

Analysis of the Diverse Models of Community Childcare Services Abroad and Exploration of the Path for Localization and Innovation in China

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Abstract: The rise of community childcare services is not only an inevitable outcome of the transformation of economic and social development but also an important manifestation of the reconstruction of the relationship among families, society, and the state. Its driving forces are closely related to factors such as the normalization of dual-income families due to accelerated urbanization, the reduction of childcare time due to the accelerated pace of life, and the transformation of family childcare needs due to the popularization of scientific concepts. This paper analyzes the current development status and problems of community childcare services in China, selects different childcare models from around the world such as those in Northern Europe and the United States for comparison and research, analyzes their institutional logic and operational efficiency, and proposes a localized framework integrating systems, spaces, cultures, and technologies. It conducts in-depth exploration on the supply system, service network, intergenerational childcare community, and precise service system, aiming to provide references for the innovation and optimization of the community childcare service system with Chinese characteristics.

1. Introduction

Influenced by factors such as the transformation of population structure and the normalization of dual-income families, China's community childcare services are facing a major problem of structural imbalance between supply and demand. Data from the National Health Commission in 2023 shows that there are only 2.1 childcare places per thousand people in the country, which is less than 50% of the target set in the 14th Five-Year Plan. Moreover, there are also contradictions such as mismatched service times and improper spatial allocation. The deep-seated contradictions are reflected in three tensions: the competition between public service attributes and market-oriented operations, the conflict between standardized construction and community heterogeneity, and the collision between intergenerational parenting concepts and modern childcare concepts. At the same time, most of the current research focuses on the experience of a single country and lacks systematic comparisons of multiple models and exploration of local transformation paths. This article analyzes the institutional logic of the welfare-oriented model in Northern Europe, the market-oriented model in the United States, the community-embedded model in Japan, and the

public-private partnership model in Singapore, and combines the characteristics of China's community governance to propose innovative paths from a four-dimensional framework of institutions, space, culture, and technology, providing decision-making references for building a childcare service system that is compatible with the development of new urbanization.

2. Current Situation and Challenges of Community Childcare Services in China

2.1. Supply-Demand Mismatch

The meaning of supply-demand mismatch is that there is a mismatch in the supply of community childcare services. Issues such as quantity, structure, time, and quality cannot meet the actual needs of families[1]. In 2023, the "National Monitoring Report on Childcare Institutions" released by the National Health Commission of China showed that the number of childcare places per thousand population was only 2.1, while the target for the "13th Five-Year Plan" was 4.5. This indicates a significant gap between the two. Additionally, there is a mismatch in service time. For example, a childcare center in Pudong District, Shanghai, chose the operating time of "8 am - 5 pm", but this conflicted with the free time of many families, resulting in a high vacancy rate for midday care. From the perspective of solutions, the "embedded" community childcare service model can be introduced, such as setting up temporary childcare points in places like courier stations or coffee shops, in order to achieve shared use of venues and solve the time contradiction through staggered operation, thereby increasing the coverage of childcare services.

2.2. Institutional Obstacles

Some community service centers have experienced long-term vacancy of their childcare sites due to failing to meet fire safety standards and conflicts with civil building regulations. The main reasons are as follows: Firstly, in terms of entrances and exits, the "Design Code for Kindergartens and Nurseries" implemented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development in 2019 requires independent design of entrances and exits, but many old communities have limited existing space and are unable to meet this standard. Secondly, in terms of the staffing of caregivers, the "Certification Rules for Childcare Services" require that childcare institutions must have at least 2 caregivers and hold relevant professional certificates. However, in reality, the certification rate in many second- and third-tier cities is generally low, below 35%. From the perspective of solutions, the "1+N" model of community childcare can be promoted, allowing a single demonstration point to radiate different micro-service stations, thereby achieving the sharing of fire safety qualification and making flexible adjustments to the staffing of caregivers. [2]

