at 83 % of the public primary schools that taught aborigine children by 2013; (d) to achieve a 75 % rate of post-secondary degree attainment among the pre-primary school teachers; and (e) to ensure a 85 % satisfaction rate from eligible families regarding their children's education (Taiwan Ministry of Education & Ministry of the Interior, 2011). A number of these measures have caused some anxiety among both parents (who worry that the variety of kindergartens will lead to less consistency in the quality of the ECE services offered; Lii, January 15, 2015a) and early childhood educators (many of whom have had extensive working experience but are not certified by governmental standards; Lii, January 22, 2015b). Regardless, the government has largely moved forward with its policies, and the number of children enrolled in kindergartens across Taiwan more than doubled after the year 2012, jumping from approximately 200,000 children enrolled to over 450,000 enrolled (Leung & Chen, in press).

[1] In theory, government-utility, privately operated kindergartens are a joint venture between the government and private individuals (or organizations), with government providing the hardware (e.g., physical space) and private individuals providing software (e.g., teaching staff and curriculum).

Improving the Quality of Early Childhood Education

Integrating Kindergarten and Daycare Center Systems

As noted previously, kindergartens and daycare centers have historically been separate ECE systems in Taiwan (Lin, 2002; Lin & Yang, 2007). Kindergartens have been under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, while the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for daycare centers. This division in the ECE system reflects how care and education for young children has been perceived in Taiwan, similar to some other Chinese societies, including the PRC, Hong Kong, and Macao (Li & Wang, 2017, Chap. 14).

Whereas kindergartens have been traditionally perceived as educating 4- to 6-year-old children in preparation for primary school, daycare centers have been and continue to be perceived as childcare or baby-sitting facilities, operating for the convenience of working parents. These differences in perception have meant that kindergartens and daycare centers differ widely in how they are funded, how teachers are trained, and how curricula are designed and monitored (Lin, 2002). One primary concern, then, is that the transition from daycare center childcare to kindergarten education might be jarring for young Taiwanese children and that their early development might thus be compromised.

Efforts to integrate daycare centers and kindergartens began in the 1980s, though progress was slow. In 1997, the Taipei City government began bridging the gap between daycare centers and kindergartens by making the newly established vouchers available to all 5-year-olds, regardless of where the children were enrolled – including private nursery schools and daycare centers. While nurseries and daycare centers were generally aimed at children younger than 4 years of age, some also accepted older students (Lin, 2002). Other cities (such as Kaohsiung) that adopted similar voucher systems also extended vouchers to children enrolled in pre-primary, non-kindergarten schools. In 2011, a new law on early childhood education and care indicated that kindergartens could encompass students of ages 2 to 6, extending ECE to children who formerly could only attend daycare (Laws & Regulations Database of The Republic of China, 2011). In the following year, a law was passed to allow both daycare centers and kindergartens to apply to become governmentally recognized kindergartens responsible for the education of 2- to 6-year-old children (Laws & Regulations Database of The Republic of China, 2012a). Under these arrangements, teachers can become certified to work in both daycare centers and kindergartens. These measures toward integration helped unify ECE in Taiwan, though much work still remains to ensure consistency and quality of pre-primary education.

Bridging the Public and Private Sectors in Early Childhood Education

In 2004, while the Ministry of Education worked to increase funding for education of 5-year-olds, it also worked to expand kindergarten options for families. Specifically, the Ministry began promoting the creation of government-utility, privately operated kindergartens (Huang & Hsu, 2004). The concept of government-utility, privately operated kindergartens appeared to be ideal on several levels. First, the government would be able provide more ECE services to families without straining an already-tight education budget. Second, since this type of kindergarten would fall under jurisdiction of local government in each city or county, they would in theory be subject to more careful regulation compared to other privately run kindergartens. In other words, government-utility, privately operated kindergartens would serve to increase ECE accessibility and accountability.

However, this policy has received strong pushback from both ECE teachers as well as from parent associations. Because the government did not explicitly prohibit public kindergartens (which are built on government-owned property) from being transformed into government-utility, privately operated kindergartens, there was much concern among teachers employed in public kindergartens that such a public-to-private transition would severely compromise their job security. For instance, if the public kindergarten in which a teacher was already employed transitioned into a privately run school, the kindergarten owners would not be obliged to honor the contracts these teachers had received through the local education department, thus jeopardizing their job prospects (Huang & Hsu, 2004).

The Taipei City Parent Education Development Organization also voiced concerns that the possible increase in government-utility, privately operated kindergartens would correspond to a decrease in public kindergartens; because the former would charge private school tuition, the costs of ECE would therefore pose a financial burden, particularly on low-income families (Huang & Hsu, 2004). For these reasons, government-utility, privately operated kindergartens remain controversial in Taiwan.

In 2012, to provide more ECE centers to families in need, the Ministry of Education proposed two other types of schools: national experimental kindergartens and private nonprofit kindergartens (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2012). Specifically, the Ministry recommended using extra space on public elementary campuses to create more national experimental kindergartens (i.e., kindergartens affiliated with public elementary schools), thus increasing the number of public ECE centers, without costing a substantial amount of money. Private nonprofit kindergartens would be similar to government-utility, privately operated kindergartens, but with careful monitoring of their creation and maintenance (including teacher salaries) by local education departments as well as by professional ECE personnel teams. This closer monitoring, combined with a nonprofit status (thus limiting exorbitant tuition costs), may allow private nonprofit kindergartens to be a reasonable

alternative, or even a replacement, to government-utility, privately operated kindergartens, though more time is needed to see whether their actual implementation is successful.

Improving the Quality of Teacher Education

The process of preparing teachers for ECE has undergone several changes over the past few years. Training ECE teachers began in 1947, when the Early Childhood Education Division at the Provincial Taipei Girls' Normal School began offering courses to prepare young women for careers in education (Lin, 2012). Similar teacher training schools, usually 3-year programs for young women, were created throughout Taiwan. However, many of these programs closed in the early 1960s, and from 1965 to 1977, and no early childhood teacher education programs were available (Lin, 2012).

In 1977, normal (i.e., teacher training) junior colleges began offering kindergarten-teacher and daycare-caregiver training courses in the summer and in the evenings, and in the subsequent years, ECE teacher programs were revived (Lin, 2012). In 1992, training for early childhood educators underwent another shift, requiring teacher candidates to undergo a longer, more thorough training process before becoming qualified early childhood teachers. Currently, a licensed early childhood educator must (a) complete a 26-unit professional program, either while pursuing a university degree in an ECE department or after completing a degree in another subject in higher education, (b) complete a half-year internship at a kindergarten, and (c) pass the teachers' qualification exam before earning a teacher certificate (Lin, 2012).

In response to concerns over the quality of teacher education, the government laid out plans to improve the training of pre-primary school teachers and of pre-primary education in recent proposals for ECE reform (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2008; Taiwan Ministry of Education & Ministry of the Interior, 2011). The plans in the 2008 proposal included (a) arranging school visits to observe and guide teachers in the classroom; (b) financially supporting ECE teachers from remote areas to observe and learn from teachers in larger cities (e.g., Taipei, Kaohsiung); (c) increasing professional development opportunities; and (d) creating multimedia materials to help teachers improve their pedagogy (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2008). The 2011 proposal emphasized many of the same plans for teachers. In addition, the government proposed having ECE departments in professional training colleges open more classes for daycare center and kindergarten teachers, as well providing financial support to private school teachers enrolled in early childhood programs at higher education institutes (e.g., professional training colleges, universities; Taiwan Ministry of Education & Ministry of the Interior, 2011). These measures were intended to raise the quality of ECE teachers, and indirectly, raise the quality of the education young children would receive.

