

Evolution of Family Education Concepts, Policies and Legalization in China

Junhao Zhang^{1,a,*}

¹*The High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China, Beijing, 100086, China*

a. zh15611118151@gmail.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: The reform and opening up has ushered in a new era in which the concepts, policies, and legalization of family education in China have gone through a significant evolution. The concepts of family education have gone through three critical phases of change: the development period, the integration period, and the modernization period. The evolution of family education policies has been divided into three phases: gradual exploration after the reform and opening up, reform and development after the 21st century, and the recent comprehensive deepening stage. The legalization process of family education also encompasses three significant developmental phases: systematic planning, scientification and specialization, and socialization. Multiple factors, including social transformation, international cultural exchanges, and parental qualities have propelled this evolutionary process. Looking ahead, developing a more comprehensive, equitable, and modern family education system will be facilitated through guidance and support from national policies, sustained reinforcement of international exchanges and collaborations, and the enhancement of parental qualities.

Keywords: reform and opening up, family education concepts, family education, Legalization of family education

1. Introduction

Family education is the foundation of the social education system, which is closely linked to the social development and cultural evolution of a nation. Since the initiation of the reform and opening up, significant transformations have swept across Chinese society, and family education, as an integral element within the social education system, has undergone noteworthy evolution. Studies on family education concepts since the reform and opening up have predominantly focused on conducting investigative studies in a certain region [1-5] or analyzing the internal developmental trajectories through individual cases [6-11], and research on family education policies and regulations often occurs simultaneously [12-14]. In general, there is a lack of systematic and stage-by-stage research and reflection on the family education concepts and family education policies and legalization process after the reform and opening up. Social transformations have continually driven the evolution and advancement of family education concepts. The government has enacted a series of policies adjustments in the field of family education, covering various aspects such as resource allocation, regulatory systems, and educational support measures. The legal system establishment has contributed positively to fortifying the Chinese family education system, providing a robust legal

foundation. The primary aim of this study is to explore the evolutionary trajectory of Chinese family education since the reform and opening up, with a particular emphasis on the evolution of family education concepts, policy changes, and the legalization process, as well as the key factors that have influenced these changes. The intent is to unveil the intrinsic development vein of Chinese family education, offering valuable experiences and recommendations for the prospective reform and advancement of family education in China.

2. Evolution of Family Education Concepts

2.1. Developmental Period of Family Education Concepts (1978-2000)

Following the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, particularly within the past 20 years of the reform and opening up, socialist family construction moved onto a healthier track. In the era of globalization, scientific and rational forces emerged as a dominant trend. The scientific spirit became the pillar and driving force of social development, characterized by the principle of utility, which was centrally manifested in family education as the utilitarian view of family education. The utilitarian view of family education emphasized a static perception of family education phenomena and approached educational activities from a utilitarian standpoint. In the process of family education, the focus was on outcomes over processes; in the goals of family education, knowledge indoctrination was emphasized over individual development; and in the forms of family education, verbal criticism was prioritized over patient encouragement. In essence, the humanistic spirit failed to receive genuine promotion, and family education needed to truly embark on the correct path of nurturing individuals. Instead, family education became an appendage to fulfilling parental or family utilitarian needs, resulting in a one-sided development of children according to pre-established adult directions.

In the period of rapid social change, individuation and socialization became an essential part of the family change process, and the thoughts of time and process constituted the development of the family education concept. The developmental concept of family education embodied the significance of time and progression in the context of family education. The development of the family education concept was closely linked to societal environmental changes, where societal restructuring continuously reshaped the perceptions of the younger generation. Following the period of reform and opening up, the traditional family structure and function underwent rapid changes, which made it imperative to establish a new concept of family education. It was far from enough to understand the family only from the institutional level and external behavior. The family should be regarded as a space for life growth and change, and the family should be regarded as an interacting individual unit or a personalized place. The dynamic developmental concept of family interaction played a significant role during this period.

In the aftermath of the reform and opening up, the practical concept of family education was increasingly emphasized. With Marxist practical materialism as a guide, we could gradually understand the changes and development of family education from a practical perspective. The practical concept of family education emphasized the practical significance of the family as a specific social unit for nurturing new people and focusing on cultivating and realizing the comprehensive nature of the individual. Family education was a practical activity in cultivating individuals, a significant form of educational practice, and an integral part of the educational enterprise. With the transformation of society, people's material and spiritual practical activities continued to deepen, the demand for human beings themselves was getting higher and higher, and the understanding of the formation and development of human beings was deepening, family education was pressing forward step by step on the road of returning to the practice of human beings. Under the guidance of Marxist practical materialism, the practical concept of family education received increasing emphasis.

