

Research on After-School Education in China: History, Progress and Trends

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Abstract: Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, research on after-school education in China has gone through four stages: emergence, exploration, reconstruction and development. Researchers have studied the concept, object, essence, content and organization of after-school education. Its research will advance towards the trend of two-way interaction between localized theoretical construction and practical exploration, comprehensive development of macro research and micro exploration, and comprehensive application of quantitative and qualitative research.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, after-school education has received more and more attention from researchers in China, and both theoretical research and practical exploration have become more and more in-depth, but there has been a lack of more systematic summarization and reflection on the research of after-school education. Based on CNKI(China National Knowledge Infrastructure), I searched and reviewed nearly 1,000 papers on after-school education published from October 1949 to December 2023 with the key words and titles of "after-school education" and "out-of-school activities". Accordingly, we reviewed the history of the research on after-school education in China, sorted out the progress and problems of the research, and attempted to reveal some trends of the future research on after-school education in China on the basis of the combination of history and logic.

1. The history of research on after-school education in China

1.1 Emergence stage (1949--1956)

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the rise of research on after-school education in China has been based, on the one hand, on the researchers' knowledge and thinking about the current development of the after-school education cause. 1949, the first after-school education institution in China, the Dalian Children's Cultural Palace, was established. 1953, the China Welfare Association Children's Palace was established in Shanghai. Since then, Children's palaces or children's out-of-school institutions began to be built all over the country, especially in some big cities in developed regions. On the other hand, it was due to the translation and introduction of the Soviet Union's research works, teaching materials and papers on after-school education by researchers. In June 1950, People's Education published the Soviet Union's Mikhail Gendrev's article "Krupskaya on Out-of-School Work"^[1] The publication of this paper marked the

beginning of the rise of research on after-school education in China since the founding of the country. The paper pointed out that Krupskaya attached great importance to the issue of out-of-school work, she clarified the relationship between out-of-school work and school, and explained the basic tasks, basic forms, basic principles and basic purposes of after-school education. Generally speaking, this phase of research on after-school education is in its emergent stage.

1.2 Exploration Stage (1957--1977)

In 1957, the first regulatory document in the history of after-school education in China, *Several Provisions on after-school education and the Work of Juvenile Homes*, was promulgated, and the legal status of after-school education was recognized. Based on the surge of school-age children in the 1960s, after-school education developed rapidly across the country. During this period, after-school education institutions shifted from large and medium-sized children's palaces to small, decentralized activities. The activity places were scattered and established in residential districts, residents' committees, streets, and the trend of after-school education institutions showed the trend of networkization. A large number of practical activities of after-school education prompted researchers to reflect on and explore the development of after-school education work experience, representative of the 1956 China Welfare Association Children's Palace of the "Shanghai Children's Palace work experience" article. The article reflected on and explored such issues as clarifying the guidelines and tasks of the Children's Palace, and how to utilize social forces.

The research and exploration of after-school education at this stage gradually shifted from the mere introduction of translation to the summarization of experience and rational reflection on practical activities, which provided experience for the study of after-school education in China.

1.3 Reconstruction Stage (1978---1999)

This stage is characterized by the following aspects:

1.3.1 Focusing on theoretical research on after-school education

Monographs on the study of after-school education were produced in this period, namely, *after-school education*, edited by Shen Deming in 1989, and *Extracurricular and after-school education*, authored by Zhang Yincheng in 1997. Based on the practice of after-school education, the researchers analyzed the basic situation of after-school education, elaborated on the basic issues of after-school education, such as the concept, role, characteristics, and laws of after-school education, and advocated that research be conducted at both the theoretical and practical levels. The above research content shows that China's after-school research has begun to develop from the analysis of practical problems to the theoretical exploration, and the theoretical results have begun to form a system.

1.3.2 Begin to pay attention to the construction of juvenile palace management system

Some researchers analyzed the urgency and feasibility of reforming after-school education from the aspects of guiding ideology, management system, basic construction and regulation designation on the basis of analyzing the existing problems of juvenile palaces.^[2] Some researchers defined the composition and functions of the juvenile palace at the horizontal and vertical organizational levels and proposed directions for reform in terms of school education, family education and government relations.^[3] Some researchers analyze the necessity of reforming the director system of juvenile palace from the perspective of scientific decision-making, efficient command and the overall function of juvenile palace and the relationship between democratic management of juvenile palace.