Developing the Early Childhood Education Curriculum

As the government's efforts in the sector of ECE have mostly focused on making pre-primary education more affordable and accessible to 5-year-olds, less attention was devoted to improving ECE curriculum. Because daycare centers are not expected to provide explicit education to their students and because most kindergartens are privately run, conducting large-scale curriculum evaluation and reform would be difficult, if not impossible.

Although the Standards for Kindergarten Curriculum were established by the government in 1987, it has not been successfully revised since, despite teacher complaints about its failure to address current educational needs (National Ping-Don Teachers College, 1993, as cited in Lin, 2002). As a result, private schools have mostly adopted popular theme-based curriculum programs, such as the Montessori and Waldorf programs (Lin, 2002). Teachers have often been encouraged to develop their own educational materials, because of budget restrictions; however, due to lack of professional support, teachers often rely on ready-made materials, and materials prepared by other educators, regardless of developmental appropriateness of those materials to their students (Lin, 2002). In short, curriculum quality is largely overlooked in Taiwan, and needs to be further investigated, so that improvements can be made in the near future.

Evaluating the Quality of Early Childhood Education Centers

Finally, the evaluation of ECE centers, specifically the curricula used in the classroom, has been a major issue in ECE improvement. According to Hsu (2003), basic evaluations of ECE centers began in 1989. A formalized effort to evaluate kindergartens began in 1994. From 1993 to 1997, both public and private kindergartens throughout Taiwan underwent one round of evaluations, which was overseen by the Ministry of Education. In 2000, the government reemphasized the importance of kindergarten evaluations, announcing that kindergartens should be evaluated every 3–5 years. The evaluations focused on the following, in order of importance: (a) administration, (b) course content, (c) educational materials and facilities, (d) safety measures, and (e) degree of integration with the community (Hsu, 2003). The evaluation system is currently used as a basis for granting rewards, in that kindergartens with high evaluations receive a monetary reward, in addition to remaining certified for the next 5 years; underperforming kindergartens, by contrast, are asked to make improvements, before undergoing another evaluation 6 months after receiving initial results (Hsu, 2003; Laws & Regulations Database of The Republic of China, 2012a).

Laws on early childhood education and care and on the evaluation of kindergartens were passed in 2012 (Laws & Regulations Database of The Republic of China, 2011, 2012b), outlining the general evaluation process as well as stating the

government's intentions to research ECE more carefully. The goal to improve and standardize evaluation guidelines is important, as currently, the local education departments oversee both basic and professional certification evaluations in their respective cities and counties. After completing basic evaluations, each education department usually then collaborates with several ECE faculty members (who are considered child development experts) at a local university to conduct professional certification evaluations (Laws & Regulations Database of The Republic of China, 2012b). Although a centralized set of evaluation guidelines has been put forth by the Ministry of Education, local governments often request guidelines appropriate to the city or county to be added as well. Therefore, collaborating faculty are often responsible for designing additional evaluation guidelines, before applying them to kindergartens being evaluated. As a result, evaluation guidelines vary in quality between counties and cities, with no overall organization ensuring that guidelines for evaluating kindergartens and other ECE centers are consistent with one another. Further research on ECE evaluation should be conducted and applied to create and enforce a central set of evaluation guidelines appropriate to all counties and cities, which can then be followed by ECE centers throughout Taiwan. An adoption of a more central, standardized set of guidelines would fall in line with policies in other Chinese societies, such as Hong Kong, where educational authorities have successfully developed a set of performance indicators and have established the rigorous system and culture for quality assurance and improvement (Li & Wang, 2017, Chap. 14).

Conclusion

In summary, development of Taiwanese ECE has largely been influenced by a number of economic, political, and pragmatic factors. The beginnings of ECE services were shaped by Japanese early childhood values and policies, while Taiwan was still under colonial rule. After World War II, the development of Taiwanese ECE slowed, largely due to financial challenges faced by the newly established government of Republic of China in its early years. Privatization was found to be a workable solution, and many private early childhood settings were created during this time. During the 1970s and 1980s, however, economic prosperity, and the lifting of martial law, resulted in more attention devoted to ECE, with the government funding more public schools to address growing need for childcare. In the 1990s, several marches organized by Taiwanese citizens and educational organizations fueled the call for high-quality ECE that was also affordable and accessible. In the 2000s, ECE became a key priority for both the federal and local governments.

Other factors have influenced the push for ECE. Specifically, increasing concern over diminishing birthrates in Taiwan has forced the government to provide more child care for families in need, such as families with two working parents, low-income families, and families with young parents. As the field of ECE has matured in Taiwan, the government has also attended more closely to social justice issues,

providing additional care and education for disadvantaged, vulnerable populations, including low-income families, families in remote communities, and ethnic minority families. To summarize, efforts from the government, educators, and concerned families have significantly boosted the development of ECE, especially in recent years, ensuring that quality of education provided to young Taiwanese children is and will continue to be much higher, as well as more developmentally and culturally appropriate.

However, compared to what is already known about ECE in the USA and other countries, there is a relative lack of scholarly knowledge about Taiwanese ECE. Although there are ECE scholars and university centers in Taiwan, much of the research has been published in Chinese, restricting the degree to which this research can be peer-reviewed and critiqued, in academia and in public. Additionally, because ECE researchers are often recruited to perform assessments of kindergartens and daycare centers, the amount of time and resources they can devote to evaluating policies, and to examining child development from a scholarly perspective, is limited. The Ministry has commissioned reports from several universities, such as the National Taiwan University of Arts and the National Dong Hwa University, to examine effectiveness of governmental funding schemes (Taiwan Ministry of Education & Ministry of the Interior, 2011), but independent researchers should conduct rigorous evaluations of these programs as well. More ECE research in Taiwan will ensure that more research-based practices and policies can be implemented and will also increase our understanding of the ECE field, particularly in Chinese-speaking societies.

To conclude this chapter, we highlight the lessons other societies could learn from Taiwan. First, providing free education for all children 5 years of age is a commendable achievement, representing a strong national commitment to educating the next generation and serving as a valuable example to other educational authorities in the East Asia region. Second, Taiwan is the first Chinese society to launch a voucher program for early childhood education. Although the voucher value could not fully cover tuition fees, it was well designed to meet the varying needs of children in both public and private kindergartens. Taiwan's experience with its voucher program can be examined alongside similar voucher schemes recently launched in South Korea and Hong Kong. Third, many legislative initiatives have been conducted to build a solid foundation for the advancement of Taiwanese ECE. As a result, we anticipate that both the federal and local governments, empowered by the recent regulations and laws, could further improve their ECE policies and practices. A similar push for policy and practice improvement should be taken by the governments in East Asia as well. The final lesson to be learned from Taiwan is that more attention should be paid to the development of curriculum and pedagogy in early childhood settings. A collective effort to reform the 1987 Standards of Kindergarten Curriculum finally succeeded in the summer of 2012; once the revised curriculum guidelines are actually implemented by ECE centers, careful examination and monitoring will be needed to ensure that these revisions do close the current gaps in curriculum and pedagogy quality, both in public and in private kindergartens. The government's recent strong efforts to reform Taiwanese ECE are very encouraging

for the field. These efforts should be matched by renowned ECE and child development researchers, who should conduct rigorous studies so that more realistic and culturally appropriate policies can be designed and launched, further improving early childhood education for future generations of Taiwanese children.

