

An analysis of China's education in the context of the new era - a comparison with Japan's "lenient education"

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Abstract: As an important part of the reform in the new era, education reform has a self-evident role in China's modernization system. Japan, which also belongs to the East Asian cultural circle, has carried out "lenient education" similar to China's "double reduction" policy, from which we can gain valuable experience and historical lessons for China's education reform. Nowadays, "double reduction" is in full swing. This paper analyzes the characteristics of Chinese and Japanese education from several dimensions, such as education contents, education methods and education evaluation, and analyzes the reasons for the failure of "lenient education" reform, so as to make practical suggestions for Chinese education.

1. Issue Discovery

Since the 1970s, Japanese society has become more and more "score-oriented" in education. The educational crisis, such as the "testing hell", prompted the Japanese government to implement a "relaxed education" policy, which was questioned by the public for reducing the burden on students by cutting class time and lowering the difficulty of teaching. The program's performance in the International Scholastic Ability Survey (PISA) was also unsatisfactory, and the end of an era was announced in 2016 when the Japanese government announced the beginning of the "de-concentration of education". China, which is close to Japan, is experiencing similar social problems as Japan while experiencing rapid economic and social development. In July 2021, with the aim of preserving the educational ecology and avoiding exam-oriented education, the "double reduction" reform was officially proposed to reduce students' academic pressure in a diversified way. However, we will focus on whether the reform can break the constraints, how to learn from the Japanese educational philosophy, how to optimize our educational concepts, and how to avoid some wrong educational views.

2. Japanese Education Style

2.1 Characteristics of Japanese education

As one of the few developed countries in Asia, Japan's education has become the target of imitation by other countries because of its many forward-looking features.

2.1.1 Focus on the development of resistance to frustration [1].

Frustration resistance education has always been an important aspect of Japanese parents' training for their children. Japanese children are required to wear shorts and short skirts from kindergarten onwards in the cold winter months, which is considered to be a reflection of honing their perseverance. When children encounter setbacks, those around them do not directly try to help them directly, but rather encourage them to overcome their difficulties. This experience will make them more independent and no longer face difficulties with a fearful attitude.

2.1.2 Emphasis on moral education.

In Japan, etiquette education is also prevalent. Japan has had a well-established system of etiquette education since the Meiji era, and manners permeate all aspects of life. Japanese everyday conversation has a large number of honorific words, and society places a high value on etiquette. The first thing that elders teach children is not counting and drawing, but the etiquette of how to treat others. From a young age, children are taught to be self-reliant and to do whatever they want without causing trouble to others. Moral education teaches children to love others from an early age, which will be beneficial to their future development.

2.1.3 Emphasis on vocational education.

In Japan, except for prestigious universities, there is little difference between the salaries of college students and specialists after graduation. This is not because it is difficult to get into Japanese universities, but because of the "childlessness" of Japan's vocational education, which is the result of multi-level, comprehensive and systematic vocational education. In teaching, teachers believe that the process of exploring the truth is more important than the truth itself, and attach great importance to the ability of children to think independently.

2.1.4 Strict control over the tutoring of compulsory education.

Like Japan, China belongs to the East Asian cultural circle, and is deeply influenced by Confucianism, and the concept of "learning is superior" is deeply rooted in people's minds. However, unlike Japan, early childhood education, compulsory education, and high school and university education are all considered "public service education". Japanese teachers, as public servants, are strictly forbidden to trade their knowledge for money. Moreover, most of the children attend cram school because they are interested, and they are exposed to different things through cram school to discover their hobbies and potential.

2.2 Historical perspective of the "lenient education" policy

With the rapid economic growth and the emergence of two "baby boomers" in Japan after the war, the education sector has grown considerably. The increase in household income also contributed to the awakening of people's awareness of education. After the 1960s, the basic national policy of education as the driving force behind Japan's economic and military development led directly to the high level of difficulty and volume of study in Japanese elementary and secondary schools. In the society of the time, excellent grades and excessive education would be a necessary prerequisite for getting into a good university and getting a good job. As companies recruited people directly based on academic qualifications, the orientation of schools slowly evolved into examination factories. The "academic society" and "one paper for life" [2] forced the Japanese government to rethink the nature of education. Then "relaxed education" came to the stage of history, but why did such a policy, which was aimed at reducing the burden of students, come to a hasty end after more than 40 years?