2.3. Cultural Resistance

Cultural concepts have a direct impact on the development of childcare service models. According to the "2023 National Survey Report on Childcare Practices of Families with Children Aged 0-3" by the China Family Development Center, 62.1% of grandparents believe that children should not be placed in institutions for care but should be raised by families. In county areas, this concept is even more prominent, and many childcare centers in county areas have a relatively small number of enrolled children. From the perspective of solutions, it is necessary to strengthen the publicity of childcare services, guide the elderly, and launch the "Grandparents Co-care Project", and require child-rearing experts to explain scientific and correct child-rearing methods, thereby increasing the acceptance of childcare institutions by grandparents. [3]

3. Typical Models of International Community Childcare Services

3.1. Welfare Model

The welfare-based community childcare model implemented in Nordic countries integrates childcare and services into the category of basic public services. For instance, in 2018, Sweden revised its "Early Childhood Education Law", where municipal authorities provide free childcare services for children for at least 3 hours every day. Additionally, in terms of space, many childcare facilities in Copenhagen were transformed from underground garages of community centers, and this phenomenon is quite common. Under the influence of this layout policy, the enrollment rate of 2-year-old children in childcare in Denmark has significantly increased. However, behind this seemingly high welfare, there are unavoidable financial issues. In 2022, the Oslo City Hall in Norway allocated an annual subsidy of 93,000 kroner per childcare place, which is equivalent to 65,000 RMB. This constitutes 35% of the overall municipal education expenditure globally, highlighting the issue of fairness in intergenerational burden. When adopting this model, one can learn from its inclusive system and use legislation to clearly define the responsibility for providing public services. However, one must be cautious of the imbalance in intergenerational burden.

3.2. Market-Dominated Model

In the construction of community childcare services in the United States, there is a strong emphasis on flexibility, presenting a characteristic of "market-driven layered supply". For example, the price of childcare services in some communities is only 8 US dollars per day, solving the childcare problem for many low-income families. However, some private early education centers charge as high as 85 US dollars per day, indicating the intuitive fragmentation of their educational landscape. According to the "2023 US Childcare Crisis and Inequality Report" by the Brookings Institution, among families with an annual income of less than 30,000 US dollars in the United States, only 23% can obtain compliant childcare services. Moreover, the development of science and technology has also had an impact on childcare services, such as the childcare center for Google headquarters employees, which introduced an AI sleep monitoring system, allowing parents to use VR glasses to understand their children's daily activities. However, the optimization of this childcare service also deepened the problem of class division of childcare resources. When adopting this model, one can utilize market-oriented operations to stimulate social participation and provide differentiated services to meet different needs. However, one must be cautious of issues of class solidification.

3.3. Community Embedded Model

In the childcare service model of Japan, childcare facilities are deeply integrated with the community, presenting a feature of "small-scale dispersion". For example, the spatial reconfiguration strategy of Yokohama City aims to transform some idle postal outlets, shops, etc. into childcare areas and provide 2-hour daily childcare services. From the perspective of intergenerational integration, Kyoto has vigorously implemented the "Silver Age Childcare Support Program", enabling the elderly to receive training and participate in childcare services. Some certified families can use their own residences to offer corresponding childcare services and receive certain subsidies from the government each year. According to the data in the "2023 Childcare Services White Paper" of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan, the overall density of childcare facilities in Japanese communities is high, reaching 4.2 per 10,000 people, but the average operating cost is 18% higher than that of large centers. When adopting this model, it is

possible to integrate micro facilities into the community living circle to effectively integrate traditional nurturing resources. However, one must avoid issues of decentralized operation pushing up costs and efficiency. [4]

3.4. Public-Private Partnership Model

Singapore has made innovations in its system, presenting three characteristics in its childcare system: Firstly, there is mandatory space allocation. In 2020, the Housing and Development Board of Singapore issued the "Planning Standards for Child Development Centers", which required new residential complexes to be equipped with 1 childcare center for every 800 households, but the land rent was relatively low, only 10% of commercial land. Secondly, in terms of quality supervision, Singapore has established a childcare service platform nationwide. All operations such as reservations and monitoring can be completed online. Finally, the payment system is gradient-based. According to different family incomes, it is divided into five different subsidy grades, and 30% of the places need to be reserved for the government for overall allocation. Under this model, the enrollment rate of children under 3 years old in Singapore has been effectively improved. However, this standard also brings problems such as homogenization of services, leading many high-income families to choose international childcare institutions. When borrowing this model, standardized services and gradient subsidies can be introduced to enhance its fairness and efficiency, but it is necessary to avoid excessive standardization, suppression of service innovation, and other issues.