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Part IV
Learning from and for Chinese Early Childhood Education

Chapter 14
International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education in the Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan

Hui Li and X. Christine Wang

This chapter considers early childhood education in the People's Republic of China (Mainland China), Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan. Despite different political and economic contexts, educational practices in these societies share some common characteristics and, to an extent, face similar challenges in their development. By reviewing recent development of ECE in these societies, we aim to understand Chinese ECE ideologies and practices from a globalized perspective. This will not only provide critical reflections on development of ECE in these Chinese societies but also bring up some interesting implications for other societies. As Singapore is not regarded as part of Greater China, this chapter will not review its ECE development; Singapore has been thoroughly considered in by Lim and Lim (2017, Chap. 12).

Shifting Landscape in Chinese Economies and Societies

In order to understand recent development of ECE in Chinese societies, we need to examine the political, economic, and cultural contexts and review the changes and reforms that have taken place in the past few decades. As in the other parts of the world, Chinese societies have undergone some dramatic economic, social, and political transformations recently, especially in the first decade of this century. In this section, we will first describe macro-level changes such as entering the World Trade Organization (WTO), and globalization, and then analyze their impact on

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educational systems and policies in general, and on ECE in particular. These changes have not only transformed economies of these countries but have also set in motion an irreversible process of modernization, democratization, and globalization and, in turn, have helped set in place the necessary preconditions for political and educational reform (Chow, 2007).

Hong Kong, the Mainland China or Mainland China, and Taiwan joined the WTO around the turn of this millennium, leading to a gradual opening of their domestic markets to the world. Joining the WTO helped them maintain their high economic growth rates, become the world's leading trading region, and increasingly play a pivotal role in international markets. China has surpassed Japan as the second largest economy in the world since 2010. To fulfill their commitment to WTO's rules and regulations and to meet the challenges of globalization, these societies have had to accelerate reform and modernization of their socioeconomic systems, leading to an unprecedented level of autonomy.

Compared to rapid economic development, changes in political systems have not kept pace, most noticeably in the Mainland China. Mainland China is moving away from centralization of state power to local democracy and autonomy diversification in some aspects. For example, some democratic movement – in the form of free election – has occurred at the lowest governing body level, in the villages, in the countryside, and in the blocks in the cities. This trend could continue and eventually lead to broader political reform (Chow, 2007), although many doubt that China would ever move completely in this direction.

Globalization and its attendant free flow of capital, technology, information, and services on a global scale are often seen as a double-edged sword that brings about both opportunities and challenges, especially in the cultural realm. China, for example, has both embraced and spurned the cultural effects of globalization: from modern art galleries to its dress sense and high fashion to coffee shops, on the one hand, to Internet control, to its judiciary, on the other. Such changes to the economic and political system in China, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan set the stage for the educational reform discussed in the following sections.

Changes in Early Childhood Education Systems and Policies

Macro system changes in Chinese societies have led to changes in educational systems and related policies. To meet challenges of globalization and to prepare the workforce for global competition, several Chinese societies have initiated national educational reform, moving away from traditionally teacher-directed and examination-oriented systems to more flexible and open systems favorable to students' holistic development, and ECE policies are changing rapidly to match with these paradigm and systemic changes.

Changing Policies and Changing Systems

Early childhood education (ECE) in these societies has developed rapidly in recent decades due to increasing numbers of working mothers, leading to nuclear families needing such services. In response, governments of these societies have made noticeable strides in promoting accessibility, affordability, and accountability of ECE over the last decade. This subsection will analyze developments in the Mainland China and Hong Kong to understand the common changes happening in these two Chinese societies.

The People's Republic of China: Since the 1990s, the central government started shifting responsibility for funding and managing ECE to the private sector or the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). As noted by Feng (2017, Chap. 4), the policy of "walking with two legs," which requires the government and NGOs to work together, was launched in 1989. Social organizations such as the units of enterprise, institutions, NGOs, and individuals were also encouraged to set up and run early childhood centers in accordance with the law. Their operating expenses were funded by their respective sponsors, while the governments at various levels provided them with personnel or other forms of support, but not necessarily financial assistance. Consequently, the number of private early childhood centers has drastically increased, from 25.2 % in 2000 to 62.2 % in 2008 (Zhou, Zeng, & Fan, 2010). At present, the existing public ECE centers owned by various levels of government are still supported by educational authorities, albeit with a gradually decreasing annual budget. In 2005, the budget for ECE was drastically cut to zero in the annual budget plan of the central government leaving local governments to sponsor several public early childhood centers, with no more than 1.3 % of the entire educational budget (Li, 2006).

This so-called market-oriented but laissez-faire policy had unfortunately placed public kindergartens in a disadvantaged situation and caused overall decline in quantity and quality of early childhood education in China (Li & Wong, 2008).

Three major consequences have been widely reported (Li & Wong, 2008):

1. Decreased funding for public kindergartens: The central government is reluctant to subsidize ECE, and funding for this sector only accounts for an average of 1.3 % of the entire education budget (Li, 2006). Such extremely low proportion of funding has seriously impeded development of early childhood education in China.
2. Lower quality of teachers: The market-oriented funding system forces many kindergartens to focus on the bottom line and cut salaries and benefits of teachers. This leads to high teacher turnover, with more qualified and competent teachers often leaving the profession, and untrained and incompetent teachers work in kindergartens.
3. Weakening administration: The administrative unit of ECE, from central to local government, has been eliminated or severely weakened. Thus, the responsibilities and accountability of administration for ECE is vague to the different educational authorities.

In brief, China's ECE system, and its financial sponsorship, have been fundamentally restructured and have become increasingly privatized and market-oriented in the past decade (Li & Wong, 2008). As stated in Chap. 4, the past decade had seen the transformation of a public ECE system into a private one, and the national strategy of "Government withdraw and Private Step In" has been implemented at the expense of the quality of ECE (Li & Wong, 2008).

Hong Kong: Hong Kong's blueprint for large-scale millennium education reform was published in September 2000, suggesting a number of initiatives to enhance preschool quality. It asserted that ECE lays the foundation for lifelong learning and all-round development. Proposals were put forward to enhance professional competence of early childhood educators, to improve quality assurance, to reform the monitoring mechanism, to enhance links between early childhood and primary education, and to promote home–preschool cooperation (Education Commission, 2000). All these proposals have been put into practice during the past decade, one of which was the launch of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) in 2007 (Li, Wong, & Wang, 2010). Aiming to subsidize ECE and improve its quality, the educational authorities set five restrictions on eligibility for the PEVS:

1. Voucher-receiving kindergartens must be nonprofit.
2. Tuition fee per annum must be less than US$3097 (half day) or US$6194 (full day) per student.
3. Kindergartens must pass a quality review (QR) conducted by the educational authority, within 5 years of receiving the vouchers.
4. Kindergartens should have thorough financial transparency.
5. Kindergartens should no longer be bound by a pay scale for teachers (Li et al., 2010; Ng, Sun, Lau, & Rao, 2017, Chap. 10).