2.2.1 There is no unified social consensus on policy understanding

The "liberal education" is opposed to the "duck-and-egg education", which is more about the adjustment of teaching contents and time. In Japan, public schools have been closed on the second Saturday of every month since 1992, and on the fourth Saturday of every month since 1995. In 2002, the "double holiday system" was fully implemented, and then schools started to implement integrated practical subjects, which made it impossible to carry out many club activities. When comparing the number of hours of classes in the revised version of the Study Guide in 1989 and 1998, Japanese elementary and junior high schools cut 70 hours of class time. The younger the grade level, the higher the percentage of reduction, and the decrease in the percentage of classroom hours corresponds to the elimination of 30% of the teaching content. These drastic reductions based on the original content did not change the teaching pattern of the classroom, and student autonomy remained low. It also did not allow the community at large to develop a unified concept of where students should learn and where

teachers should teach. Without innovation in the classroom, a reform model that treats the symptoms but not the root cause is doomed to fail.

2.2.2 There is no uniform standard in policy implementation

Public schools have implemented the policy of reducing school hours and content as required. However, private schools and extracurricular classes have not done so and continue to follow the model of teaching to the test. As a direct result, public schools with good educational resources are losing their competitiveness and the supply of education is tilting towards private schools. The public-school district enrollment approach, which no longer distinguishes between priorities, also determines that public schools can only serve as "bottom feeders". The only way to get good resources is to pay tuition fees, which leads to poor families not being able to get quality education resources, and the tutoring classes are also a great way to promote "education anxiety". Women who were originally housewives had to enter the workplace and continue to work, but they still could not compete with the upper class. The pressure on the middle class increased, society began to fall into internal conflict, the "gap" was further widened, and the willingness of the middle class to have children dropped significantly.

2.2.3 The goals and means of the policy are inconsistent

At the beginning of liberal education, slogans such as "attaching importance to individuality" and "lifelong learning" were put forward, but the fact was that the implementation method could not achieve such a desired result. After reducing the number of general subject hours, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has added "comprehensive learning time". Although the textbook has become thinner, it has increased the number of experiments, observations, reflections and discussions in the textbooks. In such an era of knowledge explosion, the problems of society are already very complex. In the case that students' general education has not been paid enough attention, it is very unrealistic to have no complete knowledge system to think about these issues, have results, and make discoveries. This also sowed the seeds of unsatisfactory results in the future International Academic Strength Survey (PISA).

3. Chinese Education Approach

General Secretary Xi Jinping once mentioned at the National Education Conference: "In the new era and new situation, reform, opening up and socialist modernization, and the promotion of all-round human development and social progress have put forward new and higher requirements for education and learning. In the face of the opportunities and challenges proposed by the times, China is facing the social problem of "low birthrate" and the difficult situation of core technology card neck in key areas. This is bound to require us to re-explore the "issue of educating people" and cultivate new people of the times who will shoulder the great responsibility of national rejuvenation. The author will talk about China's education and reform proposals from the following aspects.

3.1 Strengths and characteristics of China's educational approach

After decades of basic education construction, China's education also has its own unique advantages. Educational equity has always been a topic of discussion, and China's education has achieved bottom-line fairness. For students, everyone is equal in front of the college entrance examination, and this fairness of opportunities and rules has also brought countless ordinary people the opportunity to learn various disciplines. This is an important way for them to change their destiny, and the middle and high school entrance examinations are also an important moment to adjust the interests of all social strata. Secondly, under the perfect basic education, China's illiteracy rate has gone from more than 80% at the beginning of the founding of the People's Republic of China to 2.67% in 2021. The improvement of the quality of education has brought about rapid economic development. Finally, in the 2018 PISA test results, China far surpassed other high-quality education systems in

terms of cognitive learning results, and the performance of Chinese students in non-cognitive aspects also broke the inherent perception of the West that Eastern students were afraid of exams.

3.2 Problems in Chinese education

Although China's concept of education has been greatly optimized and improved, there are still many problems: First, the "baton" of education evaluation has not been established. Various standards and rankings have brought a lot of negative impacts to Chinese education, and test-oriented education is still the mainstream direction. The phenomenon of "five limits" is still the lingering "hat" of Chinese education [3]. First of all, the "baton" of education evaluation is not well established. Various standards and rankings have brought a lot of negative effects to Chinese education, and examination-based education is still the mainstream direction. And the phenomenon of "five limits" is still a lingering "hat" of Chinese education [3]. Education is more concerned with actual scores than practical ability, which leads to a serious mentality of "quick success" in society, and students at different stages are under heavy pressure for further education and examinations. The phenomenon of "high scores and low ability" is common, and the sense of freedom, comfort and achievement that education brings to individuals is lacking. Furthermore, education is narrowly understood as school education, ignoring the important role of family and social education. Parents lack a viable theoretical approach to educating their children and are willing to put a lot of effort into education with little effect. Since most of today's generation are only children, everything revolves around their children and parents sacrifice a lot of things in order to give their children a good environment to grow up. This is why the willingness of the school-age population to have children is still low despite the release of the "second" and even "third" children. Chinese children's frustration and discernment skills are generally not strong, making it difficult for them to adapt to society, and social guidance needs to be strengthened. In addition, although China's double reduction policy is beginning to bear fruit, and non-disciplinary tutoring continues to rise, not everyone can afford to send their children to tutoring classes. Over-education or "school-based reduction outside of school" will undoubtedly increase the burden on children, which is likely to fall into the trap of "lenient education". Moreover, Chinese students are generally less innovative, less critical thinking and less creative, and more inclined to avoid new problems until they know the "standard answer".