[4]

1.3.3 Focusing on the comparative study of after-school education with foreign countries

Researchers have conducted a comprehensive study of after-school education in the USSR, Japan and other countries and have drawn on them. Some researchers have analyzed and described the construction of the after-school education system in the Soviet Union. ^[5]Some researchers, after comparing the after-school education in China and Japan, suggest to learn from their experiences in specialized after-school education institutions and networked after-school education centers. ^[6] There are also researchers who have studied Japan's after-school education system and after-school education educational facilities. ^[7]

Generally speaking, since the reform and opening up, the theoretical research on after-school education in China has become more systematized, and the contents of the research have become more diversified and comprehensive.

1.4 Development Stage (2000 - present)

Entering the 21st century, with the continuous development of China's out-of-school career, the research on after-school education has been deepened and developed, and this development is mainly reflected in the following three aspects.

1.4.1 The theoretical study of after-school education has been further deepened

During this period, two new works on after-school education were published, namely, *Modern Theory of after-school education* (2001) written by the Professional Committee of Children and Youth after-school education of the Chinese Education Society and *after-school education* (2002 edition) edited by China Children's Center. By analyzing the basic theoretical issues in after-school education, the researchers have gained a deeper knowledge and understanding of the concepts, characteristics, roles, functions and disciplinary construction of after-school education. During the research process, the connotation and extension of after-school education have been developing and improving, which requires us to look at researching after-school education from a more specialized perspective and theory. Some researchers also propose to build after-school education as a secondary discipline of education from the standpoint of discipline construction. ^[8]Both the research on the basic theory of after-school education and the discussion on the theory construction of after-school education show that the research on after-school education in this period is more in-depth and perfect.

1.4.2 Comparative research with foreign after-school education becomes more in-depth

At this stage, researchers have made more in-depth comparative studies on after-school education abroad, especially in the comparison between Chinese and Japanese after-school education. Researchers not only compare the similarities and differences between Chinese and Japanese after-school education at different stages of education, but also expand the field of view to different levels such as educational policies, micro-educational institutions and specific historical figures in education, in an attempt to grasp the development and direction of Japanese extracurricular education as a whole. Some researchers have analyzed and drawn on the policies and regulations, administration, and main facilities of after-school education in Japan. ^[9]Some researchers have analyzed the nature, content and characteristics of after-school education in Beijing and Tokyo, and concluded that after-school education in Tokyo favors social education activities, while after-school education in Beijing favors "professional" education activities. ^[10]

1.4.3 Optimization and integration of after-school education and school education resources have become the focus of research.

As the role of after-school education is becoming more and more significant, how to rationally allocate educational resources inside and outside the school has become the focus of researchers. Some researchers have analyzed in detail the objectives, contents, principles, ways and guarantee conditions of social education run by schools.^[11] Some researchers put forward the specific mode of cooperation between primary and secondary schools and children's centers.^[12] Other researchers have explored the objectives, organization and management, and basic mode of off-campus educational activity courses from the development status of off-campus educational courses at home and abroad.^[13]

In general, the research on after-school education since the 21st century has been deepened and made more specific by the expansion of the research field and the diversification of research perspectives.

2. The Progress of after-school education Research in China

Over the past 70 years, the progress of research on after-school education in China has mainly reflected the following aspects.

2.1 The concept of after-school education

At present, the concept of after-school education is mainly defined from the perspectives of implementation carrier and educational content, as follows:

2.1.1 Definition from the perspective of the implementation carrier of after-school education

Firstly, "after-school education organizations", that after-school education is "in addition to the school, a variety of institutions and organizations for children to implement a variety of upbringing, education work, called children's out-of-school activities."^[14]

Secondly, "after-school education Institutions", which holds that after-school education is "a variety of purposeful, planned and organized educational activities carried out by after-school educational institutions such as juvenile palaces, youth palaces, children's activity centers, science and technology museums for young people and children's homes." ^[15]

The above viewpoints consider after-school education to be outside of school education and implemented by after-school educational institutions. The second understanding further emphasizes what are the implementing institutions of after-school education.

2.1.2 Definition from the perspective of the content of after-school education

Firstly, after-school education includes "out-of-school teaching guidance related to school life; activities conducted by teachers guiding students outside of school; out-of-school guidance related to children's and students' life outside of school; and the responsibility for after-school education is shared by both after-school educational institutions and schools." ^[16]

Secondly, after-school education is "the education that students receive through social and cultural educational institutions and colorful socio-political activities, scientific and technological activities, public welfare work and so on, in the broad time and space outside the school." ^[17]

The essence of defining extracurricular education from the perspective of its content is to reveal the connotation of extracurricular education. This is an indispensable stage for recognizing the concept of after-school education, but it is difficult to form a comprehensive and scientific

understanding.

