

Education in the context of China's social and economic development

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Abstract. This article describes the system of education in China; the features of modern educational standards; the role and influence of Confucianism and Sukhomlinsky's humanistic pedagogy in modern Chinese school; the trend of education humanization; the content of vocational training; aesthetic education; and the experience of contemporary Chinese teachers. Besides, the article identifies the ways to strengthen children's health, the main tasks in teaching of hygiene and the forms of physical education. The students of Chinese schools were not neglected. The article describes their everyday life in school and the methods for fostering the most gifted students.

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Introduction

The government of China found education to be of strategic importance for the socioeconomic and political development of the country. Thus Chinese authorities worked out a line for public education development and advanced a slogan: "education development should face modernization, external world and future".

Education improvement is a key to economic expansion. People in China understood this long ago. That is why they spare no efforts or expense in improving education in school and universities [2].

Today the number of students in elementary and secondary school is more than 200 million in China. If added to children of preschool age, it makes up the fifth part of the entire population. So the development of basic education is a priority for the government and is considered an important sphere of social infrastructure and the whole system of enlightenment.

Basic education includes preschool education; compulsory 9-year education from elementary school to lower secondary school; education in higher secondary school; special education for disabled children and education within the scope of illiteracy elimination.

In normative documents issued by the Chinese Ministry of Education, there is an idea that educational standards and syllabi should turn from the cognitive function to the function of spiritual advance [1].

"With this purpose, it was added to the standards of syllabi that they consider "process and methods", "sensory feelings and value system" not less important as "knowledge and skills", Zhong Ji Quan and Li Zhao Cun emphasized.

Currently, new educational standards are provided in elementary and lower secondary school for 14 subjects (not including optional classes): language and literature, mathematics, science (3-6 forms and 7-9 forms); physics, chemistry, biology, geography, history, history and society (1 and 2 parts), foreign language (English, Japanese, Russian), music, drawing, art, physical training and health.

If compared with the previous syllabi, these standards have three criteria for each subject (knowledge and skills; process and methods; emotional and value positioning).

Radio and television, along with the Internet, are the main means for implementing educational programs.

In new educational standards, China put a significant accent on aesthetic upbringing. For instance, subject "fine arts" includes three areas: the aesthetics of fine arts; painting (drawing); sculpture; and five obligatory units: design; technology; calligraphy; seal engraving; modern mass media art. "Art" includes 16 units covering the culture and history of China and foreign countries (music, theatre, fine arts, dancing). Students are to choose 6 of them, each of 18 hours. As before, ideological and moral upbringing is under special attention.

The Beijing Education Department introduced such new subjects as "engineering and information science", "basics of information science" and "art" to new educational standards. Moreover, it for the first time included various units, such as "car driving and maintenance", "basics of dramatic directions and dramaturgy" [7].

From the first day of training, every student has an electronic "record book of general advance" in which teachers describe his everyday behavior and progress (diligence). After he finishes his studies,

there is quite an objective general assessment of a student. He can use it in his further education.

In China, they foster the most gifted students: those who want to skip a grade, change school or field of study, chose a more advanced level [2].

According to the system worked out by Confucius, contemporary Chinese school adopts moral and ethical norms of human behavior; respect for ancestors, especially parents; philanthropy and first of all love for relatives; respect for elders and submission to them; internal perfection.

Today Confucius remains a Teacher for compatriots. His followers strive to have exceptional knowledge and deep wisdom like Confucius.

“He was gentle, kind, polite, modest and compliant and taught four things: culture, behavior, devotion and confidence. He disapproved four things: idle conjectures, categoricalness, stubbornness and selfishness”.

The humanistic character of Confucianism “was expressed in a special attention to man, in philanthropy” [4], which manifests itself in observing traditions and rituals. “The respect for parents and elder brothers is a base for philanthropy”. “Broad knowledge and inflexible will, inquisitive mind and painstaking reflection – all these things contain philanthropy”.

Confucius laid emphasis on two virtues man must have – duty (or fairness) and humanity (or philanthropy).

V.A. Sukhomlinsky saw the cultivation of duty and responsibility in a student in the context of forming notions “it is necessary”, “I should”, “I must” in his mind.

Vasily Sukhomlinsky attached a special importance to childhood as the highest value. He created a school of joy which gave each pupil a humanistic basis: emotional and aesthetic upbringing (the cultivation of beautiful feelings, responsiveness and delicacy) and the development of positive qualities, needs, abilities and potential. This was promoted by joy, happiness, cheerful world-view, anxiety elimination and the developed sense of peace and security [17].

Vice-president of Chinese Academy of Education Zhu Xiao Man says that the deep inner needs of Chinese society and education caused the distribution of Sukhomlinsky’s ideas and their wide use not only by certain teachers-innovators but even by teacher teams.

The works of V.A. Sukhomlinsky, his approaches to education and upbringing, are under due attention. Their popularity grows in Chinese educational community. His followers undertake various measures for the popularization of his ideas.