While the voucher system exclusively serves students in nonprofit kindergartens and is leading some for-profit kindergartens to transform into nonprofit ones, its primary goal is to promote affordability, accessibility, and accountability in ECE (Li et al., 2010).

To complement the PEVS system, the government has also implemented three other major ECE policy initiatives (Li, 2007a): (1) enhance professionalism by mandating and providing free, large-scale, in-service, and preservice training; (2) promote school-based research by setting up a Quality Education Fund (HK$5 billion); and (3) advocate quality and accountability through school-based support, quality assurance inspection, and curriculum reform (Ng et al., 2017 Chap. 10). All these initiatives have laid a solid foundation for ECE development in Hong Kong in the coming years.

Macao and Taiwan

Similar policy changes have taken place in other Chinese societies like Macao (Vong & Vong, 2017 Chap. 11) and Taiwan (Chen & Li, 2017 Chap. 13) to enhance affordability, accessibility, and accountability ECE. In Macao, for example,

educational authorities launched the 15-year education policy in 2007. All young children in Macao receive an extended provision of a year of free ECE, irrespective of whether they are in public or private schools. Educational authorities are currently striving to ensure all preschool children receive good quality education and to ensure that they are socially, mentally, and physically ready to enter primary school. To achieve this target, they have increased financial support to preschools to reduce class size from 35 to 25 pupils per class. This initiative has dramatically enhanced affordability and accessibility of ECE in Macao, but not necessarily its quality.

In Taiwan, some important changes have also taken place in early childhood policies in the past decade:

1. Launching the early childhood education voucher
2. Integrating kindergartens and nursery schools to avoid segregation of educating and caring services in preschool years
3. Promoting government-utility privately operated kindergartens
4. Enhancing teachers' performance standards, certification system, and professional development
5. Supporting a program for disadvantaged 5-year-olds (Lin, 2007)

Promoting Accessibility, Affordability and Accountability

In this section, we turn our attention to how the three critical issues of accessibility, affordability, and accountability have been addressed in China, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan.

Accessibility

The proportion of children entering kindergarten has been relatively steady over the past decade across these four Chinese societies, but regional and socioeconomic disparities are still evident. In Hong Kong, for example, the coverage rate of preschool education has been as high as 95 % (Rao, Koong, Kwong, & Wong, 2003). In China, kindergarten enrolment rate decreased due to reduction in the number of kindergartens since 2000 and grew again after 2003.

Barriers to access in China include lack of programs in remote areas and those that accommodate parents' obligations to their employers. A serious problem has arisen because of the tens of millions of migrant workers in urban China. While urbanization and industrialization have driven people to cities, migrants are not allowed to send their children to the kindergartens in the city where they work, without *hukou*, the unique residence permit system for urban China. While registered city kindergartens are set up to meet the needs of city children, migrant parents have to send their children to unregistered private kindergartens in the city (which are neglected by the governments) or to leave their young children behind in their

hometown, to be cared for by grandparents or other relatives. This rural–urban gap in accessibility of early childhood education has been a major problem in Mainland China (UNESCO, 2007).

Affordability

Affordability has become another concern in these Chinese societies. The issue is especially severe in China, as the government adopted a laissez-faire policy to drive kindergartens into a market economy, and the pricing bureaus allowed for an increase in fees with the assumption that increased fees would translate into higher-quality programs. As a result, kindergarten fees are getting higher and limiting children from low-income urban and rural families to low-quality and low-cost programs (UNESCO, 2007).

Affordability is also a problem in other Chinese societies. In Taiwan, for instance, access to public kindergartens that have a reputation of being cheap but good is very limited, with only 10 % of the 4000 kindergartens being publicly owned. Most parents have to send their children to private kindergartens that are costlier, and not necessarily of better quality. In Hong Kong, access to "cheap price but good-quality" kindergartens is limited, because most of them are private independent enterprises that charge very high fees (Li et al., 2010). Initiatives have been taken in Hong Kong and Taiwan to solve this problem, and the voucher system has been useful to enhance affordability of quality early childhood education in these Chinese societies. In Hong Kong, affordability was a problem before 2007 because kindergartens relied heavily on parents and private investors to cover operational costs (Li et al., 2010). Parents, especially those of low-income families, often found it difficult to afford the high tuition fee. In response, the government launched the *Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme* (PEVS) noted above.

Accountability

Promoting accountability in ECE through external evaluation has been widely implemented in these Chinese societies during the past decade (please refer to Chap. 4 and Chaps. 10, 11, 12, and 13, this volume). China launched a quality rating system in the 1990s to evaluate ECE programs in urban areas. It was assumed that this would lead to quality assurance and improvement in the sector. Wong and Pang (2002) observed that where quality monitoring did take place, it tended to focus on "hardware" indicators such as materials and facilities, often neglecting the more important, but harder to measure, "process" indicators such as relationships and pedagogy. Pan, Liu, and Lau (2010) investigated the effectiveness of the Beijing Kindergarten Quality Rating System (BKQRS) and found that BKQRS failed to gauge quality levels of various kindergartens as accurately as was expected. They suggested developing a set of detailed performance indicators and reliable assessment tools to conduct culturally appropriate quality assurance practices in China.

Hong Kong launched the new mechanism of Quality Assurance Inspection (QAI) in 2000 to enforce accountability and school improvement in the sector of early childhood education. The QAI normally goes through three stages: school self-evaluation, external inspection, and release of the QAI report to the public. Wong and Li (2010) found that the QAI was a facilitative and productive process for school self-evaluation and quality improvement. They suggest that an effective quality assurance mechanism should maintain a balance between external and internal evaluations and should work toward school empowerment and improvement. In conjunction with the PEVS launched in 2007, a new quality review (QR) system was launched, to promote self-evaluation and school improvement. Kindergartens were required to submit reports on annual self-evaluation, annual planning, and in-service teacher training to the education authorities in order to participate in the voucher system. This steady shift from school inspections to QAIs and to QRs, in which the scope and functions of external inspection are progressively replaced by self-evaluation, reflects major conceptions of the government toward constructs in quality (Wong & Li, 2010). A groundbreaking policy paper on education reform in 2000 (Education Commission, 2000) outlined two major areas of improvement in early childhood education: improving quality assurance and enhancing professional competence. These changes reflect the government's commitment to quality early childhood education.