2.2. Integration Period of Family Education Concepts (2000-2011)

With the advent of industrialization, urbanization, informatization, and networking, family concepts encountered a new era of historical change. The introduction and influence of Western family education concepts profoundly impacted family education concepts in China after 2000. Analyzing the developmental trends of family education, the traditional family education centered around large families gradually transitioned toward modern family education with smaller families at its core. The modernization of family education underwent a process of integration and transformation, where both families and individuals experienced this transformative journey. Whether accommodating or resisting, excluding or accepting, family education concepts increasingly incorporated modern elements. The new generation of young people increasingly explored family education ideologies and thoughts that suited contemporary needs. As Chinese parents in the post-1980s generation, their family education concepts displayed a remarkable combination of Eastern and Western characteristics. They advocated for a democratic, egalitarian, and harmonious family education approach, endorsing a position where they acted as friends while maintaining a dominant role with their children. [15] Furthermore, they believed that family education should be conducted in an atmosphere of love and respect. Although traditional Chinese culture emphasized the absolute authority of parents, the parental education concepts of the post-1980s generation tended to lean more towards respecting the individual development and autonomy of children.

2.3. Modernization Period of Family Education Concepts (2012-Present)

In a keynote speech at the First National Civilized Family Commendation Conference, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized, "The family serves as life's initial classroom, and parents function as the primary educators for children. Family education encompasses various facets, with moral education being paramount—focused on instilling values for becoming a virtuous individual." [16] Based on General Secretary Xi's words for in-depth examination, it becomes evident that in recent years, the concept of family education centered on the transmission of knowledge is crowding out the concept of ethical orientation and leaning more toward mainstream consciousness. Under the vigorous promotion and guidance of the central government and to align with the nation's modernization, family education concepts should also modernize and manifest an evolving characteristic centered on "virtue." Virtue-based family education concept is a comprehensive and integrated creative educational concept. [17] This innovative educational concept holds that family education as an activity based on virtue, with the aim of integrating the development of children's emotional lives, virtue wisdom, and character education. The virtue-based family education concept requires parents to recognize and understand education from the height of virtue life, aiming to promote the emotional lives, virtue wisdom, and character education of children, and employs a democratic educational approach involving bidirectional guidance in emotion and virtue, thereby fostering virtue concept and shaping a wholesome personality during parent-child interactions.

3. Evolution of Family Education Policies

3.1. Initial Exploration Phase of Chinese Family Education Policies (1978-2000)

After the reform and opening up, family education, on the one hand, showed the characteristics of the combination with the political life in the Party. In 1980, the "Several Guidelines on the Party's Political Life" emphasized, "Leaders at all levels of the Party must consciously and strictly abide by the regulations on their living conditions, while at the same time strengthening the education of their children." [18] In 1992, "Accelerating Reform and Opening Up, Advancing Modernization, and Achieving Significant Success in Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" proposed that

"Leading cadres of the Party, especially mid-level cadres, must rigorously self-discipline, lead by example, educate their children, and take the lead in the fight against corruption." [19]The state emphasized several times that Party members and cadres should educate their children correctly, integrating the construction of family ethics into the Party's ethical and political conduct as an inherent requirement within the work process.

On the other hand, family education also demonstrated considerable societal participation, strengthening the connections among various parties under the guidance of the state and government. In 1987, the CPC Central Committee released the "Decision on Enhancing Ideological and Political Work in Higher Education Institutions", explicitly requiring "all institutions of higher learning should strengthen contacts with all sectors of society and students' parents, listen to their opinions, get their cooperation and help, and make joint efforts to cultivate a new generation of intellectuals with both moral and talent" [20], which was intended to strengthen the connection between schools and society and parents, unify the goals and form a synergy. In 1988, the CPC Central Committee released the "Enhancing Moral Education in Primary and Secondary Schools", which expounded at length on the significance of family education in promoting the healthy growth of young children and the pathways for implementation. It pointed out that "Educational departments and schools should actively guide family involvement. Primary and secondary schools may engage exemplary parent representatives in school educational activities. Broadcasting, television, newspapers, and other news media should introduce programs on family education to popularize knowledge about family education". [21]In 1993, the Party Central Committee and the State Council officially released the "Outline for Reform and Advancement in Chinese Education", stressed the importance of societal concern and protection for the wholesome development of adolescents. This involved fostering a seamless integration of social education, family education, and school education. [21]With the issuance of these policies, family education ceased to exist in isolation, as society and schools continuously supported for the development of family education.

