

REPORTS

Family Life Education in Guangdong Province, Peoples Republic of China

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In recent years, family life education has received increased emphasis in China. In the 1980s, a greater need has been seen for research on family issues as well as educating families about family life and parenting in particular. While the educational content presented in China has many similarities to that presented in America, one notable difference exists. In America, family education often is separated from other aspects of life, while in China family education is very much related to social issues, the welfare of society, general education, and Marxist philosophy. The Chinese believe that one aspect cannot be taught without the others. Therefore, family life education begins with a base of Marxist philosophy and presents the family in terms of its relationship and responsibility to society. Beyond this base, however, the content of family education in China includes much that is familiar to the West.

This article includes an examination of the extent to which family life is taught in the colleges and universities of Guangdong Province, Peoples Republic of China. In addition, a description is provided of the formal means of disseminating information to the public.

Guangdong Province is in the southeastern part of China, bordering Hong Kong and Macao. It has 62 million people and is considered to be China's most prosperous and westernized area. The capital of Guangdong Province is Guangzhou (formerly known as Canton) with a metropolitan population of 6.7 million people.

FAMILY EDUCATION AT THE COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY LEVEL

Education at the collegiate level related to the family as a unit is limited. However, coursework related to families does exist in the sociology, psychology, and education departments.

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Sociology

In 1952, a few years following the Communist take-over, all departments of sociology were disbanded. In 1981, however, a sociology department was reorganized at Zhongshan University in Guangzhou (Canton). Zhongshan is considered to be one of the three leading universities in China. At present it remains the only sociology department in Guangdong Province and one of only ten in China. Few trained sociologists remained in China, and, as a result, sociology was not recognized for nearly thirty years. More recently, departments were reorganized by bringing together faculty interested in sociology from other academic units such as education, history, and philosophy. The department at Zhongshan University has 120 undergraduate majors, 32 graduate students, and 30 faculty members.

The study of the family is not considered to be a central focus at any of the sociology departments in China. However, an undergraduate course called Family Systems is offered as an elective. The course examines the origin and history of families, the structure of family systems, and the functions of families. Issues related to families are touched on in other classes. There are no graduate courses specifically related to families.

Most college students at Zhongshan and at most other universities in China have some level of reading comprehension in English. They have taken English throughout elementary and secondary school. Most college students take an additional two years in college. The printed reading list for the students in the class on Family Systems contains largely English language texts (see table 1).

Psychology

Psychology departments were disbanded in 1966 at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. The Psychology Department at South China Normal University in Guangzhou (Canton) was reestablished in 1985. It is the only psychology department in Guangdong Province and one of only five in China. It has 120 undergraduate students, twelve graduate students, and thirty faculty members. Although there are no Ph.D.s on the faculty, the department recently granted its first doctorate.

The study of families is made only in relationship with child development through the parent-child relationship. Marriage is not a focal point of study. Courses related to child development and parenting include Child Psychology, Adolescent Psychology, Abnormal Child Psychology, and Personality. Similar equivalent graduate courses exist. The Psychology Department maintains a library of several hundred English language textbooks for students to use. Many of the Chinese psychology textbooks are based on the content of American texts, although Russian sources also are used.

Education

While sociology and psychology are concerned with family issues to one degree or another, in China it is Education that is charged with disseminating information about the family. The Education Department at South China Normal University teaches a class called Family Life Education which is concerned with curriculum related to effective family training for adults. Students at this university will become the faculty at the fifteen teacher colleges and the more advanced secondary schools in the province. Only students at this institution take the Family Life Education course. Because of government interest in family education, the development of a university department on family education is being considered.

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Table 1. Family Systems Course Reading List at Zhongshan University, Peoples Republic of China

<u>Author</u>	<u>Title</u>
Ackerman	The Psychodynamics of Family Life
Anderson	Sociology of the Family
Bigner	Parent-Child Relations
Blood	The Family
Burr, Hill, Nye, Reiss	Contemporary Theories About Families
Good	World Revolution and Families
Leslie	The Family in a Social Context
Morgan	The Family, Politics and Social Theory
Reiss	The Families' Construction of Reality
Skolnick & Skolnick	Family in Transition
Title	Careers and Family

The Schools for Parents (to be discussed in the next section) are administered through the primary and secondary schools in China. Therefore, education departments take the lead in developing family education.