In Taiwan, accountability has also become a public concern, because 90 % of the 4000 kindergartens are privately owned. Three major quality assurance approaches have been implemented: accreditation, consultation, and school-based professional development. Kindergarten accreditation in Taiwan started in the 1980s and was prevalent by the 1990s, with annual assessments being conducted by various levels of government. However, the private nature of this market and the fierce competition among kindergartens derailed progress in accreditation and became the subject of much critique and debate. Thereafter, the Ministry of Education of Taiwan terminated kindergarten accreditation in 2005 and launched a nationwide 5-year consultation program in 2006 with the aim of promoting the overall quality of kindergartens through on-site consultations by professional experts affiliated with universities. Today more and more kindergartens in Taiwan are trying to enhance their quality of their service. Theoretically, this three-pronged quality assurance system – kindergarten accreditation, consultation, and professional development – could improve the accountability of ECE in Taiwan though empirical studies that are needed to test effectiveness.

Curriculum and Pedagogical Reform

Along with changes in systems and policies around ECE in these Chinese societies, their curricula and pedagogical practices are also moving toward being more open and diversified. This section will review those changes and specifically examine paradigm shifts in curriculum and pedagogical reform.

Early Childhood Curriculum Reforms in Chinese Societies

Early childhood curriculum reforms have been heavily influenced by Western progressive ideology and curriculum models, such as developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) (NAEYC, 1997), Montessori method, Project Approach, Reggio Emilia, and HighScope. Researchers and practitioners alike have been experimenting with these imported curriculum ideas and models (Li & Li, 2003). As a result, a shift from traditional Chinese subject-based curriculum to progressive, child-centered curriculum has occurred.

In their systematic review of curriculum reform in China, Liu and Feng (2005) concluded that such reform had promoted three main ideas: (1) respecting children, (2) active learning, and (3) play-based teaching and learning. These three main objectives of curriculum reform, adopted from Western progressive ideology, have clashed with Chinese tradition and curricular practices (Feng, 2017 Chap. 4). For example, traditional curriculum outlines six well-defined subject areas (literature, math, social studies, science, character education, and physical education), which demand teacher-directed instruction. However, the reform required shifting from transmission of knowledge and skills according to pre-structured "teaching plans," toward an emergent child-centered, flexible, activity-centered, respectful, and responsive curriculum.

The most influential measure of this curriculum reform is the *Procedural Regulations for Kindergartens* (The State Education Commission, 1989) issued by the National Education Committee (the former Ministry of Education) in 1989. It laid down principles that consolidated influences of progressive education in China ECE (Zhu & Wang, 2005). The regulations adopted theories and practices from the United States and presented progressive ideas and practices to early childhood educators in China. These included a focus on child development, integrated curriculum, active learning, attention to individual differences, group functioning, and respectful relationships between teacher and child (Liu & Feng, 2005). However, over the following decade, it became clear that these progressive principles sometimes clashed with more traditional practices and that implementation was a problem. In addition, lack of practical guidelines left many teachers not knowing how to implement regulations. To help solve these problems, the Ministry of Education issued the 2001 *Guiding Framework for Kindergarten Education (Trial Version)* to provide guidance on how progressive ideas can be integrated into curricular practices. The *framework* takes into consideration the gap between progressive ideas and reality and offers solutions by stating specific requirements and content in different domains.

To evaluate effects of this curriculum reform, Li et al. (2010) investigated Chinese teachers' beliefs and practices, by observing ten representative early childhood classrooms and by interviewing ten class teachers in Shenzhen. They found a remarkable belief-practice gap as well as policy-practice gap. Most of the curriculum reform ideas were expressed by teachers in their self-reported beliefs, but had not been implemented in their teaching practice. The Chinese traditional model of

whole class teaching was still the dominating mode of curriculum delivery. Slight differences were also found among participating kindergartens, which reflect cascading effects of curriculum reform. Li, Wang, and Wong suggest that curriculum reforms should take into consideration culture, language, teachers, parents, available resources, and the prevailing education system. It is important to note that the merit of adoption of Western curricula should be carefully examined. Cultural appropriateness should be addressed before the nation engages in importing ideas developed in other countries (Li, Rao, & Tse, 2011).

A similar trend of curriculum reform is also evident in Taiwan, Macao, and Hong Kong. For example, in Hong Kong, large-scale millennial education reform was launched in 2000, to enforce quality education across the board including ECE. Policy-makers have been seeking to infuse the best Western curricula into existing classroom practices, and integrated curriculum and child-oriented approaches have been recommended in the policy document *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 1996, 2006).

Li et al.'s study (2011), which examined how reforms based on western ideas in three Chinese cities affected literacy instruction in classrooms, illustrates limitations of these reforms. Monolingual Shenzhen, trilingual Hong Kong, and multilingual Singapore form a spectrum of cultural openness and comparative "Westernization"; however, they share the same "Westernized reform" in early childhood education (Li, 2007a). It was found that whole class direct instruction still dominates Chinese preschool classrooms. Slight societal differences in classroom practice were also found, reflecting the spectrum of openness and "Westernization" of the three cities. The findings reflect that we should adapt, rather than adopt, pedagogical innovations developed in other sociocultural milieu, as different societies have different social, cultural, and educational traditions, and that influences from culture, language, teachers, parents, resources available, and the prevailing education system should be taken into consideration when planning pedagogical reforms. Tobin (2007) was concerned about how Western ideas could be integrated with Chinese cultural values and be made responsive to concerns and conditions of local Chinese communities.

Researchers have generally identified six factors that limit the success of implementing Western programs in Chinese societies: unfavorable teacher–student ratios, low teacher quality, limited school resources, parents' expectations from academics, performance-oriented educational philosophy, and broad sociocultural ethos that respects authority and teachers (Li, 2002; Zhu & Zhang, 2008). It is noted that some successful programs in the West, such as the Project Approach and Reggio Emilia pedagogy, require considerable educational resources to support children's wide range of exploration and discovery. High teacher–student ratios and limited resources in Chinese kindergartens impose constraints in implementing these programs. Many Chinese parents' high expectations and demands for academic achievement also challenge these student-centered and child development-based curricula. Finally, the values of unity, collectiveness, and a subject-based curriculum model, which are common in traditional Chinese culture, run counter to these curricula that are built on the culture of individualism. To respond to the call for

culturally appropriate practices, many new curricula have been developed and implemented in Hong Kong kindergartens. For example, the story approach to integrated learning (SAIL) (Li, 2007b), a narrative curriculum with a focus on integrated learning anchored by a set of culturally relevant stories, has been widely adopted in Hong Kong kindergartens. Teachers report finding this curriculum easy to implement in Hong Kong kindergartens that tend to have crowded classrooms, high child–teacher ratios (30:1), hurried schedules, and an overloaded curriculum (Li & Chau, 2010).

Early Childhood Pedagogical Changes in Chinese Societies

Reforms have also been undertaken by educational authorities in these Chinese societies, to incorporate child-centered pedagogy into early childhood classrooms (Ng & Rao, 2008; Rao & Li, 2009; Zhu & Zhang, 2008). For example, the Hong Kong government issued the *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 2006) to incorporate best Western pedagogies into practices (i.e., child-centered approach, Project Approach, whole language approach). In Macao and Taiwan, some Western pedagogical approaches such as whole language approach, Project Approach, and the Reggio Emilia approach have also been advocated in recent years.