4. Exploration of Localized Innovation Paths in China

4.1. Construction at the Institutional Level

To effectively address issues such as policy inefficiency, it is necessary to establish flexible and highly adaptable local regulations, thereby achieving the goal of breaking through institutional barriers. For example, the mechanism for mixed land use should be improved. In some old communities in China, there is a shortage of site resources. The innovative experience of Shanghai Jing'an District in policy formulation can be cited. In 2023, the revised "Shanghai Urban and Rural Planning Regulations" updated the terms, emphasizing the importance of shared space for community service land mixed use, allowing places such as senior activity centers and community canteens to share space with childcare facilities. Some communities have renovated senior meal service points, turning them into intergenerational shared spaces, and then planning periods for activities such as childcare, meal provision, and entertainment, effectively increasing the utilization rate of the space. [5-6]

At the same time, one can also learn from the "multi-generation house" model in Germany. Specifically, the childcare function can be integrated into public service venues such as fitness rooms and libraries. As an example, the "four o'clock school" pilot project in Nanjing Gulou District selected the idle time in the afternoon for childcare services, and divided the different time periods for safety management responsibilities according to the "Shared Space Safety Management Measures", effectively improving the efficiency of childcare services.

In terms of talent, a stepped policy can be adopted. To effectively address the problem of a shortage of professional childcare workers, Shenzhen and Hangzhou have introduced policies for the settlement of graduates from preschool education programs. Specifically, graduates can settle in after joining the job, and a skill improvement channel has been set up for domestic housekeeping personnel. Under the influence of these policies, in 2024, the certification rate of childcare workers in Hangzhou significantly increased, rising from the original 35% to 68%, with 35% being transferred workers. At the same time, a system of connecting professional titles can be

implemented, such as senior childcare workers being able to participate in the professional title evaluation of primary and secondary school teachers, further enhancing the attractiveness of the profession. Additionally, the certification system for childcare workers in China can be improved, which can draw on Japan's "National Qualification for Childcare Workers" system, and effectively open up channels for mutual recognition of professional titles within the education system.

4.2. Optimization at the Spatial Level

The issue of limited educational places is a major problem in China's childcare services. To innovate and optimize at the spatial level, diversified supply models of spaces can be established. For example, activating existing buildings. The South District of Shenzhen, based on space-based childcare, has formulated the "Technical Guidelines for Community Non-standard Space Childcare Renovation", specifically, different places are renovated, such as courier stations and community lobbies. For example, the Park Science Community renovated the space above the courier cabinets, making it a suspended childcare corner, equipped with folding activity facilities, and with a low single-point construction cost of less than 80,000 yuan, providing about 4 hours of temporary care services daily. In addition, the renovation of existing buildings also needs to be combined with child-friendly design standards, such as the "Community Non-standard Childcare Space Children's Friendliness Evaluation Index" formulated by Shenzhen, setting corresponding indicators for aspects such as lighting, noise, and air quality, in order to create a more comfortable childcare environment for young children.

Or it can be jointly supplied by the government and enterprises, and managed through the guidance of government policies and the professional operation of market-oriented institutions for child care services. For instance, Qianjiang District of Chongqing has collaborated with Yonghui Superstores to jointly implement the shopping care model. Specifically, parents can exchange 2 hours of free care services by scanning the QR code of the goods, and the internal space of the supermarket has specially set up an over 200 m² children's activity area. The government can provide certain subsidies to enterprises based on the number of service recipients. Under the influence of this model, the coverage rate of childcare services in this community has significantly improved, and it has also driven the customer flow of the supermarket. In addition, various innovative financing tools such as "social benefit bonds" can be introduced. The government can invest in the project, while enterprises need to assume the responsibility of joint operation to ensure the sharing of risks and returns. [7]