2.2 Objects of after-school education

Most researchers believe that the objects of after-school education are children and adolescents. Psychology generally believes that adolescents are divided into adolescence and early youth, adolescence is from eleven or twelve to fourteen or fifteen years old, and youth is from fourteen or fifteen to seventeen or eighteen years old, which is equivalent to the entire secondary school stage. As for childhood, it is from the age of six or seven to eleven or twelve. Therefore, the target group of after-school education is also primary and secondary school students. In the context of lifelong education and learning for all, some researchers believe that the target group of after-school education includes not only young people but also social residents.

2.3 The essence of after-school education

The essence of after-school education is not only the embodiment of the nature of education, but also a reflection of the uniqueness of after-school education, and the two are interrelated. After-school education is a social activity dedicated to shaping students' personalities, which not only shows the core qualities of education in cultivating human beings, but also highlights its unique nature in promoting personality development.

2.4 Content of after-school education

Compared with school education, which is fixed in time, place and teaching content, after-school education shows great flexibility and richness in these aspects. At present, our scholars on the content of after-school education has been expanded to ideological and moral education, sports, science and technology education, cultural and artistic education and other aspects. Breaking through the uniformity of school education and teaching programs, workers in after-school education can start from the needs of social and regional development and the characteristics of students' physical and mental development level, using different teaching activities to teach.

2.5 Organizational forms of after-school education

Some researchers have divided after-school education institutions into two categories: comprehensive and specialized. Comprehensive after-school education institutions include children's activity centers and juvenile palaces. Specialized after-school educational institutions are set up for the purpose of carrying out certain activities, such as children's libraries, children's reading rooms and so on. Some researchers believe that after-school educational institutions mainly include four categories: juvenile palaces, after-school educational activity venues, after-school educational training institutions, and after-school educational service institutions. ^[18]

3. The development trend of after-school education research in China

The achievements and shortcomings of the research on after-school education in China coexist. We need to explore the trend of after-school education research on this basis.

3.1 Localized theoretical construction and practical exploration tend to be two-way interaction

There have been studies at the theoretical level analyzing the development of after-school

education from different perspectives, such as the concept, essence, object, content and function of after-school education, and the research results of after-school education have become increasingly rich. However, there is more deduction from practice and less generalization from the logic of extracurricular education itself. When borrowing theories from other countries, they neglected the educational thoughts and theories about extracurricular education in Chinese history and tradition, and failed to reflect the characteristics of China's extracurricular education. The study of after-school education requires researchers to actively invest in the construction of localized theories, to think about the reality of after-school education from a practical point of view, and to form a systematic theory of Chinese after-school education.

Research on after-school education in China will advance with the two-way interaction between localized theory construction and practical exploration. The reform and practice of extracurricular education cannot be separated from researchers' understanding of the connotation, essence, object and content of extracurricular education. Based on the actual development of extracurricular education, it will be a common direction for researchers to examine the current situation of China's extracurricular education, to find out the obstacles and to explore the strategies to cope with them. The two-way interaction between local theoretical exploration and practice will become the roadmap for after-school education research.

3.2 Combination of Macro Research and Micro Exploration

Extramural education research must be scrutinized from the perspective of methodology, realized in activities and processes, and constructed in the overall extramural system, which requires the support of teachers, students, schools and society. From the macro level, it is necessary to open up the vision, draw on and absorb international research, researchers will no longer simply transplant and draw on the research results of after-school education in Europe and the United States, but to learn from the deeper level of their exploration of after-school education and research paths and ways; from the micro level, the research on after-school education will further synthesize the disciplinary perspectives, the basic theories, and analyze the characteristics of after-school education from the relationship with school education, social education and community education. At the micro level, research on after-school education will further synthesize disciplinary perspectives and basic theories, and analyze the characteristics of after-school education in its relationship with school education, social education and community education. For this reason, research on extracurricular education will certainly be oriented towards the combination of macro and micro.

3.3 Quantitative and qualitative research towards comprehensive application

Research on extracurricular education requires empirical research as well as theoretical research. After combing the literature on the research of after-school education, the author found that there are more empirical studies in after-school education, less theoretical studies, and less theoretical. In terms of research methods, researchers still need to break through and innovate to achieve scientific in-depth thinking about after-school education. Therefore, researchers urgently need to enrich the methodology of after-school education research by comprehensively applying quantitative and qualitative research methods.

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