Western pedagogies are characterized by a child-centered approach (philosophy), integrated teaching (strategy), inquiry-based learning and learning through play (learning approach), small class or group learning (classroom organization), child-initiated and process-oriented activities, and so on (Li et al. 2011). Traditional Chinese pedagogies, however, often emphasize conformity, discipline, behavioral control, and academic achievement and include a teacher-directed approach, direct instruction and subject-based teaching, content-based learning and learning through practice, whole class teaching, and teacher-directed academic-oriented activities (Li et al. 2011). The key difference lies in the emphasis each pedagogical practice places on children's freedom with respect to learning initiatives, and the nature of teacher control over them (Tzuo, 2007). Western pedagogy focuses on children's individual interests and their freedom, whereas Chinese pedagogy emphasizes teacher's control over children's exploration of learning.

Pedagogical reforms in these societies have often been initiated by governments, with the result that leading kindergarten teachers often feel they are forced to change teaching practices to accommodate innovations in pedagogy (Liu & Feng, 2005). In Hong Kong, for instance, a child-centered approach, integrated curriculum, and all-round development have been advocated since the 1990s. To stop teachers from overusing "inappropriate" teaching skills (judged based on favored Western pedagogies) in Chinese classrooms, educational authorities issued a list of "do's and don'ts" (Education Department, 1999) including "don't ask children in nursery class (aged 3 to 4 years) to write," "don't ask children to do mechanical copying," "don't adopt one-way lecturing," etc. This kind of reform often fails to acknowledge

cultural roots of practices that are viewed as inappropriate by Western pedagogies. With little guidance about how to best incorporate Western ideas into daily teaching practices, Chinese teachers encountered many challenges and difficulties in directly adopting these borrowed approaches (Cheng, 2001; Li, 2002; Li & Li, 2003; Liu & Feng, 2005; Zhu & Zhang, 2008). Researchers therefore urge reflection on how best to incorporate new approaches into Chinese societies (Li, 2002) and on recognizing factors impeding the process (Hu, 2002).

Many scholars posit that Western pedagogies are incongruent with traditional Chinese beliefs about early learning and teaching, teacher–student relationships, desirable student characteristics, and quality of teachers (Hu, 2002; Wong, 2008; Zhu & Zhang, 2008). These pedagogical differences have been shaped by distinct cultural values and social beliefs about best teaching practices that are deeply rooted in Chinese and American cultures (Wong, 2008). Socio-contextual factors have further constrained adaption of Western practices: overcrowded and cramped classrooms, large class sizes, untrained teachers, high parental expectations from academia, and exam-oriented education systems (Hu, 2002; Li, Corrie & Wong, 2008; Tang & Maxwell, 2007). Culturally, contextually, and linguistically appropriate (Li et al., 2011) introduction of Western methods in Chinese-society classrooms is therefore more challenging than many reformers presumed (Li, 2007a; Rao & Li, 2009; Zhu & Zhang, 2008.). Fortunately, there is increasing recognition in the past decade to determine which Western approaches should be used in Chinese classrooms, how they should be used, and whether local values and contextual concerns are adequately taken into account within Western models (Tobin, 2007).

Lessons and Challenges in Defining Culturally Appropriate Early Childhood Education in a Globalized World

Learning from reform efforts in the past decade, ECE in these societies is moving into an exciting new phase, i.e., exploring and redefining a model that is culturally appropriate as well as forward-looking. In this section, we will highlight some major challenges and suggest ways to address them. Some of the challenges are more unique to a particular society (e.g., urban–rural inequality in the Mainland China), while others are applicable across these societies. We will conclude this chapter by discussing lessons that can be learned by other countries.

Major Challenges for Early Childhood Education in Chinese Societies

Despite tremendous progress and development over the past decade, there are some major problems and challenges facing ECE in Chinese societies. Limited financial input would be the first and foremost challenge. Educational authorities in these

societies have been grappling with challenges of subsidizing ECE and in determining the appropriate percentage of national educational funding for ECE. In China, annual financial input in ECE is 1.3 % of the entire annual educational budget, which is far below 8 %, the average level in 19 OECD countries (OECD, 2006). In another measure, the national budget for ECE in these OECD countries is around 0.5 % of GDP, whereas China only invests about 0.05 % of GDP in early childhood education (OECD, 2006). Similar problems were also found in other Chinese societies. The first priority for Chinese education authorities should be increasing financial input in ECE. Hong Kong has heeded this call, since 2007, by drastically increasing annual input into ECE by HK$ 2.2 billion for the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme.

Secondly, lack of qualified teachers and administrators is another major challenge for ECE in Chinese societies. In China, for example, a relatively small number of educational officials are managing ECE, and many ECE administrative units have been merged with primary education and have been moved from central to local governments. A case in point: there was only one ECE officer in the Ministry of Education in 2007. Lack of qualified teachers imposes tremendous challenges for development of ECE. In rural China the ratio is historically very high, and in 2001 was an abysmal 1:83.3 (Jiang, Pang, & Sun et al., 2017 , Chap. 6). In 2013, in the whole of China (urban and rural), there were a total of 1,663,487 kindergarten teachers, and the teacher-child ratio was 1:23.4. According to national guidelines issued in 2013, the teacher–child ratio in full-day kindergartens should be 1:5 to 1:7, and there is a severe shortage of preschool teachers in China (Jiang et al., 2017, Chap. 6).

Third, the rural–urban gap in the quality of ECE has widened drastically in the past decade in China. Despite rapid urbanization in recent years, more than half of China's population still engages in agricultural activities and lives in rural areas. A significant gap in family income and investment in children's education continues to exist between urban and rural areas. For example, in 2007, the gross enrollment ratio (GER) for kindergarten was 55.6 % for urban children, whereas it was only 35.6 % for rural children. In fact, the rural–urban gap in GER was increasing: from 16 % in 2005 and 17 % in 2006 to 20 % in 2007 (Center for Research in Basic Education, National Institute of Education Science, 2008). In its *National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020)*, the central government of China (2010) emphasized that ECE development should be prioritized in rural, impoverished, remote, and border areas and ethnic autonomous areas, to bridge the access gap. It is imperative to universalize preschool education in such areas and to make sure that all children, especially those who cannot migrate with their parents, are provided high-quality ECE.

Fourth, finding and establishing effective mechanisms to assure quality, and for monitoring the private for-profit ECE sector, is a big challenge for these societies. Hong Kong has started the Quality Review System through the launch of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (Li et al., 2010), and Taiwan is trying to establish a three-pronged quality assurance system of accreditation, consultation, and professional development (Lin, 2007). The existing quality rating systems in China

were found to be unreliable in evaluating quality of kindergartens (Pan et al., 2010). An effective and reliable quality assurance mechanism is thus an urgent need in China.

Cost of ECE provision is also challenging. Tuition fees are increasingly higher in the Mainland China. For example, kindergartens in Shenzhen charge more than their counterparts in Hong Kong, and this despite the fact that per capita GDP of Shenzhen in 2005 was one-fourth that of Hong Kong (Li & Wong, 2008). Comparatively reasonable cost of tuition in Hong Kong can be partially attributed to the government's success in monitoring and controlling profit level of all kindergartens. Nonprofit kindergartens were required to make less than 5 % profit (which had to be shown to be used in school development) and for-profit kindergartens a 10 % profit cap. Educational authorities in the Mainland China need to verify profit and expenditure of each kindergarten, to ensure that profit does not exceed a predetermined, acceptable level.