Sukhomlinsky’s book “The Pavlysh Secondary School” was translated into Chinese and published in China in 1982. Its popularity is so high that it was published almost in all Chinese provinces along with his another book “I Give My Heart to Children”. It became a reference book for many teachers who thought about the questions of person’s all-around development [8].

Today Chinese teachers continue to study thoroughly the works of V.A. Sukhomlinsky where he describes his experience with backward children in Pavlysh secondary school. Sukhomlinsky researched the mental and physical development of backward children and came to a conclusion that 85% of them lag behind because of the unsatisfactory work in class and at home, repeating years and poor health. Chinese teachers are especially interested in the methods and routine for working with such children and measures for health improvement.

V.A. Sukhomlinsky managed to find brand new solutions for a wide range of questions concerning modern educational concept in China: pedagogical ethics; school, family and sex education; intensification and optimization of educational process; introduction of obtained knowledge into the intellectual, moral, emotional and aesthetic development of schoolchildren; management of the spiritual life in school community; cultivation of civic stand and patriotism [10].

Professor of Beijing Teacher’s Training University Xiao Su thinks that the concept of educating a comprehensively and harmoniously developed person created by V.A. Sukhomlinsky became very called-for in contemporary Chinese education. His principal pedagogic ideas about educating a comprehensively and harmoniously developed person absolutely agree with what is called “the education of natural qualities”. That is why it is rightful to say that the pedagogic concept of Sukhomlinsky promotes the education of person’s natural qualities which were given to him by nature [13].

Moreover, Chinese researchers see the significance of V.A. Sukhomlinsky in the simple language of his works. This makes his ideas be understood and used by many teachers. That is why Sukhomlinsky is still the most known foreign educator in the pedagogic community of China, especially for teachers of elementary and secondary school [12].

Sukhomlinsky’s ideas about physical training are very important for Chinese school. Classrooms are often overcrowded (up to sixty pupils in a small room). In these conditions, the care for health and physical education becomes one of the most important concerns for a teacher.

Now we will list the methods of improving children's health and their physical education in Pavlysh secondary school which are used in China:

- a system of discussions about man and his body;
- optimal alternation of mental and physical work;
- health-improving physical training lessons, morning exercises, sport minutes and dynamic breaks;
- establishing a wide network of sport groups and drawing students in active participation ('sport is a favorite occupation of every student');
- sport games, competitions, festivals (athletics, gymnastics, swimming, horse riding, skating, skiing, cycling, winter amusements, snow building, etc.);
- forming in students an idea about the necessity to take care of their own and other people's health; active popularization of healthy life-style;
- keeping a proper day regimen;
- creation of positive psychic atmosphere in educational institution [15].

These ideas are in harmony with the demands of contemporary Chinese educational system where physical education is an important part, especially in elementary and secondary school. Physical education is aimed at strengthening students' health, their normal physical development and body reinforcement. Along with these tasks, students receive basic knowledge about hygiene and methods of health protection.

In 1996, China adopted "The Rules for Physical Education at School" and "The Rules for Hygiene Lessons at School" [3]. According to these documents, the main tasks of hygiene study are:

- monitoring of students' state of health;
- forming a habit to keep a healthy life-style and to observe the rules of hygiene and sanitation;
- improvement of sanitation and hygiene conditions at school;
- preventive measures against infectious diseases.

The main form of physical education is a physical training lesson. Besides the obligatory physical training lessons, students of elementary and secondary school in China are to do their everyday morning exercises, perform sport breaks during classes, etc. The Committee on Physical Culture and Sports periodically carries out all-Chinese, regional and municipal sport competitions. After the success of the China team at the Olympic Games in Greece and before the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008, sport popularization work became very active [11].

In May 1959, Chinese teacher Wang Yi visited Pavlysh secondary school. Senior Pioneer Organizer Lidya Kurilo asked me to come to school in Ukrainian costume that day. When Wang Yi arrived, I received a towel with embroidered Ukrainian ornament and bread with salt. All students stayed before the school building. Vasily Sukhomlinsky and I went out to meet the Chinese guest. I greeted him in Ukrainian. Wang Yi snapped off a piece of bread, dipped it into salt and ate. He thanked me and greeted Vasily. Then we entered the school. In November 2004, in a delegation of Ukrainian teachers (O.V. Sukhomlinskaya, A.Y. Savchenko, V.F. Derkach, V.A. Sukhomlinsky, V.N. Khairulina) I took part in International Research and Practice Conference devoted to the formation of Chinese educational system in the context of Sukhomlinsky's ideas. These were unforgettable days. The Conference took place in Huasheng secondary school where there were A Research and Practice Centre on the heritage of V.A. Sukhomlinsky and a museum named after him. After the reports we answered the questions of teachers and performed individual consultations for them [16].