3.2. Reform and Development Phase of Chinese Family Education Policies (2000-2011)

The undertaking of family education work not only involves internal family matters but extends to multiple domains, including schools and society. After entering the 21st century, the task of family education was gradually on the right track. In 2001, the State Council issued the "Outline for Child Development in China (2001-2010)", emphasized the significance of collaboration within families, schools, and society, and urged relevant entities to advance the development of family education collectively. [22] This outline provided a feasible pathway for the collaborative development of families, schools, and society. In the same year, the "State Council's Decision on Education Reform and Development" emphasized "prioritizing family education. Through family visits and other means to establish regular contact with parents of students, enhance family education guidance, aiding parents in forming a sound educational mindset, and create a good family conditions conducive to children's wholesome development. Furthermore, Labor unions, the Communist Youth League, Women's Federations, and other groups were urged to conduct diverse family education activities" [23], fostering a supportive atmosphere for family education development and the maturation of adolescents throughout society. In 2002, the "Tenth Five-Year Plan for National Family Education Task" highlighted the need to "Gradually establish and improve a family education guidance system that combines primary and middle school and early childhood parent schools, community family education guidance and social family education guidance" [24], promoting the scientific, specialized and systematic development of family education work." Moreover, documents such as the "Guidelines on Further Strengthening Family Education Task" (2004), "Eleventh-Five Year Plan for National Family Education Task" (2007), "National Family Education Guidance Outline" (2010), and "Guidelines for Enhancing Parent and School Collaboration" (2011) provided specific explanations

regarding the development goals, tasks, and methods for the development of family-school-community collaboration in nurturing individuals. These documents place family education in a vital position in developing the education cause, aiming to construct a policy system for family education that fosters collaborative nurturing among family-school-communities.

Overall, from the reform and opening up period until before the 18th CPC Communist Party of China's National Congress, the government successively introduced a series of crucial family education policy documents, offering institutional assurances for the delineation of the primary responsibilities and obligations of family education, juveniles' rights, and the mechanism for collaborative nurturing among family-school-community. Unlike the preliminary exploration period, the family education policy system during this period trended toward standardization and refinement, propelling the continuous, robust, and stable progress of the family education cause.

3.3. Comprehensive Deepening Phase of Chinese Family Education Policies (2012 to Present)

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, guided by the leadership of the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, the reform of education with Chinese characteristics has ushered in a new phase. Within this framework, family education has encountered fresh prospects for development. In this contemporary context, family education policies have undergone continuous optimization, refinement, and ongoing reforms, stepping into a phase of comprehensive deepening.

The unveiling of the "Guidance on Promoting Family Education's Five-Year Plan (2011–2015)" in 2012 marked the commencement of a concerted effort to advance the comprehensive development of family education. By 2015, the Education Ministry released the "Guiding Opinions on Enhancing Family Education" [25], propelling the family education agenda into a phase of deep reform and institutional innovation.

In 2016, the Women's Federation of China, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, the Central Office for Promoting Civic Virtue, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and the Ministry of Culture, among others, jointly published the "Guidance on Promoting Family Education's Five-Year Plan (2016–2020)" [26], which pointed out the direction of China's family education for the next five years in terms of the overall requirements, critical tasks, and organizational guarantees. Subsequently, in 2019, the Ministry of Education, working in conjunction with six other ministries, revised the "National Outline for Family Education (Revised)" [27], which adjusted, supplemented, and improved the substance of family education guidance to suit the demands of the modern era, added relevant content in accordance with the characteristics of the times, and revised the essential aspects of the substance of family education guidance for children of all ages, putting forward higher standards and requirements for the development of family education. In 2020, the "Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council's Comprehensive Enhancement of Labor Education in Universities, Secondary Schools and Primary Schools in the New Era" highlighted that "the family should play a fundamental role in labour education Families should set up a good family culture of respect for labour, parents should teach through words and example in daily life, imperceptibly let the child develop a good habit of love of labor from childhood" [28], which document also carried labour education through all aspects of the family, the school and the community, and promoted the everydayization of labour education in the family.

Under the vigorous advancement of national policies, the content of family education policy has become more specific. Deepening the reform of family education has emerged as a pivotal strategic task for the current and future development of Chinese education. The Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC in 2020 emphasized accelerating education reform, integrating the "establishment of a mechanism for coordinated family-school child-rearing" into the national strategy for the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan and the 2035 modernization vision. Guided by the leadership of the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, and driven by the momentum generated in the

pertinent conferences, the status of family education has been significantly elevated, and its strategic position has become more and more prominent.