Finally, shortage of systematic research to support and guide ECE development in these societies is another problem. In the Mainland China, for example, policies are often made based on intentions and good wishes of government officials, rather than on what the most pressing needs are and are often not predicated on scientific evidence and conclusions. As a result, many policy initiatives are neither culturally appropriate nor practical (Li et al., 2011), because of this lack of empirical studies that could provide scientific evidence to help policy-makers make informed decisions. In recent years, Hong Kong has tried to address this issue by sponsoring many empirical studies through the *Quality Education Fund* and the *Public Policy Research Fund.* More rigorous research and well-designed policies are needed to address challenges discussed above.

Lessons We Could Learn from Chinese Societies

These Chinese societies have achieved tremendous progress in economic development over the past 20 years, and progress in ECE reform is equally impressive, providing valuable lessons for other countries. First, Chinese traditionally have a strong commitment to education in general; their commitment to ECE is especially strong in recent years. Even within China, there are lessons to learn from one region to another. For instance, Shanghai students topped the PISA 2009 results in multiple subject areas (OECD, 2010), and strong ECE in Shanghai is credited as one factor contributing to this great success. The Shanghai government has been promoting affordability, accessibility, and accountability in early childhood education for years and has achieved universal high-quality ECE that has provided a strong foundation for lifelong learning and academic success.

Second, education leaders in Chinese societies use international benchmarking to improve their system and embrace good ideas from overseas and try to appropriate and improve them. While there is need for these ideas to be filtered through the lens of cultural appropriateness and synthesis, it stands to reason that being open

and willing to adapt – rather than adopt – is a good starting point and one that will continue to pay rich dividends.

Third, China is modernizing curriculum to incorporate twenty-first century skills, by moving away from traditional didactic teaching practices (with their heavy emphasis on rote memorization) to curriculum that incorporates inquiry, classroom discussion, applications of knowledge, and use of technology. Shanghai students' success in PISA 2009 has proved that such educational reform is effective in preparing students for global challenges (OECD, 2010).

Last but not the least, privatization of ECE has not been effective. It is understandable that the Mainland China has had to implement the policy of "Government Withdraw and Private Step In," to remove the responsibility of funding and managing early childhood education, as the existing educational system and funding systems are no longer capable of meeting needs and demands of developing ECE throughout the nation (Liu & Feng, 2005). However, it is hardly acceptable that the policy of "walking with two legs" has been so overused that the "governmental leg" was disappearing and the nongovernmental leg was getting stronger and stronger. This kind of reform in the Mainland China has brought decline in the quantity and quality of ECE, as, left unchecked, privatization and commercialism has led to long-lasting undesirable effects on children, parents, society, and the nation in general. In brief, privatization of ECE has many drawbacks, and public or voucher-sponsored kindergarten may be more desirable in these Chinese societies. Fortunately, since 2011, the central government of China has ported and corrected its policy to promote public kindergarten all over the country. The disappearing "governmental leg" has been revived and is being consolidated.

The Chinese societies reviewed in this chapter are still undergoing tremendous change, and it is impossible to record all change in the field of ECE in a limited review like this. We prefer providing an outline or a snapshot of what has then a panorama of ECE development in Chinese societies. Our hope is that the identification of these key issues will lead to increased research as well as course correction in policy implementation and that it provides a sound theoretical basis to develop ECE in these Chinese societies.

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Chapter 15
Conclusions: Similarities and Distinctions in Early Childhood Education Across Chinese Societies

Nirmala Rao and Jin Sun

It has been noted in several chapters in this volume that Chinese societies, influenced by the deeply embedded philosophy of Confucianism, have traditionally stressed learning and academic achievement as a means to upward social mobility. As a consequence, there has been no real need to create a demand for early childhood education (ECE). In places where early childhood education is not universal (e.g., remote and rural areas in China), it is more an issue of increasing the supply of services.

It is indeed creditable that all of these societies (People's Republic of China (PRC), Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore, Taiwan) have been so open to methodologies and philosophies of education imported from outside, including but not restricted to the West, even when they were/are at divergence with traditional views of education that are deeply ingrained in these societies. However, this brings with it attendant dangers of wholesale import of ideas that may be incongruent with the thinking on the ground, of parents and practitioners, leading over time to the policy-practice gap observed in earlier chapters, as well as to other unforeseen consequences.

ECE initiatives in these five Chinese culture societies are compared in terms of (1) separation/integration of childcare services and kindergarten education, (2) degree of public vs. private funding for ECE, (3) unique cultural history and influences on ECE, and (4) government guidelines and policy.

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Separation or Integration of Childcare and Kindergarten Education

There are two primary approaches to the governance of early childhood services. Care and educational services for children from birth to formal school age can be managed by one ministry (integrated approach) or be the responsibility of more than one ministry (split approach). It has been argued that most advantages are accrued from integrated systems of governance.

The majority of the societies considered in this volume have split systems of governance for early childhood services. Childcare typically comes under the remit of the Ministry of Social Welfare Department (or equivalent), and kindergarten education is overseen by the Ministry of Education (or equivalent). There are some exceptions.

In the PRC, there is a clear demarcation between childcare and kindergarten education, with full-day kindergartens being the most common form of services for children from 3 years of age to school age (Feng, 2017, Chap. 4). In Hong Kong, childcare services provided in crèches and nurseries are regulated by the Social Welfare Department. On the other hand, services for children over 3 years which are provided in kindergartens and in kindergartens-cum-childcare centers are now regulated by the Education Bureau (Ng, Sun, Lau, & Rao, 2017, Chap. 10). In Macao, till 1999, early childhood services were under the purview of independent departments: the Social Welfare Bureau which oversaw nurseries[1], and the Education and Youth Affairs Bureau, which administered kindergartens[2] (Vong & Vong, 2017, Chap. 11). Such segregation was found to be counterproductive to overall early childhood services in Macao. In response, the government made a shift in nomenclature, from "preprimary education" to "early childhood education." In Singapore, childcare is a service, under the purview of the Ministry of Child and Youth Services (MCYS), whereas kindergartens are overseen by the Ministry of Education (MOE), which traditionally focuses more on levels primary and above (Lim & Lim, 2017, Chap. 12). In Taiwan, the government officially recognized ECE centers that focused on 4- to 6-year-old children as "kindergartens" (Chen & Li, 2017, Chap. 13).

Public vs. Private Funding of Kindergartens

In the PRC, modes of funding have changed, from being fully public to having a mixture. With the *National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020)* (Ministry of Education, 2010), priority is being given to western and rural areas. In Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan, all

[1] Institutions for children 3 months to 5 years old, with special authorization for up to 7 years old

[2] Institutions for children around 3 years to 6 years old

kindergartens are considered private schools (Li & Wang, 2017, Chap. 14). In Singapore and Hong Kong, the responsibility for children rests with the family, and the governments ensure that no child is deprived of ECE because of the family's financial status. The PEVS, initiated in 2007, is considered a milestone of ECE in Hong Kong, as it not only helps reduce parents' financial burden but also supports professional development of teachers and improvement in preschools (Ng et al., 2017, Chap. 10). In Macao, 1 year of free education is provided (Vong & Vong, 2017, Chap. 11).