We were impressed by the wish of the Chinese teacher to trace the career of Vasily Sukhomlinsky, to identify his pedagogical methods, approaches and techniques. Chinese teachers told us how they practice the ideas of V.A. Sukhomlinsky and what results they obtain. They imbibed with attention and concentration the ideas of V.A. Sukhomlinsky about school, children and teacher which are up-to-date in the 21st century. We visited lessons where we saw how Chinese teachers introduce Sukhomlinsky's ideas in the practice of their school (lessons of thinking, experiments, searching, etc.). Besides, Chinese teachers pay attention to school environment which is important according to Sukhomlinsky. The rooms for classes, rest and sport are spacious, light and cosy [19, 23].

School headmistress, her deputies and teachers are competent, enthusiastic and open to everything new. They try to solve the problems of each student with love. All conditions are created for their all-round development. Teachers of foreign language are invited from the USA and the UK. Teachers of drawing and music are invited from the Ukrainian Academy of Arts. Manual training is performed in production shops. Production made by students and their parents is exported not only to Chinese provinces but also to all countries of the world.

Lively and noisy during the break, Chinese students are concentrated in classes where they acquire knowledge, and inspired while singing or dancing.

In November 2013, together with V.F. Derkach and V.N. Khairulina, I visited a number of schools in China where educational program “The Didactic System of V.A. Sukhomlinsky” is implemented.

In recent 20 years, the ideas of V.A. Sukhomlinsky are at the centre of attention in China, says Mrs. Zhu Xiao Man. Why Sukhomlinsky is so popular in China? This is because his practical experience is versatile. His ideas are up-to-date. He proclaimed general human values, studied the questions of child’s spiritual upbringing and feelings. This is the base for moral upbringing of students. In his original theory and practice of molding senses, V.A. Sukhomlinsky pays attention to the importance of kindness, responsibility, self-esteem and justice [9, 22].

O.V. Gukalenko, A.Y. Daniluk, Zhu Xiao Man and Liu Zi Lin marked out the following similar system-making ideas in the educational concepts of Russian and Chinese scientists:

- considering child the highest value on earth;
- the subject-subject character of education;
- dialogue as an all-purpose form of education;
- transition from the knowledge-information educational model to the person-oriented one.

The trend of education humanization is a consequence of accepting general human values. Globalization results in the wide use of information technologies. Chinese educational system is built in national tradition to a great extent.

The basic task for all levels of government is to reduce educational load at all steps of education. This task requires “thorough planning and multi-aspect implementation” [25].

The content of vocational education differentiates with a glance to regional peculiarities. Modern educational technologies are introduced, and various pedagogical terms are bought to agreement [3].

In the period from the late 20th to the early 21st centuries, education, especially the higher one, is a very important priority of the social and economic development of China and the question of prestige for Chinese society. Chinese government is guided by strategical slogan “the country’s progress by science and education”. As the epoch of “information boom” sets in, the importance of education for social and economic development of China manifests itself more and more convincingly [6, 21].

As no other country, China moves systematically and efficiently to the world standards of education both in administrative and methodological plane. At the same time the centuries-

old national tradition of social educational institution is used in combination with the innovations of leading countries under the conditions of growing globalization and world integration [6].

There are about two thousand universities in China. The number of students increases. The system of higher education includes state and private universities.

In compliance with the law on higher education (1999), foreigners can study in Chinese universities, conduct researches or teach if they meet the requirements.

Today, about 30 thousand foreign teachers work in China (mainly from the USA and Western Europe). Law permits to create students’ organizations. Their activity should be “regulated by internal order and agree with school administration” [4].

In China, there is a trend to get higher education abroad. For 20 years, 270 thousand young people went to study to the west, first of all to the USA. 40 thousand Chinese study in U.S. universities and 8 thousand ones study in Russia [14, 18].

International student exchange projects in China include different kinds of collaboration: contacts between teachers, student swap, joint research, joint study, etc. Many students get education abroad [5]. They come back being already creative scientific and technical elite. They introduce modern knowledge, outlook, efficient technologies, forms of management and advanced industrial experience [8].

At the phases of secondary and higher education, the concern for the efficiency and perfection of education come to the fore. This is directly connected with modernization which in turn cannot do without regular update of state educational standards, strict monitoring of programs implementation and the quality of education, teachers’ advanced training and the usage of Internet. The same is in Russia [20, 24].

Both in Russian and Chinese scientific community have similar opinions about the reorganization of pedagogical education. The heads of educational institution must have “the highest level of education in psychology, pedagogy and taught subjects”.

N.K. Rozov compared the state of education in China and Russia. He notes that there is a trend to the gradual transformation of specialized teacher’s training universities into the “classical” ones. However, in China such universities keep the function of teacher’s training.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is worth to notice that education is a fundamental and priority field in modern China. It moves systematically and efficiently to world standards in content, administration and methodology. At the same time the priority of national educational model and traditional spiritual values is preserved.

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