4. Legalization Process of Family Education

4.1. Systematic Planning Phase of Family Education Legalization (1978-2000)

Between 1979 and 1985, China continued traditional family concepts, treating family education as a matter for the individual's private sphere, and legal provisions on family education appeared mainly in the "Marriage Law" and so on. Since 1986, educational laws in China have started incorporating relevant stipulations about family education, especially the explicit provisions on the responsibilities of education in the family, marking the importance attached to family education as an issue in education. In 1986, the "Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China" stipulated that "In accordance with the law, the state, society, schools, and families must ensure the right of school-age children and adolescents to receive compulsory education." [29] Between 1992 and 1995, China's legal regulations concerning women and children introduced systematic planning regarding family education, guiding for establishing specific plans for family education. In 1992, the first children's development action plan in China, "China's Child Development Program Outline in the 1990s," stipulated that "By the end of the 20th century, 90% of children under the age of fourteen should have parents possessing diverse levels of expertise in child care and education". [30] In 1995, the "Education Law of the People's Republic of China" stipulated that "Parents or legal guardians of minors are required to provide the necessary conditions for the education of their underage offspring or other individuals under guardianship. They shall collaborate with schools and other entities in the education sector in educating their minor children or other individuals under guardianship. Schools and teachers may guide family education to students' parents". [31] Legal provisions regarding family education gradually evolved systematically and became more comprehensive during this period.

4.2. Scientific and Specialized Phase of Family Education Legalization (2000-2011)

In 2002, the "Tenth Five-Year Plan for National Family Education Work" emphasized the significance of parents possessing scientific concepts and methods of child-rearing [24], and gradually pushed family education toward scientific and specialized. To actualize the overarching goals of the outline of the plan for children's development and the work plan for family education, the "Code of Conduct for Parent Education" (revised in 2004) and the "National Guidance on Parent School Work (Trial)" (revised in 2004) were formulated in 1997 and 1998. These sought to effectively advance the legalization of family education by standardizing parental behavior and the implementation of parent schools. Additionally, foundational laws and administrative regulations encompass provisions for family education. In 1999, the "Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency Law" was the first to introduce the legal responsibility of parents toward the education of minors. [32] In 2010, the "National Medium and Long-Term Plan for Education Reform and Development (2010-2020)" explicitly proposed the establishment of family education laws. [33] In 2011, the "Outline for the Development of Chinese Children (2011-2020)" stated, "Promote the legislative process of family education. Regulations and policies that are incompatible with the protection of children's rights should be cleaned up, revised and abolished. Enhance the operability of child-related laws and regulations. Increase the legal concept, sense of responsibility and capacity of families, schools and all sectors of society to protect children's rights". [34] The legalization of family education has developed towards scientific and specialized.

4.3. Socialization Phase of Family Education Legalization (2012-Present)

At this phase, the formulation of the "Twelfth Five-Year Plan for National Family Education Work" marked the socialization of the legal system for family education in China. In 2012, the "Guidance on Promoting Family Education Five-Year Plan (2011-2015)" proposed to "establish a sound public service network for family education" [26], further promoting the socialization of family education work while placing more emphasis on the legalization of family education work, emphasizing the development and improvement of family education-related legal policies and systems. In 2019, the "Opinions on Deepening Educational Reform and Enhancing the Quality of Compulsory Education" released by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council urged the acceleration of family education legislation, steadily promoting the legislative process of family education. [35] This indicates that the legalized construction of family education in China is entering a fast track, entering a period of deepening development.

In general, under the top-level design of the nation, the process of legalizing family education continues to advance, and family education legislation is gradually becoming clear. A comprehensive, organized, and influential legal system for family education is being constructed. At this point, the evolution track of China's family education policy for more than 40 years is presented. Also, it shows the basic vein of the evolution of family education in China.

5. Analysis and Discussion: Factors Influencing the Evolution of Family Education

International cultural exchanges, societal transformations, and parental quality as the main drivers of the evolution of family education are closely related to the ecological concept of human development proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner. Examining this topic from Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, we find that international cultural exchange is in a more macrosystemic context, which influences new theories and practices of family education. Although it does not directly interfere with the internal microsystem of the family, it brings new concepts and methods to family education through its influence on the external environment. At the same time, social transformation, as part of the exosystemic environment, has triggered new cultural and social demands, forcing the family and the educational system to adapt to these changes, thereby indirectly influencing individual behavior. Parental quality, as an important part of the microsystem environment, directly shapes the effectiveness of family education. These combined factors shape the trajectory of family education, from individual behaviors to more macro-social changes, and assume a crucial role within the ecosystem of family education.