Unique Cultural History

In each of these Chinese culture societies – the PRC, Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore, and Taiwan – government beliefs about the early years have influenced its policy (educational and fiscal) and guidelines for ECE. The largest influence on ECE has come from the government, albeit through the enforcement of standards. However, their unique historical and sociopolitical, demographic, and geographical characteristics have influenced ECE in each society. We briefly summarize these factors in each of these societies and their influence.

While the first kindergarten was established in 1903 in Wuhan in the PRC (Feng, 2017, Chap. 4) there was a strong Japanese influence. When the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded in 1949, the new government immediately launched political, economic, social, and cultural reforms, and its ideological partner in socialism and role model, the former Soviet Union, became the blueprint or template for Chinese reforms (Feng, 2017, Chap. 4). The opening-up policy, the privatization of ECE, and large urban disparities, and the large number of urban migrants, have all influenced the form of services.

Hong Kong's colonial history and Confucian cultural heritage have influenced the development of ECE. Since the transfer of sovereignty to the PRC in 1997, it follows a policy that promotes trilingualism and biliteracy. Hence it is not unusual for children in kindergartens to be exposed to three languages in a half-day kindergarten program. There has been steady increase in numbers of children coming from the PRC, and the government is committed to supporting children from ethnic minorities in learning Chinese (Ng et al., 2017, Chap. 10).

In Macao, 13 April 1987, the date of signing of the Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration on the question of Macao, was a milestone and a point of demarcation in its contemporary history (Vong & Wong, 2010). Leading up to this event, and to the handover in 1999, the Portuguese government of Macao initiated legislation in every social area, to define or to redefine the boundary of governance, including government intervention in ECE, initiated in the 1980s.

Singapore has risen quickly out of poverty, to become an advanced economic nation. The Singapore government takes proactive measures in technology development in the country and highly emphasizes the value of quality education. Although ECE is not directly provided by the Singapore government, there are policy tools to

continue nudging the ECE private sector toward better quality of provision (Lim & Lim, 2017, Chap. 12).

Taiwan was only able to form its own identity during World War II. In the 1970s, with rapid economic development, the government was able to attend more closely to ECE, by passing several important regulations which solidified the foundation for rapid development of kindergartens in Taiwan. In the past decade, the Taiwan government has adopted new measures to make ECE more affordable and accessible to preschoolers, as well as to improve the overall accountability of early childhood institutions (Chen & Li, 2017, Chap. 13).

Contrast Between These Societies in the Introduction/ Publication of Policy on ECE

The key ECE policy document in the PRC is the *Guiding Framework for Kindergarten Education* (Ministry of Education, 2001). In Hong Kong, proposals for reform put forward by the Education Commission in 2000 "have been influenced by international developments, and the need to prepare students for lifelong learning in a knowledge-based economy" (Rao, Koong, Kwong, & Wong, 2003). In a landmark acknowledgment, early childhood education was recognized as the foundation for lifelong learning (Education Commission, 2000), heralding that the government was moving from a laissez-faire approach toward an active interventionist approach in early childhood policy (Pearson & Rao, 2006). This welcome and proactive role adopted by government in early childhood education has resulted in remarkable progress in its development in Hong Kong.

Glocalization Rather Than Globalization

Tobin, Hsueh, and Karasawa (2009) have made a strong case for adaptation, rather than adoption, of best practices from other parts of the world. Many social scientists, among them Amartya Sen (2002), have stated that the process and effects of globalization, by their very nature, veer toward synthesis and accommodation, rather than superimposition.

This perspective has led to understanding and acceptance of the phenomenon of glocalization, where imported ideas merge with existing, deeply ingrained ideas to generate new and exciting forms. This recognition presents a more realistic and respectful view, than concerns about pervasive "coca-colonization" or any ingrained preference for "West-is-Best," among cultures and ideologies around the world.

Confucian Ideal of Education

Confucian values influence Chinese families and teachers, irrespective of where they live, notwithstanding society-specific history, educational guidelines, and policy, that may result in variations in early childhood education in these different Chinese societies (Rao, Sun, & Zhang, 2014). Chinese culture is generally characterized by collectivistic orientation and high power distance (social rules which preserve status differences). There is always the danger of dichotomizing cultural values, as more people are influenced by multiple layers of cultural influences in a globalized world or indeed a glocalized world. Chinese culture has been shaped by dominant Confucian values which have interacted with Daoist, Buddhist, and Judeo-Christian doctrines through history. Confucianism evolved over 2000 years and has met with significant transformation. Influenced by the core value of *xue-zuo-ren* ("learning to be human") in the Confucian tradition, Chinese educators advocate moral self-development or self-cultivation as an indispensable component of education, with some regarding it as the primary goal of education.

Adaptation Rather Than Adoption

Given this rich culture, philosophy, and wisdom, and the fact that it influences society, and, by extension, the policy and practice of education, to this day, it would follow that it makes most sense to acknowledge and build on this strong foundation. It is easy and natural to blend it with more contemporary approaches, rather than supplant it with approaches to education that may understandably present challenges in getting rooted in these Chinese culture societies.

In the context of the PRC, the private sector has over time supplemented the efforts of the public sector: the oft-quoted philosophy of "walking on two legs," with the government representing one leg and the private sector and free-market economy representing the other leg (Government Administration Council of the Central People's Government, 1979). This tenet, along with the approach of "Government step back, Private step in," has been implemented successfully, but its effects and efficacy in these societies are still a matter of debate.

Perhaps the time has come to look back, see how far we have come, and acknowledge that a strong foundation, at least, has been built. The days of seeding the ground (although that is a cyclical, ongoing, even eternal process) have given way to the nurturing of promising shoots and saplings of ECE in these countries.

In doing so, it is perhaps also time to step away from "freeze-framing" ECE development in the philosophy of "walking on two legs," or indeed of "Government step back, Private step in," for inherent in these images is the unarticulated or muted struggle and pain of perhaps "hobbling along," in a three-legged (or perhaps even one-legged) race of sorts, which may or may not be the most optimal use of the latent energy and intent of both sectors – albeit with the best of intentions.

To evolve what is best in ECE in these countries, there have been attempts to:

- Look eastward, as in the case of one wave of Chinese educational reform, in the 1920s, that resulted in importing ideas and methodologies from Japan.
- Look back, to Confucianism, and to practices such as those intuitively followed in schools in rural China, with the surprising realization that these schools naturally integrate the story-telling approach, as well as learning through play and activity, in ways that schools in urban metropolitan centers could do well to learn from.
- Look westward, as all of these cultures indeed have, in the past half-century, resulting in adoption, rather than adaption, of educational philosophies such as Montessori and Reggio Emilia.
- Look forward, with an intense, persistent determination to ensure that the next generation gets a head start and does not lose "at the starting line."

We further suggest that it is time to not just stride ahead but, indeed, to turn around, as in a dance, and then move forward: to look back and turn back, momentarily, to the rich wisdom and history of education in these Confucian heritage societies; to bow to the East and West with pride and thanks; and to acknowledge, accept, and integrate the learning and the journey with pride. We must continue to move forward to improve access to ECE, enhance the quality of services, and promote equity so that all children have access to high-quality early childhood education.

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