FAMILY STUDY FOR ADULTS IN FAMILY EDUCATION

In addition to the formal education about family life at the university level, non-credit programs are available for adults as well. Such programs are called Schools for Parents.

Schools for Parents

First started in 1983 on an experimental basis, the Schools for Parents have become popular in Guangdong Province. Guangdong Province has 13,000 such schools. Each elementary school has an associated parent's school. In the cities, parents meet once a month. Separate classes meet for each grade level. At these meetings, they hear a lecture on child development, child guidance, and educating children. In preparation for each month's lecture, parents read the appropriate chapter in the *Textbooks for the School for Parents*. There is one booklet for each grade level through junior high school. Following the lectures, parents are encouraged to share their concerns. A newsletter entitled *Parents Friend* also is published by the school for parents of junior high and senior high students.

Topics which are similar to parent education classes in America include the importance of the child's self-esteem, respecting the child, and the proper use of reward and punishment. Hitting children is discouraged, while patience for parents is encouraged. Subject areas not commonly stressed in American parent education include a variety of topics referred to as "moral education". This area includes teaching love of the motherland, courtesy, politeness, honesty, thrift, will-power, helping others, and maintenance of the social order.

Other Family Education

There are no other family education interventions which are developed to the extent of the School for Parents. Other province-wide programming, however, does exist for persons who are getting married, expectant mothers, and mother-in-laws!

Informal Education

While other popular press magazines carry articles related to marriage and parenting, two are widely read. They are *Family* and *Parents Should Read*.

A recent issue of *Family* (May, 1988), for example, included an article on quarrels between spouses and advice on how to use them constructively. Another article dealt with the need to work at a marriage. It is entitled, "Rome Wasn't Built in a Day: Neither Was Mutual Understanding." There were several articles concerning divorce. Divorce is stated to be the best solution for unsuccessful marriages if resolution of their problems is not possible. Another article was entitled, "On Social Innovation and Marriage Stability." The article told readers that the highest state of marriage should be happiness, not stability. Happy marriages often are said to be stable, but a stable marriage may not be happy. The article stated that the key to the happy marriage is equality between husband and wife. The wife should not be dependent, obedient, and submissive. Additional articles included such topics as adultery and using gifts to express love. *Family* has been published only for one year.

The April 1988 issue of *Parents Should Read* had a variety of articles on children's development. Topics for this issue includes friendships between children, stuttering, children's shyness, playing with children, helping children study, health care, grandparenting, and solutions for discipline problems.

DISCUSSION

Family education has increased greatly in China in the 1980s. While still limited at the college level, much information is available to the general population.

Family education stresses child development and parenting. The marriage relationship generally has been ignored in the past. Marriage is receiving more attention now, but generally only to the extent that it affects children. It now is realized that a happy marriage is necessary for children to have an optimal environment for growth. Marriage, in and of itself, is still not fully discussed as a topic.

While family education in China has its political aspects, nevertheless, much of what is taught is information that will be helpful to learners in leading more satisfying lives. Family education is aimed, in large part, at changing old ideas of the past about relationships to thinking that has a more "scientific" or factual basis.

Education on the family will increase in the future. New departments of psychology and sociology gradually are forming as enough new graduates are trained to staff them. Likewise, education departments are increasing emphasis on family education. The Schools for Parents, already well received in the cities, are continuing to expand and new curriculum materials are being developed. Education for marriage is increasing, although such topics still are limited.

The greatest challenge facing family education in China is the education of people in the rural areas, many of whom are functionally illiterate. Many of the current educational interventions are directed towards the educated populace of the cities. The problem is recognized and educators are grappling with how to best meet the challenge.

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