4. Comparative Analysis of Chinese and Japanese Educational Perspectives

Both countries are well-developed in basic education and have very advanced educational concepts. However, the way of selecting talents in China is always the same as the old examination system, which focuses more on the result of education. Japan, on the other hand, has changed its single-purpose education system and has improved the configuration of "general education" and "professional education" to diversify educational opportunities. In addition, Japan's "liberal education" makes no special demands on families. The lack of family education is a direct result of "widowhood parenting," which is actually detrimental to the long-term development of children and needs the attention of Chinese families.

5. The focus of China's education reform in the context of the new era

Combining the experience of "liberal education" in Japan and the actual situation of Chinese education, the author proposes the following points.

5.1 Vigorously develop vocational and technical education.

In the context of new development, vocational and technical talents are an important driving force to promote industrial upgrading and optimization, to promote high-quality economic growth, and to improve China's education system [4]. And high-quality vocational and technical education is a necessary prerequisite for meeting people's needs to find jobs and earn a living, and to obtain sustainable career development. Vocational and technical education is not based on grades. It can

provide a fast track for students who really have dreams, abilities, skills and interests, so as to truly realize the concept of talent for all, and to stimulate the innovative vitality of talents. Data shows that of the more than 200 million skilled workers in China, only 25% are highly skilled, and the talent gap is huge. To solve the supply-side problem in terms of talents, it is necessary to make vocational technical education realize the mutual integration of industry, academia and research. Let front-line workers enter schools to teach, and let students come out of the classroom to participate in actual factory work, so that what they learn can be used and what they use can be achieved. To improve the social status of skilled workers, the government, society and enterprises need to work together to create an environment that respects knowledge and technology, and to provide a good social atmosphere for “made in China” to “Mind in China”.

5.2 Deepen the reform of education evaluation.

Evaluating student schools cannot be "one size fits all". It is necessary to adhere to a diversified evaluation system and reverse the unscientific evaluation system. This requires us to adjust the test-oriented education, establish the ideological concept of becoming a scientific talent, and encourage students to integrate knowledge and action through the evaluation of students' comprehensive quality. For example, in recent years, the emphasis on the five educations such as physical education and moral education is a valuable practice [5]. In addition, employers cannot only value "985" and "211". This kind of employment orientation of only famous schools and only academic qualifications will only exacerbate the phenomenon of "high consumption" of talents. Therefore, we should strengthen the talent recruitment mechanism that is oriented by morality and quality and as the goal of job demand, promote the healthy development of education, and truly realize the high-quality environment of "eclectic and degrading talents". At the same time, improve the overall quality of the teacher team, cultivate the teacher's morality and teaching style, and evaluate the standard of teachers cannot be single and narrow.

5.3 Improve the content and methods of education.

Education is essentially the cause of educating people and cultivating people. People need to master a variety of knowledge. The experience of "liberal education" in Japan tells us that it is unrealistic to drastically reduce the content of the curriculum at the basic education stage. Therefore, the educational content and methods that guide students' growth cannot be narrow and cannot dampen children's enthusiasm for learning. We can use the weekend to take students out of books and get in touch with society.

5.4 Pay attention to family education.

The family is a child's second classroom. Although the "double reduction" policy clearly stipulates that children's homework should not be pushed to parents, parents should also assume the responsibility of leading by example, teaching by example, and realizing that parents and children are like endless learning processes. Parents should allow their children to make mistakes, to tap their children's potential, and to explore more possibilities. In addition to caring about academic performance in daily life, we should pay more attention to the physical and mental health of children, guide them to face life with a positive and optimistic attitude, and let them know how to communicate and cooperate with others.

6. Conclusion

Through a comparative study of Japan's educational concepts, we will take their essence and remove their dross, and find places to learn from and learn from. Education must be people-oriented education, we must be fully aware of people's subjective initiative, aware of the differences and independence of each individual. Teaching according to aptitude and realizing the all-round development of people is in line with the fundamental needs of contemporary society for talents and education [6]. This requires us to change our concept of education, through the school, family, society

and the three work together to provide a good environment for children's growth, so that our education is truly scientific, modern and international.

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