4.3. Transformation at the cultural level

Traditional culture has an intuitive impact on early childhood care services. Many grandparents have a relatively resistant attitude towards such services. To effectively break through this rejection phenomenon, it is necessary to start from the cultural level and achieve its modernization transformation. For example, intergenerational care workshops, and in areas like Suzhou, they have drawn on the experience of "silver-haired early childhood care" in Japan, embedding grandparent-child classes into various community elderly care service centers. Or they can hold activities such as "memory puzzles", and have the elderly lead the children to complete the relevant processes, thereby effectively increasing the participation rate of grandparents. At the same time, intergenerational integration needs to focus on cultural translation, and establish a professional support system, and cooperate with major universities to jointly build a "nurturing wisdom center", and integrate cultural activities such as nursery rhymes and Zhou Li into daily services, seizing the modern educational value within them. For example, the early childhood language development education at Suzhou Vocational University integrates the Pingtan rhythm of Wu culture, thereby

effectively improving parents' satisfaction with the nurturing institution.

Secondly, the reconfiguration of nurturing ethics is also involved. For instance, the home-child integration course established in Jiangnan District of Wuhan City specifically sets aside one day each week as a "family day", inviting parents and grandparents to participate in parent-child activities together. At the same time, parenting experts can provide targeted guidance for this activity, carry out activities such as role-playing, effectively resolving different intergenerational conflicts, and reducing the rate of disputes between institutions and families. Moreover, a mechanism such as "family nurturing negotiation meeting" can be introduced. For example, nurturing experts, community mediators, and family elders can jointly form a mediation team, and use scenarios and other methods to discuss and resolve daily nurturing disputes, effectively resolving intergenerational conflicts. [8]

4.4. Technological innovation at the technical level

In early childhood care services, technology can effectively improve the quality and efficiency of care. Therefore, there is an urgent necessity for human-centered technological innovation. For instance, the non-intrusive safety monitoring system was introduced in Changning District of Shanghai, which piloted the "smart floor mat + AI visual analysis" system. Specifically, pressure sensing and behavior algorithms can be used to identify abnormal states of children, and effectively avoid privacy disputes such as those caused by wearable devices. After introducing this technology, relevant childcare points effectively reduced the probability of accidents, and the overall acceptance of parents was relatively high. However, it is necessary to note that the design of this system needs to refer to ethical boundaries, such as the "smart fence" system piloted in Xuhui District of Shanghai, which uses millimeter-wave radar instead of traditional cameras, ensuring the safety of children while also considering the issue of privacy leakage, thereby effectively reducing the number of complaints from parents.

Or demand forecasting models, which can analyze different indicators such as historical data, population structure, and policy variables, and are a quantitative tool constructed using machine learning algorithms. Based on the algorithm upgrade of "nurturing brain" in Hangzhou, Yuhang District has constructed the "three-color warning" mechanism. Specifically, it can analyze data related to prenatal check-ups, vaccination, and other relevant information, and implement red, yellow, and green warnings for the shortage of childcare positions in the next three years. Under the influence of this technology, relevant communities can make precise construction plans in advance, effectively reducing waste of resources. At the same time, this model also needs to strengthen its dynamic calibration ability, such as the "population migration - childcare demand" correlation algorithm constructed by Yuhang District of Hangzhou, which uses machines to learn and analyze the changes in the flow of the population, effectively improving the accuracy of prediction.

5. Conclusion

This article analyzes the four major childcare models and explores the operational essence of models such as the welfare type, the market type, and the community integration type, which lies in the three-dimensional collaborative governance network involving the government, the market, and society. When China adopts foreign community childcare models, it needs to grasp three major balances: the balance between universal welfare guarantee and the efficiency of service quality, the balance between intergenerational nurturing cultural inertia and professional childcare concepts, and the balance between the rigidity of government planning and the flexibility of market innovation. Based on the four-dimensional framework of institutions, space, culture, and technology, the practice shows that the Chinese-style childcare system needs to achieve deep integration with

grassroots governance through embedded governance: constructing flexible policy tools at the institutional level, activating existing resources at the spatial level, promoting the translation of intergenerational values at the cultural level, and strengthening human-centered innovation at the technological level. In the future, further research is still needed on the sustainability of this model, addressing common problems, and laying a solid foundation for the optimization of China's childcare model.

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