5.1. From a Macrosystem Perspective: International Cultural Exchanges as Experiential References for the Evolution of Family Education

The macrosystem comprises the broader cultural context, encompassing values, customs, beliefs, and traditions of the surrounding culture, such as Eastern and Western culture, political culture, and others. During the period of reform and opening up, the exchange and fusion of East and West cultures, that is, international cultures, have reached an unprecedented scale and degree, and numerous advanced Western ideologies and concepts have been introduced into China, including many advanced theories and practices of family education. In the process of changes in contemporary family education in China, these introduced and translated family education theories and family education practice models and other family education cultures not only constitute the prerequisites and bases for criticizing China's local family education, especially traditional family education but also provide a good reference and comparison system for the changes in China's contemporary family education. [36] The continuous introduction and dissemination of new Western educational concepts and

practices have provided rich theoretical and practical references for the evolution of family education in China.

5.2. From a Exosystem Perspective: Social Transformation as a Driving Force for the Evolution of Family Education

The exosystem comprises external environmental conditions that have an indirect impact on development, where the individual is not directly engaged, such as social transformation. With the deepening of social transformation, people have come to realize that purely economic transformation brings about rapid development of production and maximization of economic effects. It pursues unlimited growth of wealth and constant change in economic structure; purely political transformation pursues political revolution and change in political structure. Economic growth and political reform are not the only goals of society, the most important indicator of social development is still the conscious development of individuals, and the "liberation of the human spirit" is the most important manifestation of social transformation. [37]Social transformation is fundamentally a cultural change. Mr. Gao Qinghai has put forward a thought-provoking point that society emphasizes the importance of the individual, but the challenge now is how to emphasize the value of the individual while at the same time getting people to think more about the good of the whole in order to achieve the broader interests of society. [38]This perspective emphasizes that more attention should be paid to the development direction of the overall interests on the basis of individual subjectivity. This transformation provides a potential developmental model wherein family education can both emphasize individual development and complement the overall societal advancement. The social transformation not only propels the change of ideologies but also furnishes new impetus for the evolution of family education, enabling its better integration into the overall progression of society.

5.3. From a Microsystem Perspective: Parental Quality as a Crucial Factor in the Evolution of Family Education

Microsystem includes an individual's immediate surroundings (family, school, peer group, neighbourhood) and one's biological composition. Parents are their children's first teachers in the family, and their words, behaviours, lifestyles and ideologies significantly impact their children. Especially for parents in the period of social transformation, their knowledge structure, level of education, and conservative or open-mindedness are directly related to their children's growth and determine their future development. At a time when Chinese society is facing great changes, the quality of parents has become an important influence on the evolution of all aspects of family education. Compared to the quality of parents in the generation before the reform and opening up, most parents born in the 1970s and 1980s were well-educated. They are more willing to embrace new things, ideas, and concepts within an open social environment. The modernization of parental quality and the great flood of contemporary family education change converge to foster the development and modernization of family education.

Apart from the aforementioned influencing factors, elements such as family economic status and changes in family structure are also important factors impacting the evolution of family education. These factors are often interconnected and collectively contribute to the progression and development of family education.

The evolution of family education is part of complex social change and a requirement for change within family education, which is vital for understanding the current and future development of family education. Family education in different eras is profoundly marked by the characteristics of that particular time. Throughout China's modernization process and the ebb and flow of reform and opening up, family education concepts have continuously evolved, gravitating towards emphasizing

“virtue”. Simultaneously, there has been a notable improvement in the construction of family education policies and the legalization of family education. To trace the underlying reasons behind this evolution, it is easy to find that factors such as international cultural exchange, societal transformation, and parental qualities have all contributed to propelling the progression of family education. Looking ahead, with the guidance and support of national policies, continually injecting new vitality into the development of a more comprehensive, equitable, and modernized family education system will be achieved through enhanced international exchange and collaboration, as well as the improvement of parental qualities and educational capabilities.

6. Conclusion

The evolution of family education is part of complex social change and a requirement for change within family education, which is vital for understanding the current and future development of family education. Family education in different eras is profoundly marked by the characteristics of that particular time. Throughout China's modernization process and the ebb and flow of reform and opening up, family education concepts have continuously evolved, gravitating towards emphasizing “virtue”. Simultaneously, there has been a notable improvement in the construction of family education policies and the legalization of family education. To trace the underlying reasons behind this evolution, it is easy to find that factors such as international cultural exchange, societal transformation, and parental qualities have all contributed to propelling the progression of family education. Looking ahead, with the guidance and support of national policies, continually injecting new vitality into the development of a more comprehensive, equitable, and modernized family education system will be achieved through enhanced international exchange and collaboration, as well as the improvement of parental qualities and educational capabilities.

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